Tesis Doctoral

'The *Sea* is History':
Transoceanic Perspectives on the Neo-Victorian Maritime Novel

Juan José Martín González

Dirigida por la Dra. Rosario Arias Doblas
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PhD Thesis supervised by Professor Rosario Arias

UNIVERSIDAD
DE MÁLAGA

AUTOR: Juan José Martín González

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9482-2202

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras
Departamento de Filología Inglesa,
Francesa y Alemana

Dra. Mª del Rosario Arias Doblas
Catedrática de Filología Inglesa
Depto. de Filología Inglesa, Francesa y Alemana
Facultad de Filosofía y Letras
Universidad de Málaga
Campus de Teatinos
29071 Málaga
Tel.00-34- 952131793
Email: rarias@uma.es

Mediante la presente, **HAGO CONSTAR**

Que D. Juan José Martín González, con DNI: 53699686E, es estudiante de doctorado del Programa de Doctorado "Lingüística, Literatura y Traducción", con matrícula activa, y que ha realizado bajo mi dirección, la Tesis Doctoral titulada

"'The Sea is History': Transoceanic Perspectives on the Neo-Victorian Maritime Novel"

Revisado el presente trabajo estimo que reúne los requisitos establecidos según la normativa vigente. Por lo tanto, **AUTORIZO** la admisión a trámite y defensa pública de esta Tesis Doctoral para optar al grado de Doctor en la Universidad de Málaga.

Y para que así conste, lo firmo en Málaga a 22 de enero de 2019,

ARIAS DOBLAS
MARIA DEL
ROSARIO -
33373006Y

Firmado digitalmente por ARIAS
DOBLAS MARIA DEL ROSARIO -
33373006Y
Nombre de reconocimiento (DN): c=ES,
serialNumber=33373006Y, sn=ARIAS
DOBLAS, givenName=MARIA DEL
ROSARIO, cn=ARIAS DOBLAS MARIA
DEL ROSARIO - 33373006Y
Fecha: 2019.01.22 09:00:59 Z

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Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?
Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,
in that grey vault. The sea. The sea
has locked them up. The sea is History

('The Sea is History' – Derek Walcott)

Life is but the shipwreck of our plans

(*The Shape of Water* – Guillermo del Toro)

Resumen

La presente Tesis Doctoral, titulada "'The Sea is History': Transoceanic Perspectives on the Neo-Victorian Maritime Novel", pretende llevar a cabo un estudio de la novela neo-Victoriana poscolonial dentro del contexto de la migración marítima en la época Victoriana. El periodo Victoriano (1837-1901) en Reino Unido figura hoy en día como una época clave para el desarrollo del concepto de nación, la migración transoceánica y la política global. De hecho, a finales del periodo Victoriano, el imperio Británico acaparaba todos los océanos del mundo y fue clave en las vidas de millones de personas en todos los continentes. Como sostiene Duncan Bell en su introducción a *Victorian Visions of Global Order: Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (2007), la aprobación del Roman Catholic Relief Act (1829) y el Reform Act (1832) supuso el inicio de una nueva era en la Inglaterra del siglo XIX caracterizada por "the rise of liberalism, the slow gestation of democracy, the increasing importance of ideas about nationality and 'national character', and the move from mercantilism to free trade" (Bell, Introduction 2).

A tenor de lo anterior, esta Tesis Doctoral se propone establecer perspectivas alternativas sobre la globalización, la historia global y la transculturación a través del análisis de novelas neo-Victorianas que inciden en aspectos de raza, hibridismo y la historia imperial Británica en el contexto de los viajes transoceánicos en la época Victoriana. En el marco actual, en el cual las políticas de la primera ministra Británica Theresa May están sacando a relucir los aspectos más regresivos del inminente Brexit, y los discursos ultranacionalistas, anti-inmigración, anti-refugiados o meramente racistas y xenófobos se están propagando cada vez más tanto en Europa como en el exterior, las fronteras tanto geográficas como culturales parecen

ser una cuestión candente en la política global actual y este trabajo pretende articular una respuesta crítico-literaria a dicha cuestión.

El enfoque de esta tesis es, tal y como indica su título, transoceánico. Mi análisis se centra en novelas neo-Victorianas que tratan sobre inmigración y el viaje marítimo; el enfoque oceánico de dichos textos posibilita mirar más allá de las rígidas fronteras nacionales y culturales que parecen estar conformando la política global actual. El corpus de obras primarias que han sido seleccionadas para ser analizadas cualitativamente incluye las siguientes novelas: *Letters from an Age of Reason* (2001) de Nora Hague; *TransAtlantic* (2013) de Colum McCann; y *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011) y *Flood of Fire* (2015) de Amitav Ghosh. Estas novelas neo-Victorianas representan y recuperan historias de inmigración transoceánica de los sujetos coloniales durante la época Victoriana. Las novelas de Nora Hague y Colum McCann se focalizan en el océano Atlántico mientras que las tres novelas de Amitav Ghosh – que conforman la trilogía del *Ibis* – se sitúan en el océano Índico. Esta Tesis Doctoral navega, por tanto, en dos direcciones y se plantea explorar ambas regiones oceánicas – así como las conexiones culturales e históricas entre ambas – y la contribución de las mismas a las narraciones globales en la época Victoriana.

Evidentemente, este trabajo reconoce la existencia de otros océanos como una limitación palpable del proyecto. Debido a restricciones de espacio y de análisis, los océanos Pacífico y Ártico permanecen fuera del foco de este trabajo. Estos océanos ciertamente se muestran más periféricos al imaginario oceánico en la época Victoriana, aunque por supuesto fueron escenario de la actividad colonial Británica y como tal, son propensos a proporcionar futuras líneas de investigación, sobre todo

en términos de sus conexiones transoceánicas con otras regiones. La focalización de esta tesis sobre los océanos Atlántico e Índico está justificada porque dichas regiones oceánicas han tenido una fuerte presencia en la historia de la globalización, y fueron el escenario de una intensa lucha anti-colonial.

En su introducción al volumen *Many Middle Passages: Forced Migration and the Making of the Modern World* (2007), Marcus Rediker, Cassandra Pybus, and Emma Christopher señalan que "it might be possible to relate the experiences of slaves, indentured servants, transported convicts, and coerced migrants of all kinds" (Rediker, Pybus and Christopher 2). Esta Tesis Doctoral se apoya en una proposición similar. Los personajes que habitan las novelas neo-Victorianas analizadas incluyen ex-esclavos afroamericanos, marineros de raza negra, inmigrantes irlandeses, 'indentured workers' o reclusos injustamente condenados, por nombrar solo algunos ejemplos.[1] Todos estos personajes se embarcan en viajes transoceánicos a través de las vías marítimas en la era Victoriana y están oprimidos, en diferentes grados, por la maquinaria del imperialismo Británico. Mi análisis se propone analizar cómo estos colectivos desfavorecidos articularon sus identidades en el mundo oceánico e ilustrar las posibilidades políticas que proporcionaban el viaje marítimo y las fronteras fluidas de los océanos.

Uno de los corolarios básicos defendidos en este proyecto es que el océano es una localización liminal y transitoria que desestabiliza el eje 'centro/periferia', siendo

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[1]   El llamado 'indentureship' fue un sistema laboral no remunerado que sustituyó a la esclavitud después de que esta última fuese abolida en el imperio británico en 1833. Durante la primera mitad del siglo XIX y en menor medida en la segunda mitad de dicho siglo, los llamados 'indentured workers', en su mayoría procedentes de Asia, fueron enviados a colonias británicas tales como Sudáfrica, las islas Mauricio o diversas islas del Caribe, y fueron determinantes para mantener a flote la industria del azúcar. Los métodos dudosos y a menudo coactivos bajo los que los trabajadores eran 'contratados', así como las condiciones de semi-esclavitud a las que los trabajadores eran sometidos han llevado a algunos historiadores a calificar el sistema de 'indentureship' como "the new slavery" (Beaumont 32-35; Shepherd 343).

muy usual éste último en la crítica poscolonial. El estatus intermedio del mar, localizado entre origen y destino, posibilita la fluidez de los límites raciales, culturales y nacionales y facilita una transgresión de las ortodoxias de la cultura Victoriana. Poniendo el énfasis en el viaje marítimo por encima de los puntos de salida y destino, tanto los valores metropolitanos como coloniales pueden percibirse como propensos a ser desafiados y mutuamente transformativos. Esta perspectiva se acomoda a la posición 'in-between' que generalmente caracteriza a los protagonistas de novelas poscoloniales sobre la diáspora. Como señala Véronique Bragard, "[this in-betweenness] "between two extreme tendencies of fanatically rejecting or imposing one's culture . . . announce[s] the acceptance of the dynamics of pluricultural identity construction" (Bragard 115).

Desde un punto de vista neo-Victoriano, la perspectiva 'in-between' descrita arriba subvierte la hegemonía de Gran Bretaña como el centro de la novela neo-Victoriana. Las novelas que se analizan en este proyecto desligan el género de su referente geográfico británico para trasladar el foco a las vías marítimas Victorianas así como a las colonias litorales, ampliando de este modo el imaginario neo-Victoriano hacia una perspectiva más global. En este sentido, tal y como afirma Elizabeth Ho, ""neo-Victorianism emphasizes the continued relevance of postcolonial theory at a particular moment when empire is evoked again as a way of making sense of globalization" (Ho 13). Considerando las desigualdades engendradas por la globalización capitalista, la novela neo-Victoriana poscolonial proporciona un repertorio de estrategias para resolver el legado y efectos del imperialismo Victoriano así como la desazón provocada por la desintegración del imperio británico – y su transición hacia el neo-imperialismo norteamericano.

Teniendo en cuenta lo anterior, este proyecto se propone demostrar, a través de un meticuloso análisis cualitativo de lo que denomino la novela neo-Victoriana marítima, que la era Victoriana en su dimensión transoceánica puede leerse como una era de proto-globalización para articular una crítica materialista sobre las desigualdades del neo-liberalismo global contemporáneo. Al incidir en el potencial diacrónico del género neo-Victoriano, esta Tesis Doctoral examina las continuidades entre el imperialismo Victoriano y "capitalist-based globalization – which is a newer term from colonialism" (Dwivedi and Kich 10) y analizar así cuestiones de vital importancia en la política global, como son la inmigración, el cosmopolitismo y la transculturación.

Para llevar a cabo los objetivos de investigación que se han descrito, el capítulo 2, titulado "Postcolonialism, Maritime Criticism, and Transoceanic Connectivity" desarrolla el primer pilar del marco teórico de la tesis. Concretamente, este capítulo proporciona un análisis profundo de la crítica marítima y el reciente 'giro oceánico' en la crítica literaria en relación con el pensamiento poscolonial. Haciendo uso de ejemplos literarios en el canon Anglo-americano del siglo XIX, este capítulo subraya las posibilidades críticas de las perspectivas oceánicas para narrar el pasado colonial. El capítulo comienza con un resumen de la crítica poscolonial desde sus orígenes hasta nuestros días, ilustrando los contextos y cuestiones más reseñables de dicha crítica. Esta sección ilustra y clarifica conceptos y herramientas teórico-críticas en el pensamiento poscolonial que resultan poco menos que indispensables para cualquier análisis literario-cultural del pasado colonial marítimo. Para ello, la sección analiza las ideas de pensadores clave dentro de la crítica poscolonial, tales como Edward Said, Homi Bhabha y Gayatri C. Spivak – la llamada 'postcolonial holy trinity' – así como otros críticos destacables, tales como Benita Parry, John M.

Mackenzie o Stuart Hall, partiendo de una lectura breve de *Orientalism* de Edward Said (1978) así como de las críticas posteriores que se han realizado sobre dicha obra. A continuación la sección analiza el estado de la cuestión dentro de los debates más reseñables de la crítica poscolonial, tales como la especificidad histórica, el hibridismo, la voz del sujeto subalterno, o la redirección de la crítica poscolonial hacia enfoques materialistas. Finalmente, la sección sitúa el pensamiento poscolonial en relación al paradigma posmoderno y discute una de los debates más reseñables en relación con el poscolonialismo, que es el supuesto desgaste y agotamiento de las posibilidades críticas de esta corriente de pensamiento. En relación con este debate, argumento que para mantener su relevancia en los debates culturales actuales, la crítica poscolonial debe redirigir su foco hacia el legado más obvio del colonialismo en la sociedad actual: la globalización capitalista.

La sección 2.2 analiza en profundidad el 'giro Oceánico' – también conocido como 'new thalassology' (Mentz 101; Horden and Purcell 723) – en la crítica literaria y cultural en relación con perspectivas actuales acerca de la historia colonial. Entre otras cuestiones, en esta sección argumento que el mar aún ocupa una posición destacada en la cultura contemporánea y para dicho propósito la sección revisita brevemente el estatus del océano en el mundo occidental desde el Renacimiento. Esta sección se apoya en gran medida en teorías provenientes de la sociología y la geografía humana para analizar cómo se ha construido el océano socialmente y espacialmente desde el origen de la modernidad capitalista y para ello recurro a especialistas en dichos campos tales como John Mack, Philip E. Steinberg, Carl Pedersen o Kimberley Peters. La hipótesis principal que destaca en esta sección es que el mar se ha construido tradicionalmente como un espacio nulo, situado fuera de

la historia y por lo tanto ajeno a las fuerzas sociales terrestres. Tal y como he señalado, esta idea está siendo disputada por historiadores y pensadores recientes que se proponen *historicise* el océano. El 'giro oceánico' se propone por tanto recuperar el espacio oceánico no simplemente como una localización intermedia entre regiones geográficas lejanas, sino como un auténtico espacio de la historia. Esta idea parece ser la base del volumen de Bernhard Klein y Gesa Mackenthun *Sea Changes: Historicizing the Ocean* (2004), que se propone dar al océano una 'historia' y desacreditar "the cultural myth that the ocean is outside and beyond history" (Klein and Mackenthun 2). Además, esta sección profundiza en la posición ambivalente del océano como barrera y conducto, aunque se enfatiza el potencial de las rutas marítimas para la creación de historias, culturas e ideas. Finalmente, esta sección termina haciendo alusión a los usos metafóricos y figurativos del océano en la literatura inglesa, incidiendo fundamentalmente en la historia colonial, la diáspora y las narraciones del pasado.

En la sección 2.3 el análisis se centra en la construcción social del océano desde la perspectiva de los colectivos que habitaron las vías marítimas en la edad de la navegación, así como su impacto en las identidades diaspóricas y transoceánicas de dichos colectivos. Esta sección intenta responder cuestiones clave en la crítica marítima en relación con el pasado migratorio colonial, tales como el papel que desempeñó el océano entre el centro metropolitano y sus periferias poscoloniales, así como el impacto que tuvo la migración marítima sobre las identidades de los sujetos migratorios.

Entre otras cuestiones, esta sección subraya que el carácter intermedio de la travesía marítima evoca simbólicamente el carácter transitorio de la identidad

diaspórica, que puede verse como perpetuamente navegando entre las culturas de origen y de recepción. Desde un punto de vista más materialista, argumento que el ya mencionado 'in-betweenness' del viaje marítimo impedía que los valores metropolitanos y coloniales fueran enteramente operativos, lo que se tradujo en una fluidez de las fronteras raciales, culturales y nacionales.

Esta fluidez fue ciertamente capitalizada por los sujetos migrantes subalternos con fines transgresores o transformativos y así lo señalo con ejemplos específicos de la historia colonial y marítima occidental, así como a través de ejemplos de la literatura y cultura inglesa. Un ejemplo destacado son las Navigation Acts, que fueron aprobadas por el parlamento Británico in 1651 hasta que fueron abolidas en 1851. Las Navigation Acts señalan la fluidez de la categoría 'Britishness' cuando se aplicaba a los marineros extranjeros a bordo de los barcos mercantes británicos. De hecho, tal y como señalan Peter Linebaugh y Marcus Rediker, a pesar del nacionalismo que se desprendía de las Navigation Acts y su insistencia en que los barcos ingleses debían ser navegados por marineros ingleses, las estadísticas señalan que gran parte de los marineros definitivamente no eran de origen inglés (Linebaugh and Rediker 150). De hecho, a principios del siglo XIX los barcos británicos eran ampliamente tripulados tanto por esclavos negros de las Indias occidentales como por marineros negros libres (Bolster 103; Cobley 155-156). Tras la abolición de la esclavitud, a estos marineros de raza negra se unieron marineros de Asia y otros territorios alrededor del océano Índico, normalmente conocidos como *lascars*.

Esta sección argumenta que al situar la focalización sobre el océano se subraya el carácter transcultural e híbrido que caracterizó la primera fase de la

globalización, que alcanzó su punto álgido a mitad del siglo XIX. Gabaccia y Hoerder señalan el periodo situado entre 1830 y 1940 como la primera gran época de la migración en la que se crearon las primeras redes de migración global (Gabaccia and Hoerder 5), una afirmación apoyada también por McKeown (McKeown 42).

Al mismo tiempo, esta sección apoya sus corolarios básicos en *The Black Atlantic* (1993) de Paul Gilroy, una obra realmente pionera en la crítica marítima. Entre otras ideas, la obra de Gilroy cuestiona la nación como una unidad de investigación coherente y aboga por adoptar un enfoque transnacional en los análisis literarios y culturales (Gilroy, *Black* 133). A través de un análisis de personalidades e intelectuales negros, tales como Frederick Douglass, Toni Morrison, Martin Delaney, William Wells Brown o Alexander Crummell, Gilroy proporciona una crítica de la modernidad eurocéntrica que rescata una memoria del océano Atlántico compartida entre África, Europa y América, desacreditando la noción de occidente como una categoría étnicamente uniforme.

Para cerrar el capítulo 2, la sección 2.4 acota aún más el foco para analizar la localización más destacada en la literatura marítima: el barco. Considerado el mediador geográfico más importante en las relaciones entre los humanos y el mar, el barco ostenta una posición problemática en la imaginación occidental cuando se sitúa en la historia colonial, ya que evoca cuestiones de exploración, aventura y descubrimiento, pero también de esclavitud y horror. En esta sección recurro a la historia cultural – apoyando el análisis de nuevo en *The Black Atlantic* de Paul Gilroy – así como a la sociología y la geografía humana para proporcional un análisis del barco en la historia colonial. Primero, esta sección desarrolla un estudio del barco en la cultura marítima Victoriana, señalando ejemplos específicos de la cultura,

literatura e historia anglo-americana del siglo XIX e incidiendo específicamente en el carácter multiétnico de las tripulaciones de los barcos. Por otro lado, esta sección proporciona una visión teórico-crítica de la construcción socio-cultural del barco. Para este propósito, indago en dos perspectivas críticas: el barco como *heterotopia* y el barco como *contact zone*. Los términos *heterotopia* y *contact zone*, tal y como los entienden Michel Foucault y Mary Louise Pratt respectivamente, posibilitan una visión del espacio del barco desde una perspectiva socio-cultural. Además, para complementar esta sección establezco vínculos entre dichas perspectivas críticas del barco y el pensamiento poscolonial y la historia marítima Victoriana.

El capítulo 3, titulado "The Victorians on the Globe: Poscolonial Neo-Victorianism and the Neo-Victorian Maritime Novel in the 21st Century", desarrolla el otro pilar teórico que sustenta esta Tesis Doctoral, la crítica neo-Victoriana. Este capítulo proporciona una visión crítica de la novela neo-Victoriana, incidiendo en el género de forma general, así como en sus formas más específicas – el neo-Victorianismo poscolonial y la novela neo-Victoriana marítima – analizando textos, debates y terminología claves en el área.

Este capítulo abre con la sección 3.1, que proporciona una visión general de la novela neo-Victoriana y discute los debates y contextos más destacados del género. Comienzo esta sección analizando el propio término 'Victorian' y como los múltiples usos denotativos y connotativos del mismo han dado forma a las manifestaciones culturales sobre el siglo XIX desde la muerte de la reina Victoria en 1901. En este sentido, Cora Kaplan argumenta que *Victoriana* debería considerarse "a conceptual nomad" o "a discourse though which both the conservative and progressive elements

of Anglophone cultures reshaped their ideas of the past, present and future" (Kaplan, *Victoriana* 3, 4).[2]

A continuación, desarrollo un análisis diacrónico de la novela neo-Victoriana, discutiendo sus orígenes, terminología, así como elementos y novelas claves en el género. En particular, discuto los prefijos neo-, post-, retro-, faux- y pseudo- que han sido usados para designar al género y argumento porqué ha cristalizado finalmente el término 'neo-Victorian'. A continuación realizo una breve lectura y análisis de *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1966) de John Fowles, considerada uno de los textos fundacionales de la novela neo-Victoriana, así como de *Possession: A Romance* (1990) de A.S. Byatt, otra novela que contribuyó de forma considerable a la popularidad del género. Finalmente, sitúo mi análisis del neo-Victorianismo en debates más generales, especialmente la posición de la novela neo-Victoriana en el paradigma posmoderno – y el discutido distanciamiento de la misma de dicho paradigma – y la contribución del género a las narraciones del pasado Victoriano. Entre otras cuestiones, argumento que la ficción neo-Victoriana, como narrativa histórica revisionista, desmantela las *grand narratives* y las nociones tradicionales de verdad y objetividad, y desacredita de forma creativa la historiografía tradicional sobre la época Victoriana al conferir la coherencia narrativa que caracterizaba la tradición realista Victoriana a narrativas tradicionalmente marginadas.

En la sección 3.2 delimito mi análisis de la novela neo-Victoriana a uno de los temas más destacables del género, como son las reescrituras poscoloniales del pasado Victoriano. Primero, la sección analiza los orígenes de la novela neo-

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[2]   El término *Victoriana*, originalmente usado para referirse exclusivamente a objetos y materiales de coleccionista del periodo, fue apropiado por Cora Kaplan para "embrace the whole phenomenon, the astonishing range of representations and reproductions for which the Victorian . . . is the common referent" (Kaplan, *Victoriana* 3).

Victoriana en su modo poscolonial y proporciona una breve lectura de *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) de Jean Rhys. Esta novela es una reescritura feminista y poscolonial de *Jane Eyre* (1847) de Charlotte Brontë y puede considerarse un buen punto de partida para el análisis de la novela neo-Victoriana poscolonial, además de ser considerada también otro de los textos fundacionales del género neo-Victoriano en general. A continuación la sección desarrolla un análisis revisionista y exhaustivo de las percepciones Victorianas acerca de cuestiones de raza y el imperio Británico y como dichas percepciones se abrieron camino en el pensamiento racista pseudo-científico de la época, proporcionando ejemplos específicos en la literatura y cultura Victorianas. Para ello, recurro a textos clave en este campo tales como *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (1971) de Christine Bolt, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (1984) de Peter Fryar, y *Taming Cannibals: Race and the Victorians* (2011) de Patrick Brantlinger. A continuación, la sección pasa a analizar las manifestaciones neo-Victorianas como respuesta a la memoria traumática del imperio Británico y las relaciones raciales en el siglo XIX. En concreto, analizo que estrategias emplean las novelas neo-Victorianas poscoloniales para representar el pasado colonial y analizo brevemente dos textos representativos en este subgénero: *Hottentot Venus* (2003) de Barbara Chase-Riboud y *The Journal of Dora Damage* (2007) de Belinda Starling.

La última sección del capítulo 3 estrecha aún más el análisis sobre la novela neo-Victoriana y analiza en concreto la novela neo-Victoriana marítima. Para introducir esta sección, focalizo mi análisis del género en uno de los debates más recientes en la crítica neo-Victoriana, que es la debatible posición del género neo-Victoriano en contextos globales, y sitúo dicho análisis en paralelo a un debate similar que se está produciendo en los estudios Victorianos. Para ello hago

referencia a lo que Lauren Goodlad ha llamado "Victorianist cosmopolitan practice"
Goodlad, "Cosmopolitanism" 399), que trata de resituar la literatura Victoriana en un
contexto global, y por lo tanto permeable a culturas fuera de la nación Británica.
Luego, partiendo del concepto 'neo-Victorian-at-sea' acuñado por Elizabeth Ho –
hasta la fecha la única y breve contribución a la crítica neo-Victoriana desde un
punto de vista marítimo (Ho 174) – analizo qué características está adoptando la
novela neo-Victoriana marítima. Además, sitúo este subgénero neo-Victoriano en
relación con la novela náutica Victoriana, señalando similitudes y diferencias entre
ambas y proporcionando ejemplos concretos de narraciones neo-Victorianas del
mar, así como de sus equivalentes Victorianas. Entre los textos decimonónicos
marítimos a los que hago referencia se encuentran *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863) de
Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mr Midshipman Easy* (1836) de Frederick Marryat, *John
Holdsworth* (1895) de William Clark Russell, o "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'" (1897)
de Joseph Conrad. Por otro lado, también ilustro mi análisis con novelas neo-
Victorianas parcial o totalmente situadas en el mar, tales como *Hottentot Venus*
(2003) de Barbara Chase-Riboud, *Alias Grace* (1996) de Margaret Atwood y sobre
todo *English Passengers* (2000) de Matthew Kneale. Para concluir este capítulo,
analizo la novela neo-Victoriana marítima en relación con debates más amplios
sobre globalización y cosmopolitismo, señalando que ideas pueden obtenerse a
partir de este subgénero de la novela neo-Victoriana para reorientar la crítica
poscolonial hacia la globalización capitalista actual.

El capítulo 4, titulado 'Black America's Romance with Victorian Britain': African
Americans in Neo-Victorian Narratives of the Atlantic", analiza en profundidad dos
novelas neo-Victorianas marítimas situadas en el océano Atlántico, que son *Letters
from an Age of Reason* (2001) de Nora Hague, y *TransAtlantic* (2013) de Colum

McCann. Partiendo de la afirmación de John M. Picker de que los estudios transatlánticos, aunque a menudo se focalizan en el siglo XIX, no suelen subyacer en los estudios Victorianos, este capítulo intenta establecer "what forms a Victorian transatlanticism would take" (Picker 595). Desde un punto de vista temático el capítulo se centra en las conexiones transatlánticas entre los afroamericanos y los británicos en la era Victoriana, señalando las transacciones políticas y culturales entre ambos.

En la sección 4.1 analizo *Letters from an Age of Reason* de Nora Hague, una novela que ha sido ignorada por la crítica literaria. Analizo la novela de Nora Hague y su retrato del sujeto migratorio afroamericano en el océano Atlántico como un ejemplo del modelo cultural transnacional proporcionado por Paul Gilroy en *The Black Atlantic*. Primero, analizo los viajes transatlánticos narrados en la novela, incidiendo en como dichos viajes facilitan la fluidez de los marcadores de raza y género Victorianos. Asimismo, indago en el impacto de dicha fluidez en las psiques e identidades de los personajes afroamericanos que circulan alrededor del Atlántico. Por otro lado, esta sección argumenta que la novela de Nora Hague construye una visión del océano Atlántico como medio que facilitó la circulación de culturas y vínculos familiares de ascendencia africana alrededor del hemisferio norte, lo que subraya el potencial de la comunicación transatlántica y apunta hacia una memoria pan-Africana del océano Atlántico.

A continuación, en la sección 4.2 analizo *TransAtlantic* de Colum McCann, una novela narrada a través de múltiples perspectivas que reescribe las relaciones transatlánticas entre Reino Unido, Irlanda y Estados Unidos en los siglos XIX, XX y XXI. Mi análisis se centra sobre todo en dos acontecimientos de la época Victoriana

que tuvieron una dimensión decididamente transatlántica – el movimiento abolicionista y la hambruna irlandesa (1845-1849) – y su legado cultural en la cultura contemporánea. Primero, la sección examina el alcance transatlántico del movimiento abolicionista a través de la célebre figura de Frederick Douglass, cuyo tour por Irlanda en 1845 es ficcionalizado en la novela de McCann. A continuación, la sección analiza el flujo migratorio transatlántico provocado por la hambruna irlandesa, o lo que se ha denominado culturalmente como 'the Green Atlantic', tal y como se refleja en el volumen *The Black and Green Atlantic Cross-Currents of the African and Irish Diasporas* (2009), editado por Peter D. O'Neill and David Lloyd. Además esta sección explora las conexiones entre America – en particular los afroamericanos – e Irlanda que se generaron tras el flujo migratorio irlandés. Esta sección concluye explorando la idea de que el foco transhistórico de la novela – que yuxtapone los eventos del siglo XIX ya mencionados con otros acontecimientos del siglo XX tales como el conflicto de Irlanda del Norte y el IRA (Irish Republican Army) y las posteriores negociaciones de paz anglo-irlandesas – construye una visión oceánica del tiempo y el espacio en la que los eventos del pasado, metafóricamente representados como olas del mar, configuran de forma cíclica los acontecimientos del presente.

El capítulo 5, titulado "The Neo-Victorian Indian Ocean: Lascars, Coolies and the Opium Trade in Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis* Trilogy", aleja el foco radicalmente del océano Atlántico hacia el océano Índico y examina en profundidad el escritor de origen indio Amitav Ghosh y su célebre trilogía del *Ibis*. Como punto de partida, examino a Ghosh como un escritor global cuyas perspectivas cosmopolitas movilizan ideas desfasadas del concepto de nación. Por lo tanto, el capítulo sitúa a la trilogía del *Ibis* dentro de los debates sobre globalización y cosmopolitismo. Mi principal

hipótesis en este capítulo es que la trilogía del *Ibis* construye las incursiones transoceánicas Victorianas en el océano Índico como un presagio de la globalización capitalista actual, estableciendo una conexión entre el imperialismo Victoriano y el neo-colonialismo contemporáneo. Además, mi análisis de la trilogía señala las conexiones patentes entre las historias del Atlántico y el océano Índico.

Mi exploración del océano Índico durante la época Victoriana comienza con un análisis de la primera novela de la trilogía del *Ibis*, *Sea of Poppies* (2008). Esta novela ha sido extensamente analizada por la crítica poscolonial, si bien no tanto por la crítica neo-Victoriana. Mi contribución al análisis de *Sea of Poppies* como novela neo-Victoriana marítima se centra en varios aspectos. En primer lugar, analizo la narración que hace la novela sobre el tráfico de opio y el fenómeno del 'indentureship' en relación con debates globales acerca del trabajo forzado. En segundo lugar, el análisis se centra en el impacto de la migración marítima sobre las identidades cosmopolitas de los personajes migratorios. Finalmente, exploro la diversidad lingüística que caracterizó el mundo marítimo en el océano Índico durante la época Victoriana y como dicha diversidad refleja la fluidez de las fronteras culturales generada por la vida marítima.

En la sección 5.2 paso a analizar la segunda novela de la trilogía, *River of Smoke* (2011). Esta novela narra el tráfico de opio entre India y China como preludio a la Primera Guerra del Opio (1839-1942) entre Reino Unido y China – también llamada Primera Guerra Anglo-China. La segunda entrega en la trilogía está localizada durante la mayor parte de su narración en Cantón, China. Esto implica que la trilogía extiende los límites del imaginario neo-Victoriano y posibilita la narración de modelos alternativos de hibridez cultural. La principal idea que defiendo

en mi análisis de *River of Smoke* es que se trata de una novela que refleja el preludio a la Primera Guerra del Opio como un evento que marcó el comercio global en el siglo XIX y que refleja la globalización y las políticas neo-liberales actuales, incluyendo diversas invasiones militares recientes bajo la diplomacia del cañonero. Por otro lado, argumento que la reconstrucción que realiza la novela acerca de la implicación de India en el tráfico de opio durante el siglo XIX en China proporciona nuevas perspectivas sobre las relaciones Indo-Chinas tanto en el periodo Victoriano como actualmente. Concretamente, mi análisis argumenta que *River of Smoke* reconstruye una perspectiva Pan-asiática decimonónica sobre las relaciones en el océano Índico que refleja idiomas, espacios y vínculos que escaparon al control del imperialismo Victoriano.

Finalmente, en la sección 5.3 analizo la culminación de la trilogía, *Flood of Fire* (2015). Esta novela narra la escalada de violencia entre Reino Unido y China y la posterior Primera Guerra del Opio entre ambos países, construyendo una visión del océano como vector para la proyección de poder. Además, para cerrar la trilogía la novela retoma cuestiones tratadas en las dos primeras novelas, tales como el carácter permeable de las categorías de raza, género y nación cuando éstas se sitúan en el océano. El principal foco de mi análisis es sin embargo la narración de la Primera Guerra del Opio – y la compleja posición de India en la misma – como un evento que marcó profundamente las relaciones entre oriente y occidente. La sección presta especial atención a la perspectiva de China y el pueblo chino, lo que supone un correctivo al anglocentrismo que ha caracterizado la construcción historiográfica occidental sobre el conflicto. En última instancia, argumento que la novela fomenta las conexiones y la colaboración entre dos países fuera del

hemisferio del Atlántico norte, India y China, señalando diacrónicamente ambos países como potencias emergentes en la política global y neo-liberal actual.

A través del análisis desarrollado sobre dicha selección novelas neo-Victorianas marítimas sobre los océanos Atlántico e Índico, y la intersección de dicho análisis con el marco teórico-crítico explorado en los capítulos 2 y 3, esta Tesis Doctoral se propone sacar a relucir la forma en la que la novela neo-Victoriana marítima se ha desarrollado en las últimas décadas. Mi análisis de este subgénero aspira a trascender el terracentrismo que normalmente caracteriza la historiografía y el pensamiento poscolonial. Con ello, se pretende ilustrar que la novela neo-Victoriana marítima y su contribución a las narraciones globales proporcionan visiones alternativas y transnacionales sobre la globalización y recuperan historias subalternas marítimas del olvido, historias que son potencialmente relevantes para comprender la globalización capitalista actual.[3]

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1. Introduction

In the aftermath of the 2016 Brexit Referendum, Theresa May, current Prime Minister in the United Kingdom and leader of the Conservative Party, put forward her vision of citizenship in her keynote speech to close the Tory Party Conference in October 2016:

> We applaud success. We want people to get on. But we also value something else: the spirit of citizenship . . . That spirit that means recognising the social contract that says you train up local young people before you take on cheap labour from overseas . . . But today, too many people in positions of power behave as though they have more in common with international elites than with the people down the road, the people they employ, the people they pass in the street . . . But *if you believe you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere*. You don't understand what the very word 'citizenship' means (May, no pages; my emphasis).

At the time of writing this PhD thesis, with the United Kingdom and the European Union enmeshed in tense negotiations to consummate Brexit, Theresa May's speech two years ago retrospectively suggests a couple of implications. Firstly, May's denial of world citizenship, which already anticipated the contours of post-Brexit nationalism that lurk ahead, seems at odds with the current globalising forces – for all their shortcomings – and their drives towards cultural exchange and transnational solidarity. May's strict definition of 'citizenship', based on stale notions of national belonging, significantly ignores the experiences of overseas immigrants who have defined – and have been defined by – the British Empire and whose identities are necessarily plural and global. Secondly, the Prime Minister's sympathy for 'local young people,' unsettlingly reminiscent of jingoistic 'Locals first' policies, has significantly disappeared from May's current speech. At the time of writing, in the face of the apparent accentuation of Britain's insular position within Europe, the Prime Minister's Cabinet appears to be favouring an immigration policy that would welcome

wealthy and highly skilled workers (Sabbagh and Crerar, no pages), the very 'international elite' that May dismissed a couple of years ago.

The regressive forces exhibited in Theresa May's Brexit policies, coupled with the growing nationalisms and anti-refugee discourses in Europe and abroad, illustrate the fact that the (re)instatement of borders seems a pressing issue in contemporary global politics. I want to take these concerns over national boundaries as a starting point for this PhD thesis, which aims at providing an analysis of post-colonial neo-Victorian fiction in the context of Victorian maritime migration. The Victorian period stands today as a fulcrum point for nation-building, transoceanic migration and global politics. Indeed, the British Empire during the Victorian period encompassed all the oceans of the world and it shaped the lives of millions of people from all continents. Additionally, Duncan Bell argues, in nineteenth-century Britain

> the Roman Catholic Relief Act (1829) and the Reform Act (1832) ushered in a new era, marked above all by the rise of liberalism, the slow gestation of democracy, the increasing importance of ideas about nationality and 'national character', and the move from mercantilism to free trade (Bell, Introduction 2).

That said, this PhD thesis aims at ascertaining what can be gained from analysing neo-Victorian texts dealing with race, hybridity, immigration and imperial history in the context of transoceanic journeys in the Victorian era in order to get alternative insights into globalisation, world history and transculturation.

The scope of this PhD thesis is, as its title indicates, decidedly transoceanic. My analysis focuses on texts dealing with immigration and the maritime crossing and their markedly oceanic perspective allows to *think on, through and beyond* rigid national and cultural boundaries which seem to be informing contemporary global politics. The corpus of primary texts selected for analysis and close reading includes

the following works: Nora Hague's *Letters from an Age of Reason* (2001), Colum McCann's *TransAtlantic* (2013) and Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011) and *Flood of Fire* (2015). These neo-Victorian texts illustrate and re-imagine the transoceanic mobility of colonial subjects in the Victorian era. The first two texts are set in the Atlantic Ocean whereas the three novels by Amitav Ghosh – comprising the so-called *Ibis* trilogy – are situated in the Indian Ocean. This thesis navigates therefore in two directions, seeking to peruse these two oceanic regions – and potential connections between them – and their contribution to narrations of the globe in the Victorian era.

Out of the corpus of primary works selected for analysis, this PhD thesis claims for the acknowledgement of an emerging sub-genre in contemporary historical fiction that I will call the neo-Victorian maritime novel. This label comes justified because of the considerable number of neo-Victorian novels that are set or interact in different degrees with the nineteenth-century maritime world. This PhD thesis aims at providing the first sustained analysis of the neo-Victorian maritime novel by sketching out the ideological and aesthetic foundations of this literary subgenre – as well as its likely contribution to debates on (trans)national identities – and paving the way for future follow-up research

Obviously, this thesis does acknowledge the existence of further oceanic areas as an obvious limitation of this project. Due to spatial and analytical constraints, the Pacific and the Arctic Oceans remain outside the scope of this thesis. These oceanic regions certainly seem more peripheral to the Victorian maritime imaginary but they surely recorded colonial activity and provide the possibility of future avenues of research into further transoceanic connections. The focalisation on the Atlantic and

Indian Oceans is justified because these maritime areas have had a strong presence in global history and were particularly remarkable for their intense colonial struggle.

In their introduction to *Many Middle Passages: Forced Migration and the Making of the Modern World* (2007), Marcus Rediker, Cassandra Pybus, and Emma Christopher contend that "it might be possible to relate the experiences of slaves, indentured servants, transported convicts, and coerced migrants of all kinds" (Rediker, Pybus and Christopher 2). This PhD thesis is grounded on an analogous proposition. The characters populating the neo-Victorian novels I set out to analyse include African American ex-slaves, black sailors, Irish immigrants, Indian indentured workers or wrongly convicted inmates, to name just a few. All of them engage in transoceanic crossings through Victorian sea lanes and are coerced, in varying degrees, by the machinery of Victorian imperialism. My analysis intends to inquire into how these dispossessed collectives made sense of their identities in the Victorian waterworlds and illustrate the political possibilities provided by the sea crossing and its fluid boundaries.

One of the basic thesis statements supported in what follows is that the ocean is a liminal and transitional locus which destabilises the centre/periphery axis typically articulating postcolonial thought. The midway status of the sea, located between origin and destination enables, I argue, the fluidity of racial, cultural and national boundaries and allows for a challenge to land-based orthodoxies in Victorian culture. By privileging the sea crossing over the points of departure and destination, both metropolitan and colonial values are seen adrift and prone to be subverted and mutually transformative. This perspective fits in with the in-between position which typically informs contemporary postcolonial novels dealing with diaspora. This in-

betweeness, Véronique Bragard argues, "between two extreme tendencies of fanatically rejecting or imposing one's culture . . . announce[s] the acceptance of the dynamics of pluricultural identity construction" (Bragard 115).

From a neo-Victorian point of view, the in-between approach described above challenges the hegemony of Britain as the centre of the genre. The novels under analysis unhook the neo-Victorian novel from its British referent and the focus is transported to Victorian sea lanes and colonial littoral outposts, increasingly broadening the neo-Victorian imaginary to reach a global scope. In this sense, Elizabeth Ho claims, "neo-Victorianism emphasizes the continued relevance of postcolonial theory at a particular moment when empire is evoked again as a way of making sense of globalization" (Ho 13). In the face of the inequities engendered by capitalist globalisation, postcolonial neo-Victorianism provides a literary-cultural repertoire of strategies to work through the after-effects of Victorian imperialism as well as the anxieties following the disintegration of the British Empire – and its supersession by US imperialism.

In light of the aforementioned, I seek to demonstrate, through a careful close reading of what I will call the neo-Victorian maritime novel, that the Victorian age in its transoceanic dimension can be read as an era of proto-globalisation to articulate a materialist critique of the inequities of contemporary global neo-liberalism. Making the most of the diachronic potential of the neo-Victorian genre, this PhD thesis aims at examining the continuities between Victorian imperialism and "capitalist-based globalization – which is a newer term for colonialism" (Dwivedi and Kich 10) to discuss issues of immigration, cosmopolitanism and transculturation which are still of crucial importance in global politics.

To carry out the above-mentioned purposes, in chapter 2, entitled "Postcolonialism, Maritime Criticism, and Transoceanic Connectivity," I provide an in-depth analysis of maritime criticism and the recent 'Oceanic' turn in intersection with postcolonial thought. Drawing on literary examples of the Anglo-American canon, this chapter illustrates the critical possibilities of oceanic perspectives to narrate the colonial past. The chapter is opened by section 2.1, which provides an overview of postcolonial thought and its most remarkable contexts and debates. This section illustrates and clarifies concepts and analytical tools in postcolonial criticism which are indispensable to any literary-cultural discussion of the colonial (maritime) past. It discusses key thinkers in postcolonialism, such as the postcolonial 'holy trinity' comprising Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri C. Spivak, as well as other remarkable authors such as Benita Parry, John M. Mackenzie or Stuart Hall, to name just a few. After situating postcolonial criticism in relation to postmodernism, the section finishes by suggesting a way-out of the arguable exhaustion of postcolonial thought, namely that in order to maintain its critical sharpness, postcolonialism must re-direct its focus towards today's most obvious legacy of colonialism: capitalist globalisation.

Section 2.2 engages in an analysis of the 'Oceanic turn' in literary and cultural criticism in relation to perspectives on colonial history. The section firmly argues that the sea still occupies a prominent position in contemporary culture and for that purpose it revisits the place of the ocean in the Western world since the Early-Modern period. I draw considerably on sociology and human geography to outline how the ocean has been socially and spatially constructed since the very inception of capitalist modernity. The main idea surfacing this section is that the sea has been traditionally constructed as a *void* space out of history and therefore impermeable to

land-based social forces – a notion which is being challenged by historians and theorists who aim at 'historicising' the ocean. Then the section proceeds to illustrate the metaphorical and figurative uses of the ocean in English literature, focusing particularly on colonial history, diaspora and the narration of the past.

In section 2.3 I narrow down my inquiry to evaluate the social construction of the ocean as seen through the people populating the sea lanes in the age of navigation, as well as the impact on the transoceanic and diasporic identities of such people. I argue that the in-betweeness of the sea crossing – between points of departure and destination – symbolically evokes the transitional character of diasporic identity, perpetually navigating between home and host cultures. In a more materialist sense, I contend that the aforementioned in-betweeness of maritime travel prevented either metropolitan or colonial values from being fully in operation, what translated in a fluidity of land-locked racial, cultural or national boundaries that was leveraged by sea migrants for transgressive or transformative purposes. I support this thesis statement with specific references to Western maritime culture and English literature and history and cement my analysis by drawing on Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993), a ground-breaking work in maritime criticism.

Section 2.4 provides an examination of the most remarkable topography in maritime literature: the ship. The most important mediator in human-ocean relations, the ship holds a troubled position in the Western imagination when placed within colonial history, evoking adventure, exploration and knowledge, but also racial terror and slavery. In this section I draw both on cultural history – including Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* – and human geography and sociology to provide an appraisal of the ship in colonial history. Firstly, the section gives a literary-cultural analysis of the ship

in Victorian maritime culture, providing specific examples in nineteenth-century Anglo-American culture, literature and history and focusing particularly on the multi-ethnic composition of ship crews. On the other hand, the section pursues a critical inquiry into the socio-cultural construction of the ship. For this purpose, I delve into two critical perspectives: ship as *heterotopia* and ship as *contact zone*. The terms *heterotopia* and *contact zone*, as understood by Michel Foucault and Mary Louise Pratt respectively, allows for a perusal of shipspace from a socio-cultural viewpoint. I further complement this section by intersecting these critical readings of the ship with postcolonial thought and Victorian maritime history.

Chapter 3, "The Victorians on the Globe: Postcolonial Neo-Victorianism and the Neo-Victorian Maritime Novel in the 21st Century," develops the second theoretical pillar grounding this PhD thesis. This chapter provides a critical account of the neo-Victorian novel, focusing on the genre as a whole as well as its more specific forms – namely postcolonial neo-Victorianism and the neo-Victorian maritime novel – and discussing key texts, debates and terminology in the field.

Section 3.1 gives an overview of the neo-Victorian novel and examines the most remarkable debates and contexts of the genre. I open the section by discussing the very word 'Victorian' and how the denotative and connotative uses of the term have shaped cultural responses to the nineteenth century since the very death of Queen Victoria in 1901. The section then moves to provide a diachronic account of the neo-Victorian novel, discussing its roots and foundations, terminology, and key elements and texts in the genre. Finally, I situate my analysis of the neo-Victorian novel in wider debates, particularly the position of the genre in postmodernism – and

its much debated detachment from the latter – and its contribution to narrations of the past.

In subsection 3.2 I delimit my account of the neo-Victorian novel to one of the most remarkable themes in the genre, that of postcolonial engagements with the Victorian past. Firstly, after briefly outlining the roots of neo-Victorian fiction in its postcolonial mode, the section provides a revisionist analysis of Victorian perceptions on race and empire and how such perceptions found their way through pseudo-scientific racist thought, providing specific examples in Victorian literature and culture. Further on, the section delves into neo-Victorian interventions into the traumatic memory of the British Empire and race relations in the nineteenth century. I outline the strategies adopted by postcolonial neo-Victorian novels to represent the colonial past and discuss representative novels in the genre.

To close chapter 3, section 3.3 further narrows down the analysis of the neo-Victorian genre to focus on the neo-Victorian maritime novel. Firstly, I situate my analysis of this subgenre in relation to one of the latest debates in neo-Victorian criticism, namely the debatable position of the genre in global contexts. Then, setting off from Elizabeth Ho's notion of the 'neo-Victorian-at-sea', I delineate the forms the neo-Victorian maritime novel has adopted. I position this subgenre in relation to nineteenth-century nautical novels, outlining differences and affinities between the two and providing examples both of neo-Victorian narrations of the sea and their Victorian counterparts. To close the section, I discuss the neo-Victorian maritime novel in intersection with wider debates on globalisation and cosmopolitanism, pointing out what can be gained in analysing this subgenre of the neo-Victorian novel to re-orient postcolonial critiques of contemporary capitalist globalisation.

Chapter 4, 'Black America's Romance with Victorian Britain': African Americans in Neo-Victorian Narratives of the Atlantic", provides an examination of two neo-Victorian maritime novels dealing with the Atlantic Ocean, namely Nora Hague's *Letters from an Age of Reason* (2001) and Colum McCann's *TransAtlantic* (2013). The chapter is thematically focused on the transatlantic interactions between African Americans and Victorian Britons, highlighting the cultural and political transactions between the two.

Firstly, I analyse in section 4.1 Nora Hague's *Letters from an Age of Reason*, a novel that has received scant critical attention. I read Hague's neo-Victorian novel and its account of the black migratory subject in the Atlantic basin as exemplary of the transnational cultural model put forward in Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*. Firstly, I read the transatlantic journeys depicted in the narration as facilitating the fluidity of land-based Victorian boundaries of race and sexuality and inquire into the impact of such fluidity on the psyche and identity of the black characters in the novel who crisscross the Atlantic Ocean in the Victorian age. On the other hand, this subsection argues that Hague's narration constructs the Atlantic Ocean as a medium facilitating the dissemination of African-oriented cultures and family ties around the north-Atlantic hemisphere, which highlights the connective potential of transoceanic communication and points to a pan-African memory of the Atlantic Ocean.

Then, in section 4.2, I analyse Colum McCann's *TransAtlantic* (2013), a multi-perspectival novel that rewrites transatlantic relations between Britain, Ireland and the United States in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries. My analysis focuses specifically on two events in the Victorian era that had a markedly transatlantic dimension, namely abolitionism and the Irish famine, and their cultural

afterlife in contemporary culture. Firstly, this subsection delves into the transatlantic reach of abolitionist activities through the persona of Frederick Douglass, whose 1845 Irish tour is fictionalised in the first volume of McCann's novel. Secondly, the section inquires into the transatlantic mass migration flow triggered by the Irish Famine – what has been called the 'Green Atlantic' – and the Irish-American encounters that it engendered. Finally, the section finishes by arguing that the transhistorical scope of the novel – juxtaposing the nineteenth-century events above mentioned with twentieth century happenings in Ireland such as the Troubles or Anglo-Irish peace negotiations – constructs an oceanic conception of time and space in which past events, like sea waves, cyclically configure present concerns.

Chapter 5, "The Neo-Victorian Indian Ocean: Lascars, Coolies and the Opium Trade in Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis* Trilogy" radically moves the focus away from the north-Atlantic hemisphere to the Indian Ocean and provides an in-depth perusal of the Indian writer Amitav Ghosh's so-called *Ibis* trilogy. I read Amitav Ghosh as a global writer whose cosmopolitan viewpoints mobilise stale ideas of the nation. Accordingly, the chapter situates Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy within debates on globalisation and cosmopolitanism. My main thesis statement is that Ghosh's take on the neo-Victorian novel constructs Victorian transoceanic exploits in the Indian Ocean as an era presaging today's capitalist globalisation, creatively implicating the Victorian era in contemporary neo-colonial globalism. Additionally, my insight into the trilogy is sustainably alert on the potential transactions and connections between the histories of the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean.

My insight into the neo-Victorian Indian Ocean sets off in section 5.1, which analyses *Sea of Poppies* (2008), the first instalment in the *Ibis* trilogy. The novel has

received considerable critical attention, especially within postcolonial critical circles, although such criticism has not been sustained within neo-Victorian criticism. My contribution to the analysis of *Sea of Poppies* as a neo-Victorian maritime novel focuses on several contexts. Firstly, I read the novel's portrayal of the opium trade and indentureship – a labour system which replaced chattel slavery – within global debates on forced labour. Secondly, the analysis delves into the impact of maritime mobility on the migrant protagonists' psyches and cosmopolitan identities. Finally, I look into the linguistic diversity that characterised the Indian Ocean waterworlds in the Victorian era as illustrating the fluidity of cultural boundaries engendered by maritime life.

In section 5.2 I move on to analyse *River of Smoke* (2011), the second volume in the trilogy. This novel deals with the opium traffic right in the prelude to the First Opium War (1839-1942) and the bulk of the narration occurs in nineteenth-century Canton. The trilogy's move to China pushes the boundaries of the neo-Victorian imaginary and potentially paves the way for the unearthing of alternative models of cultural hybridity. Firstly, I analyse Ghosh's *River of Smoke* as marked by parallels between its narration of the prelude to the First Opium War as a crux in the history of nineteenth-century global trade and current political conflicts arising out of neo-liberal policies and globalisation, including Western military interventions under gunboat diplomacy. On the other hand, I argue that the novel's reconstruction of India's involvement in nineteenth-century opium trade in China provides renewed perspectives on Sino-Indian relations in the Victorian period and today. In particular my analysis argues that *River of Smoke* reconstructs a nineteenth-century Pan-Asian perspective on Indian Ocean relations by illustrating idioms, relations and spaces which escaped the control and hegemony of Victorian imperialism.

Finally, in section 5.3 I delve into *Flood of Fire* (2015), the culmination of the trilogy. This novel portrays the actual outbreak of the First Opium War and the escalation of violence between Britain and China, drawing on a construction of sea-space as a vector for the projection of power. Additionally, in order to round up the trilogy, the narration resumes concerns already dealt with in the first two instalments, such as the permeable character of the categories of race, gender and nation when situated at sea. The main focus of my analysis is nevertheless the narration of the First Opium War – and India's troubled position in it – as an event that marked West-East relations, paying particular attention to China's perspective as a corrective to the Anglocentricity that characterises the western historiographical construction of the conflict. Ultimately, I argue that the novel promotes further south-south collaboration between India and China as emerging superpowers in the global politics at play in the neo-liberal present.

By bringing into focus this selection of neo-Victorian maritime novels dealing with the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans, and setting the analysis in intersection with the theoretical framework developed in chapters 2 and 3, this PhD thesis expects to delineate the forms the neo-Victorian maritime novel has been adopting in the last decades. I expect my inquiry into this subgenre, through the discardment of terracentrism which typically characterises historiography and postcolonial thought, to illustrate that neo-Victorian maritime interventions into narrations of the globe provide alternative and counternationalistic insights of globalisation and retrieve

subaltern histories from oceanic oblivion that are potentially relevant to understand

contemporary global capitalism.[1]

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[1]   This PhD thesis, including the references in the Works Cited section, has been formatted according to the guidelines provided in the 7th Edition of the MLA Handbook.

2. Postcolonialism, Maritime Criticism, and Transoceanic Connectivity

The following chapter provides an overview of maritime criticism and transoceanic migration in the context of British imperial history, which is one of the basic theoretical pillars grounding this thesis. Section 2.1 engages in a roll call of postcolonial thought, outlining theoretical tenets that, for all their ubiquity in criticism, provide language and terminology that are indispensable to any literary-cultural analysis of imperial history. Section 2.2 provides an inquiry into a flourishing literary field which have gained prominence in the last decades, that of maritime criticism and the 'oceanic turn.' I situate this critical field in relation both to postcolonial criticism and debates around world and imperial history and globalisation. In section 2.3 I narrow down my analysis and engage in an analysis of the sea as a space for migration and transoceanic encounters, evaluating the impact of sea migration on diasporic identities. Finally, section 2.4 delves into one of the most remarkable loci in maritime criticism: the ship. I pursue both a cultural and critical analysis of this oceanic mobile artefact, providing significant instances in Victorian culture as well as different critical evaluations of the ship from a spatial point of view.

2.1. Postcolonial Theory Then and Today: Contexts, Theory, Criticism

> The continuing decline, the growing poverty and the meanness of spirit of much of Thatcherite Britain encourages many Britons to turn their eyes nostalgically to the lost hour of their precedence. The recrudescence of imperialist ideology and the popularity of Raj fictions put one in mind of the phantom twitchings of an amputated limb (Rushdie, *Imaginary* 91-92).

In the excerpt quoted above, Salman Rushdie harshly criticises Thatcherism's so-called appeal to Victorian values and the heydays of the British Empire as a safety valve for the social unrest experienced by Britons during Margaret Thatcher's ministry in the 1980s. Rushdie's bitter criticism on the Raj Revival both on page and screen in

that decade, exemplified by films such as Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* (1982) or David Lean's *A Passage to India* (1984) and illustrated grotesquely as a phantom limb pain, reveals the (mis)uses of the colonial past and its problematic relations to history, literature and culture in the post-colonial present. Postcolonial criticism, one of the most contested and controversial literary-critical spheres, is the school of thought devoted to analyse and deconstruct the effects of colonialism during and after the colonial period from literary, cultural, political, economic or historical viewpoints.

Originally devised as an exclusively historical marker in its hyphenated form,[2] postcolonialism is generally regarded today as an umbrella term for manifold theories aimed at contesting and deconstructing colonial power. It is significant though that the term 'postcolonial' was missing in early texts by authors who are today considered key to the field and occasionally (and debatably) referred to as a critical 'Holy Trinity' in the field (Young, *Colonial* 163): Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha or Gayatri C. Spivak. Among them, Edward Said's groundbreaking monograph *Orientalism* (1978) is almost undisputedly distinguished today as the foundational text of postcolonial studies.[3] Focusing on the colonial history of both Britain and

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[2]   The hyphenated term post-colonialism was used by historians to former European colonies and their decolonization after the 2nd World War (Baker, Hulme and Iversen 4). Today post-colonialism generally differs from postcolonialism in that the former refers chronologically to the historical period following the end of colonial rule in former colonies and their post-independence period whereas the latter is an epistemological category which grasps both the colonial and post-colonial period to examine colonial power. Joanna Rostek has suggested a new variant of the term with a slash, post/colonialism, in order to place a balanced stress on the terms postcolonialism and colonialism, especially when dealing with historical novels which rewrite the colonial period from a postcolonial stance (Rostek 249).

[3]   In *Postcolonial Theory in the Global Age: Interdisciplinary Essays* (2013), Om Prakash Dwivedi and Martin Kich credit Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) to have given rise to postcolonial studies (Dwivedi and Kich 9). Fanon, a Martinican psychiatrist and philosopher, researched thoroughly the psychopathological features of colonisation and became a symbol for colonial resistance and decolonisation. Certainly his study of the relation between coloniser and colonised can be traced to be an obvious antecedent of Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and of the recurrent

France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Said conceives Orientalism as a unified corpus of stereotypes, assumptions and representations fabricated by European colonial powers in order to justify and perpetuate their domination over the East.

Said's definition of Orientalism as a 'discourse' is regarded as one of his main contributions to the postcolonial field (Low and Wolfreys 201) and it unveils the heavy influence of post-structuralism in general and Michel Foucault in particular on *Orientalism* (a point I will tackle further on). As a result of her imperialist project, Britain got involved in several military conflicts throughout the whole nineteenth century, namely the Indian Mutiny (1857-58), the South-African War (1899-1902) or the Opium Wars (1839-42 and 1856-60). Said's main thesis lies in the idea that, even if military power played a pivotal role in imperial expansion, the British imperialist scheme was backed up and justified by an assembly of beliefs, assumptions, and representations which he identifies as 'colonial discourse.'

Said opens his monograph by problematising the very term 'Orientalism', which in his view may have, initially, two senses. On the one hand, Orientalism may refer to an academic stance, applied to professionals researching, teaching and writing about the Orient. On the other hand, Said argues that the term 'Orientalism' designates epistemologically and ontologically the Western mindset which seeks to fully establish the cultural differences between "the Orient" and "the Occident" (Said, *Orientalism* 1-2). In intersection between those two perceptions on Orientalism, Said

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polarities which have marked postcolonial thought, as well as a lasting influence on later theorists on colonisation such as Homi K. Bhabha. Fanon's words in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) are revealing: "There is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to black men. There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect . . . However painful it may be for me to accept this conclusion, I am obliged to state it: For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white" (Fanon 12).

identifies a third sense of the term, that of a "corporate institution for dealing with the Orient . . . a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, *Orientalism* 3).

Said's *Orientalism* is targeted primarily on this latter view of Orientalism as a structure of discourses, originating in the late eighteenth century and developing throughout the nineteenth century, with a view to malleate the East in the Western imagination. As John M. MacKenzie suggests, the original and traditional perceptions of the term Orientalism, applied sympathetically to scholars and artists who tried to make the Orient available to western audiences, changed radically after the publication of Said's *Orientalism* to designate the western discourse of supremacy over the East which came to dominate academic circles in the 1980s and 1990s (MacKenzie xii).[4]

Edward Said draws upon Michel Foucault's notion of discourse as illustrated in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) and *Discipline and Punish* (1975) to unveil "the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (Said, *Orientalism* 3). Since the late eighteenth century, the unprecedented power of British and French empires coalesced with an academic and scientific interest in examining and perusing virtually every aspect of the Orient. In Said's words:

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[4]   John M. MacKenzie seems to belong to what Ali Behdad has called an "anti-Saidian" trend in postcolonial criticism which seeks to restore Orientalism to its original apolitical sense, particularly in the field of visual arts (Behdad 710). In his analysis of the influence of Orientalism on nineteenth-century painting, Mackenzie argues that "there is little evidence of a necessary coherence between the imposition of direct imperial rule and the visual arts . . . it is apparent that Orientalism celebrates cultural proximity, historical parallelism and religious familiarity rather than true 'Otherness'" (Mackenzie 51-52).

> From the end of the eighteenth century, there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories of development, revolution, cultural personality, national or religious character (Said, *Orientalism* 7-8).

This scientifically and academically exhaustive approach from the West towards the East reveals knowledge as the main pillar cementing colonial discourse and accounts for Orientalism not simply as a fragile set of beliefs, myths and stereotypes, but as a fully designed network of ideas on which a big deal of material, creative and intellectual investment was encouraged. This vast and increasing Western knowledge about the East is arguably one of the chief engines instigating the effectiveness of Orientalist discourse to justify colonial domination in the post-Enlightenment period. The West *knows* (about) the Orient and therefore the former arguably has the legitimacy to subjugate the latter. In tune with Foucauldian thought on power and "discourses of truth" (Foucault, *Power* 93) and Antonio Gramsci's conception of hegemony, in Orientalist discourse knowledge becomes synonymous with power. The Orient as created by the Orientalist becomes a construct, a representation, a deformed double which rescues the 'true' Orient out of "obscurity, alienation, and strangeness" for Western consumption (Said, *Orientalism* 121).

One of the most radical and contested aspects of Said's *Orientalism* is its Manichean outline of West-East relations in the form of asymmetrical dichotomies stemming from a limited selection of authors to whom the author identifies as Orientalist.[5] On this point, Said is categorical: "The Orient is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, 'different' . . . The European is rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'"

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[5] Said and Foucault drift apart in the former's advocacy of "the determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise anonymous collective of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism" (Said, *Orientalism* 32).

(Said, *Orientalism* 40). These binaries impose upon Westerners a mode of representation on how the East *must* be perceived and provide a foundation to compact Western identity in opposition to the Orient. Accordingly, "Orientalism reveals by proxy more about *those that describe the Orient* than the peoples and places that are being 'described'" (McLeod, 41; original emphasis).

The binary system of imperial ideology was further theorised by Abdul R. JanMohamed in his essay "The Economy of Manichean Allegory" (1985). In JanMohamed's view, colonial discourse represents the worlds of the colonisers and the colonised as polarised into the categories of good and evil respectively. This binary thinking seems ingrained in the colonisers' psyche and consequently

> the colonizer's invariable assumption about his moral superiority means that he will rarely question the validity of either his own or his society's formation and that he will not be inclined to expend any energy in understanding the worthless alterity of the colonized (JanMohamed 65).

This seemingly endemic Manichean thinking, Said argues, implied that every European in the nineteenth century "in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric" (Said, *Orientalism* 204). Said's unqualified assumption seems to essentialise Western scholarship about the East in similar terms to the essentialisation of the East that his work seeks to denounce and seems to ignore nineteenth century Western works that did seek to comprehend the Orient (MacKenzie 5).

Said's sweeping statements about the potency and all-encompassing reach of Orientalist discourse have made *Orientalism* the target of critics who impute to Said's seminal work its ahistorical character and its blindness to counter-hegemonic discourses (Porter 152). The uncertain potential of Orientalist discourse, challenged

by resistant responses by the colonised and by Western scholars who did not endorse Said's model of colonial discourse, has led John M. MacKenzie to asseverate firmly that in radical perspectives on Orientalism "we find an entire epoch condemned out of hand as though historical ages themselves can be divided into 'goodies' and 'baddies'" (Mackenzie xvii). The unstable hegemony of colonial discourse is also the concern of Homi K. Bhabha, who provided an interesting re-formulation of Said's *Orientalism*. Bhabha's theories on colonial ambivalence and mimicry, which are informed by deconstruction, poststructuralism and psychoanalysis, significantly do not deny the power of Orientalist discourse and its "regime of truth" (Bhabha, "Other" 93), but unveil internal contradictions and slippages in colonial discourse which cast doubts upon its authority.

In his influential essays "The Other Question" (1983) and "Of Mimicry and Man" (1984), Bhabha unveils the discursive inconsistencies of the civilizing mission through which British imperialism assumed a tutelary status over the Orient. Bhabha defines colonial mimicry as "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an *ambivalence*; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (Bhabha, "Mimicry" 280; original emphasis). Drawing sardonically upon Thomas Babington Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education" (1835), Bhabha unveils an evident ambivalence in coloniser-colonised relationships: colonial discourse tries simultaneously to

westernise and alienate colonial subjects, to establish them *inside* and *outside* Western knowledge, and to make them both *similar* and *different* to their colonisers.[6]

In plain terms, colonised natives are described through "terrifying stereotypes of savagery, cannibalism, lust, and anarchy" (Bhabha, "Other" 96) in order to perpetuate their oppression but at the same time they are presumed redeemable, tame, and knowable to vindicate their rule and Westernisation. Anglicised natives and their capacity to mimic their colonisers' values, customs, religion and language exposes the inconclusiveness of colonial discourse by placing colonial power face to face with a threat in the form a "*resemblance* [which] is the most terrifying thing to behold" (Bhabha, "Mimicry" 283, original emphasis). Colonial discourse is then invalidated "through the repetitious slippage of difference and desire" (Bhabha, "Mimicry" 283). Bhabha patently discloses the flawed nature of colonial authority from a discursive point of view: the coloniser seeks the native to be similar to himself while simultaneously he takes pains to maintain the signifiers of difference. Accordingly, Bhabha argues, racial discourse resorts to stereotypes which must be continually repeated in order to reaffirm their unstable signification (Bhabha, "Other" 100) and arrest the colonial Other's flux between similarity and difference.

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[6]   The Victorian historian Thomas Babington Macaulay published his well-known "Minute on Indian Education" in 1835 and it quickly became a decisively influential article in British educational policy in nineteenth-century India. Among other claims, Macaulay argued that English should substitute vernacular languages such as Sanskrit, Persian or Arabic as the language of instruction and education. Teaching Indian students in a Western style, Macaulay claimed, would produce "a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Macaulay 183). Packed with racist overtones, Macaulay's "Minute" advocated the cultural superiority of European culture and the English language, arguing that "a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia" (Macaulay 174). The persuasive rhetoric of Macaulay's article nevertheless encouraged the Council of India to pass the English Education Act (1835), which assuredly westernised the Indian curriculum and withdrew British support for traditional Indian education.

Bhabha's work has been instrumental not only in highlighting the ambivalence of colonial discourse but also in reinterpreting the colonial encounter from the point of view of identity. Bhabha follows Said in stating that colonisers defined and cemented their identity in opposition to the native by building a structure of differences "between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them')" (Said, *Orientalism* 42). Nevertheless, Bhabha abandons the Saidian conception of coloniser/colonised relations as non-fluid and monolithic to lay bare the flowing transactions operating in the construction of the coloniser's identity, or in Necati Polat's words, "Bhabha departs in his reading of the colonial situation from the earlier and better known take by Edward Said by replacing an essentialised dichotomy of the coloniser and the colonised with one that is transversal and differentialising" (Polat 1259).

To put it bluntly, just as colonial discourse conceives Anglicised natives as dependant on metropolitan culture, religion and language, so do the colonisers *depend on* the native to articulate their identity. In Bhabha's thought, John Mackenzie argues, "[Colonial] discourse, far from being simply possessed by the coloniser, also possesses him. His relationship with the colonised operates like a *fetish*, vacillating between fear and desire, doubt and confidence" (Mackenzie 12, emphasis added). Delving into Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* and Freud's insights into fetishism and castration,[7] Bhabha reads the colonial encounter as one in which the

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[7]   The gender biases in Bhabha's thought are evident and they are also attributable to Said. Reina Lewis claims that "in [Said's] *Orientalism* gender occurs only as a metaphor for the negative characterization of the Orientalized Other as 'feminine'" (Lewis 17-18). Both Said and Bhabha are concerned with the Western representation of the Orient but neither of them alludes to the ambivalent position within Orientalist discourse and imperial power of western women, who were empowered in relation to the eastern colonised subjects, but placed in a subordinated position with regards to their western male counterparts (Lewis 4-5). Bhabha and Said do not pay attention either to the fact that many Victorian women actually travelled to the colonies and produced their own writings, contributing as well both to the Orientalist discourse and the imperialist project (McLeod 49; Lewis 18).

coloniser simultaneously *avows* and *disavows* the fact that "all men have the same skin/race/culture", what translates in an "anxiety associated with lack of difference" (Bhabha, "Other" 98) in the coloniser's confrontation with the 'dark native.' The native's skin emerges then as a fetish signifying concurrently the coloniser's fear and desire.

Bhabha provides a further elaboration on the ambivalence of colonial discourse through the concept of hybridity. As Bhabha argues, the subjectivities of both coloniser and colonised are interdependent and mutually constructed. This correlation in coloniser-colonised relations leads Bhabha to argue that all cultural systems and exchanges take place in what he calls the "Third Space of enunciation" (Bhabha, *Location* 54). In his view, "the pact of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these two places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space" (Bhabha, "Commitment" 20). Consequently, "hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or 'purity' of cultures are untenable" (Bhabha, "Commitment" 21). Every culture and every individual is therefore characterised by a hybridity which legitimises cultural difference. It is the hybridity operating in that in-between Third Space that produces cultural meaning.

The term 'hybridity,' for all its ubiquity in postcolonial debates, has often been contested, criticised and misused. A particularly wrong application of hybridity has consisted of equating the term with crosscultural exchanges, which masks the asymmetrical nature and the different histories of coercion and oppression articulating those exchanges. This sense of the term, under the guise of a benign multiculturalism, can be argued to ultimately shield the separateness and

incommensurability of cultures. In its most celebratory version, hybridity codifies

instances of crosscultural encounters out of mutual respect and egalitarianism, which

contrasts sharply with the actual social and economic inequalities arising between

opposing communities. In Ania Loomba's words, some "current invocations of

'hybridity' within postcolonial theory . . . work to downplay the bitter tension and the

clash between the colonisers and the colonised and therefore misrepresent the

dynamics of anti-colonial struggle" (Loomba 181).

Nevertheless, I argue that the term 'hybridity' may help to chase away

essentialist articulations which consider cultures as innately acquired and the

exclusive property of specific communities which, only under the optimal

circumstances, may coalesce. As Andrew Smith argues,

> "Hybridity" can become a term not for the mixing of once separate and self-
> contained cultural traditions, but rather for the recognition of the fact that all
> culture is an arena of struggle, where self is played off against the
> purportedly 'other', and in which the attempts of the dominant culture to close
> and patrol its hegemonic account are threatened by the return of minority
> stories and histories, and by strategies of appropriation and revaluation . . .
> This poststructurally orientated sense of the term 'hybridity' foregrounds the
> 'constructedness' of culture. There are important reasons for this, and the
> insistence on recognizing the discursive creation of meaning and value is a
> powerful refutation of the claims of culture as a 'given' category on a par with
> genes or blood type" (Smith 252-253).

In light of Smith's words, I suggest that hybridity can be considered a potentially

useful parameter which codifies the vexed tension between the specificities of local

post-colonial cultures and a shared history of post-coloniality, a lynchpin in the

"debate over historical specificity" (Slemon 20) as well as "an important cultural

strategy for the political project of decolonisation" (Coombes 90).

The impact of imperialism on identity is also the concern of Gayatri C. Spivak,

the last theorist in the postcolonial 'holy trinity'. Robert Young has argued that

Bhabha and Spivak share "the assumption that imperialism was not only a territorial and economic but inevitably also a subject-constituting project" (Young, *White* 159). Similarly, both scholars display their reliance on poststructuralism and deconstruction in their concomitant promotion of identity and subjectivity as fragmentary, fluctuating and discursively constructed as well as in their shared challenge to the categories of coloniser and colonised as "active and passive, imperial mugger and unresisting victim" respectively (Mackenzie 11). Nevertheless, Gayatri C. Spivak has provided her own take on postcolonial theory, informed by Marxism and Feminism, to open up crucial debates in postcolonialism, namely the agency and voice of the (female) 'subaltern' and the perils of representation.

Spivak's work has been commonly associated with the Subaltern Studies group, an assembly of historians devoted to unearth subordinate and silenced collectives in South Asian politics. The term 'subaltern', which signals the Marxist influence both on Spivak and the Subaltern group, was adopted by the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci to refer to subordinate social collectives who are dominated and subjected to the hegemony of a ruling élite. Gramsci argued in "Notes on Italian History" (1934-35) that the hegemony exercised by the ruling classes is articulated and unified around the State and this entails that the subaltern classes, whose formation is necessarily fragmentary, cannot access the same hegemony as long as they are not an integral part of the State. Hence that "subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up: only "permanent" victory breaks their subordination, and that not immediately" (Gramsci 55).

The Subaltern Studies group, comprising South-Asian scholars such as Ranajit Guha, Shahid Rahmin or Partha Chatterjee, adopted Gramsci's sense of the term to

uphold the histories of subordinate collectives, particularly the working classes and the peasantry and the documented evidence of their insurgency, against bourgeois visions of South-Asian historiography and Indian nationalism. In "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India" (1982), which is generally credited as the text that inaugurated the use of the term 'subaltern' in postcolonial thought (Loomba 199), Ranajit Guha points the finger at the elitism characterizing the South-Asian historiography of Indian nationalism as a product of British rule and its Anglicised natives, and asserts that "parallel to the domain of elite politics there existed throughout the colonial period another domain of Indian politics in which the principal actors were not the dominant groups of the indigenous society or the colonial authorities but the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the labouring population and the intermediate strata in town and country – that is, the people" (Guha 40).

Spivak has recognised the validity of Subaltern Studies and their deconstructive potential to turn dominant historiography upside down. In particular she has argued that "the most significant outcome of this revision or shift in perspective is that the *agency* of change is located in the insurgent or the 'subaltern'" (Spivak, *In Other* 197). The debate over the agency of the colonised, indeed one of the most complex issues in postcolonial thought together with that of historical specificity, has proved to be especially unmanageable for postcolonial theorists. The question of agency has particularly concerned postcolonial thought in its poststructuralist strand, which has generally conceived (colonial) subjectivity as externally constructed by language, ideology or discourse (Slemon 22). Postcolonial scholars have repeatedly pointed out the impact of European colonialism on the subjectivity of the colonised (Tiffin vii). Hence the project of retrieving the agency of the colonised to counteract and resist

colonial power, as well as to speak back against colonial discourses, has become imperative in the postcolonial agenda.

Such is the concern of Spivak in her ground-breaking and most influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), in which she problematises her alliance to Subaltern Studies via her questioning of representation understood as "speaking for" (Spivak, "Subaltern" 70). For Spivak, the representation of subaltern voices by (First World) intellectuals posits two problems. Firstly, it falsely renders subaltern consciousness as unaffected by the 'epistemic violence' of hegemonic Western discourses. In other words, subalterns cannot be considered 'sovereign subjects' with control over the discourses which construct their subjectivity and hence they are marked by their "irretrievable consciousness" (Spivak, "Subaltern" 82).[8] In Spivak's view, presuming too easily that self-representation was an option for non-elite natives would be, Ania Loomba argues, "to undermine the devastating effects of colonial power which was so pervasive that it re-wrote intellectual, legal and cultural systems" (Loomba 52). Such is analogously the claim of Rey Chow, who argues that

> it is the native's silence which is the most important clue to her displacement. That silence is at once the *evidence* of imperialist oppression (the naked body, the defiled image) and what, in the absence of the original witness to that oppression, must act in its place by *performing* or *feigning* as the pre-imperialist gaze (Chow, "Writing" 38, original emphasis).

Spivak's second objection to the representation of the subaltern's voice deals with the role of postcolonial intellectuals and their arguable transparency. Spivak appeals to Karl Marx's assertion in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* (1852) that French small peasants cannot represent themselves but must be

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[8]   Spivak articulates her view on the "critique of the sovereign subject" (Spivak, "Subaltern" 66) in parallel to her examination of Michel Foucault's and Gilles Deleuze's philosophies. She confronts the idea, supported by Foucault and Deleuze, that "the oppressed, if given the chance . . . *can speak and know their conditions*" and indicts them for ignoring the epistemic violence of colonialism (Spivak, "Subaltern" 78, 84, original emphasis).

represented (Spivak, "Subaltern" 71) to uphold the role of the postcolonial intellectual to represent and 'speak for' the subaltern, or in her words, "the intellectual's solution is not to abstain from representation" (Spivak, "Subaltern" 80). However, she simultaneously takes issue with the postcolonial critic's endeavour to adopt the subaltern's standpoint. For Spivak, Colin MacCabe argues, Subaltern scholars should not aim at "restoring the subaltern's consciousness" but at "tracing the subject effects of subalternity" (MacCabe xvi). Accordingly, Spivak warns postcolonial intellectuals "not to be complicit in the persistent constitution of Other as the Self's shadow" (Spivak, "Subaltern" 75) and to mistrust the historiographic construction of a unified subaltern voice, for "the colonized subaltern *subject* is irretrievably heterogeneous" (Spivak, "Subaltern" 79, original emphasis).[9]

In Spivak's philosophy, the issue of representation is further complicated from a gendered point of view. For Spivak, the silence of the female subaltern is typified by the debates on widow immolation, or sati, in colonial India. She examines carefully reports in the records of the East India Company around the British abolition of widow sacrifice in 1829 to argue that the female subaltern is always the *object* of patriarchy and imperialism and is never assigned a subject-agent position, that is, "there is no space from which the sexed subaltern can speak" (Spivak, "Subaltern" 103). The female subaltern lies voiceless and in darkness since in colonialist historiography, dominated by imperialism and patriarchy, "women are the 'site' rather than the subjects of certain historical debates" (Loomba 222).

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[9]   Spivak has however allowed a concession to the historiographical construction of subaltern consciousness providing it is carried out "as a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (Spivak, "Other" 205, original emphasis). This entails that any construction of a unified and homogeneous consciousness of the oppressed may seem fictitious and artificial but can be nevertheless useful for the larger project of postcolonialism.

Spivak's discontents with Subaltern studies have resulted, some critics argue, in an irreducible aporia which Joana Rostek summarises like this: "[Spivak] argues that the subaltern cannot be truly represented by someone else but must speak for herself; yet when she does so and is heard she can no longer be classified as subaltern" (Rostek 267). This is certainly what transpires from Spivak's categorical conclusion to her essay: "the Subaltern cannot speak" (Spivak, "Subaltern" 104). Ultimately, Spivak's concern on the silence of the subaltern compels us to be circumspect on the perils of representation and the essentialising effects of the historiographical construction of subjectivity as well as to bear in mind that postcolonialism is a contended arena in which what matters is not only who speaks but also who speaks for whom. Nevertheless, Spivak's downright statements, together with some misinterpretations of her theories which she has herself qualified,[10] have brought about some opposing arguments to her thought.

Bart Moore-Gilbert, for example, has pointed out the repercussions of the untranslatability of the subaltern's consciousness for the non-subaltern scholar:

> Spivak leaves the would-be non-subaltern and all of the subaltern in a seemingly impossible predicament, simultaneously unable to represent the subaltern in an 'uninterested' fashion . . . the non-subaltern must either maximally respect the Other's radical alterity, thus leaving the status quo intact, or attempt the impossible feat of 'opening up' to the Other without in any way 'assimilating' that Other to his/her subject-position, perspectives or identity" (Moore-Gilbert 102).

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[10] Spivak has stated in an interview that her claim on the silence of the female subaltern does not entail that the latter could not actually express her rebellion and insurgency but rather that, as Robert Young has put it, "she is assigned no position of enunciation" (Young, *White* 164). Spivak's answer to the frequent misreadings of her argument (even if they are partly attributable to the opaqueness of her writing style) are worth quoting: "Problems arise if you take this 'speak' absolutely literary as 'talk.' There can be and have been attempts to correct me by way of the fact that some of the women on the pyres did actually utter . . . but it really doesn't actually touch what I was trying to talk about. The actual fact of giving utterance is not what I was concerned about . . . 'the subaltern cannot speak', means that even when the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard, and speaking and hearing complete the speech act" (Spivak, "Subaltern Talk" 291-92).

In other words, Spivak complicates the possibility of resistance to hegemony and oppression to non-subalterns who, facing the unfeasibility of recovering subaltern lost voices, must refrain from doing anything productive on behalf of the oppressed.

Nevertheless, Spivak's bitterest readings have arisen from advocates of anti-colonial nationalism such as Benita Parry, who has tellingly censured "Spivak's deliberated deafness to the native voice where it is to be heard" (Parry, "Problems" 40). Parry goes on to argue that "Spivak in her own writings severely restricts (eliminates?) the space in which the colonized can be written back into history, even when 'interventionist possibilities' are exploited through the deconstructive strategies devised by the post-colonial intellectual" (Parry, "Problems" 40). Parry's and Spivak's contending views are emblematic of the recurrent opposition pre-colonial reclamation versus post-colonial syncreticity respectively. Critics who uphold anti-colonial nationalism, like Parry, have speculated with the idea of a complete decolonisation of previously colonised cultures via a nationalist recuperation of pre-colonial languages and practices. Other critics, such as Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, not only have argued against the conceivable reconstruction of a pre-colonial purity, but also have pointed out that syncretism is an inescapable feature of post-colonial societies as well as part of their appeal and vitality. Ashcroft, Tiffin and Griffith specify, however, that "accepting this does not, in any simple sense, involve hiding the role culture plays in the continuing neo-colonial hegemonic formation of the day-to-day experience of those societies" (Ascroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *Empire* 180).

Nevertheless the issue of decolonisation is context-specific and hence we should be wary about the use of 'post-colonial' or 'decolonisation' as all-inclusive

labels for regions with radically different circumstances. Certainly, Canada or Australia are not 'postcolonial' in the same way as India, South Africa or the Caribbean, not to mention the United States which rarely counts as a postcolonial nation despite the fact it was certainly a colonial territory until the end of the American War of Independence. Decolonisation becomes a far more problematic, if not unworkable, process if we consider language and the educational system in India, where the English language, as it was argued before, was introduced in the nineteenth century as the language of instruction in Indian education at the expense of local vernacular languages and hence English has become an indissoluble component of contemporary Indian culture.[11]

The varying applications in which British imperialism crystallised throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and whether such applications involved military subjugation, enslavement, forced mobility, a systematic westernisation policy or a methodical insertion of English language as a substitute (or alternative) for native languages have patently determined the divergent decolonisation processes undergone by different postcolonial nations. The possibility of a full decolonisation for regions such as India or the West Indies, whose cultural practices are (and have been) manifestly transcultural and transnational as a result of imperialism seems difficult to achieve. At variance with critics who reclaim nationalism against hybridity,

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[11]   In contrast to my reasoning , some postcolonial scholars such as John C. Hawley foretell that "the real renaissance of postcolonial studies is yet to be realized in India and will concern itself with literatures that Europeans and Americans cannot read" (Hawley 778). Hawley's prediction is rightfully concerned about the Anglocentricity which has characterised Postcolonial studies and Commonwealth literatures. Equally informed by the Anglocentric biases in postcolonial literatures, the Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has become the most influential reference in the debate concerning European languages in postcolonial societies, calling for their abandonment as a precondition for "decolonizing the Mind." (Thomas, *Afroeuropean* 3).

such as Benita Parry or Neil Lazarus,[12] we could question, instead, whether such decolonisation is desirable since, I argue, it would obscure the fact of British subjugation and violence in the colonial past and it would dismiss the fact that the hybridity and cosmopolitanism of such regions are an integral part of their potential to become models of cultural and racial integration.

In tune with perspectives on decolonisation which uphold post-colonial hybridity and syncreticity, cultural theorists on migration have qualified diaspora as a concept that promotes anti-essentialist views on culture. Stuart Hall defines diaspora experience as characterised

> not by essence and purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' that lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference (Hall, "Cultural Identity" 396).

Similarly, Iain Chambers, following Aihwa Ong, has illustrated the concept of diaspora around the concept of 'flexible citizenship' to argue that diasporic identities are "articulated across the hyphen, the transition, the bridge or passage between, rather than firmly located in any one culture, place or position . . . This interrogates the understanding of culture as a site of belonging with the idea of culture as a process of transition and becoming" (Chambers, "Signs" 53). In section 2.2 I further complicate and elaborate on diaspora, nationalism(s) and centre-periphery perspectives in intersection with maritime criticism. It can be argued for now that the hybridity, syncretism and difference that inhere within diasporic identities entail a reassessment of the fixity of origins and reveal diaspora as an in-between experience

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[12] See Benita Parry's "Resistance Theory / Theorising Resistance or Two Cheers for Nativism" (1996) and Neil Lazarus's "National Consciousness and the Specificity of (Post)-colonial Intellectualism." (1996)

that is productively anti-maniquean and holds a privileged position to explore the deficiencies of both origin and destination, metropolis and periphery.[13]

Until now we have revised postcolonial thought through its most emblematic critics (Said, Bhabha and Spivak) as well as through the specific responses they have engendered in other scholars. Nevertheless, the way in which contemporary literary criticism and postcolonial thought have replied to the postcolonial 'holy trinity' as a whole is expressive of the interrelations between postcolonialism and postmodernism on a larger scale. As will be discussed further on, postcolonialism and postmodernism have often exhibited a cut and thrust and occasionally an openly confrontational dynamics - "the twin peaks of '80s theoretical thinking" (Bhabha, "Making" 73) - which is worth exploring.

Marni Gauthier suitably argues that "the pith of the intersection of the postmodern and the postcolonial is their mutual concern with historiography, or the investigation of how events and people are represented and who does the representing" (Gauthier 55). Certainly, the shared postcolonial and postmodern preoccupation with representation has often translated into the unearthing of misrepresented histories, an overall mistrust on official historiography, and a rejection of master narratives[14] and of the notion of a unified sovereign subject.[15] Regarding

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[13]   Postcolonial critical perspectives that draw upon diaspora should be mindful, though, of the problematic rejoicing tone usually applied to exile and migrancy which Susheila Nasta summarises as follows: "the predominant focus in contemporary postcolonial criticism on the celebratory elements of exile and displacement, the *heroic* potential of migrancy as a metaphor for a 'new' form of aesthetic freedom, does have a number of significant limitations which often dehistoricize and elide important questions of class, gender and cultural difference" (Nasta 4, original emphasis).

[14]   See Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) and his basic definition of the postmodern as the "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard xxiv).

[15]   Recent post-colonial historiography seems fuelled by a rejection of monolithic and all-encompassing narratives. For instance, Kwasi Kwarteng's *Ghosts of Empire* (2011) points to a plethora of colonial relations and competing visions of empire: "The British Empire was nothing more

fiction, postcolonial narratives have evinced their affinities with postmodernism in their adoption of historiographical metafiction to retrieve the marginalised perspectives of the colonised and the subaltern and "to offer distinctive, contradictory, and mutually complementing versions of history whose alleged progression forward is also challenged" (Berndt 130).

For all the overlaps between postmodernism and postcolonialism, Arijana Luburić-Cvijanović and Nina Muždeka significantly point out that the latter must be compellingly political, which is not necessarily the case for the former (Luburić-Cvijanović and Muždeka 437). Linda Hutcheon has further argued that postcolonialism goes "beyond the post-modern limits of deconstructing existing orthodoxies into the realms of social and political action" and "possesses a strong political motivation that is intrinsic to its oppositionality" (Hutcheon, "Circling" 130). Nevertheless, some critics have maintained that Said, Bhabha and Spivak's reliance on French poststructuralism has weakened postcolonialism's political drives. Circumspections on deconstruction and poststructuralist theory have certainly become the lynchpin of the postcolonial strand which bewails its closeness to postmodernism. In particular, postcolonial critical practice by (and derived from) Said, Bhabha and Spivak has been said to be symptomatic of "postcolonial theory's fetishization of textual critique" (Hawley 771) and its "metaphysics of textualism" (San Juan 22).[16]

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than a series of improvisations conducted by men who shared a common culture, but who often had very different ideas about government and administration. There is very little unifying ideology in this imperial story. It was grand and colourful but it was highly opportunistic, dominated by individualism and pragmatism" (Kwarteng 7-8).

[16]   For a contrapuntal reading on postcolonial thought's drawing on European poststructuralism, see Robert Young's *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001). Young leaps out as a scholar who rejects the criticisms posited on postcolonialism as relying on Western theory and argues against the idea that "theory is itself completely western" (Young, *Postcolonialism* 413).

Materialist and Marxist-oriented scholars have taken the lead in channelling misgivings on the closeness between postcolonialism and postmodernism. Neil Larsen, for instance, has claimed in *Marxism, Modernity, and Postcolonial Studies* (2002) that "postcolonialism as currently practiced has a great deal more to do with the reception of French 'theory' in places like the United States, Britain, Canada, and Australia than it does with the realities of cultural decolonization or the international division of labor" (Larsen 204-205). Similarly, Benita Parry, one of Spivak's sharpest critics and firm defender of anti-colonial nationalism, has likewise stood out among materialist scholars who complain about postcolonial reliance on poststructuralist theory. Parry, who has charged postcolonialism with releasing "colonialism from historical capitalism and [representing] it for study as a cultural event" (Parry, *Postcolonial* 4), has repeatedly tried to posit a materialist re-orientation to postcolonial criticism:

> The task facing postcolonial studies is not, of course, to abandon the theoretical sophistication that has marked its engagement with Orientalist discourse, Eurocentrism, and the exegetics of representation, but to link such meta-critical speculations with studies of actually existing political, economic, and cultural conditions, past and present (Parry "Institutionalization" 80).

The warning inherent in materialist critiques on postcolonialism is evident. Out of its abstract exploration of textuality, discourse, ambivalence, difference and other concepts derived from 'high theory', postcolonial thought runs the risk of overlooking real-world problems and the material conditions that truly had (and still have) an impact on (de)colonised societies and this entails that postcolonialism may end up becoming a purely aesthetic category without any significant political edge.[17]

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[17] In his review of the transition of colonial societies into capitalism, Neil Lazarus gives a succinct list of those material conditions: "Over the course of a couple of centuries in some territories, mere decades in other, generalised commodity production was imposed: production for exchange rather than use; monetisation; private ownership; the development of specifically capitalist markets . . . Along the way, existing social relations and modes of existence were undermined, destroyed, reconfigured . .

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri make a similar claim on the exhausted concoction of postcolonialism and postmodernism in *Empire* (2000), although they target their critique towards the recurrent focus on the past:

> Postmodernist and postcolonialist theorists never tire of critiquing and seeking liberation from the past forms of rule and their legacies in the present . . . We suspect that postmodernist and postcolonialist theories may end up in a dead end because they fail to recognize adequately the contemporary object of critique, that is, they mistake today's real enemy . . . What if these theorists are so intent on combating the remnants of a past form of domination that they fail to recognize the new form that is looming over them in the present? (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 137-138).

Hardt and Negri's concerns over postcolonialism reaching a cul-de-sac seem fair-minded and accordingly, following their reasoning, this section ends by illustrating a potential way out for postcolonial thought which is in tune both with maritime perspectives on culture and neo-Victorian criticism. Nevertheless, this PhD thesis necessarily opposes Hardt and Negri's disregard of past forms of oppression as a sine qua non of the denunciation of current injustices. I argue that the enterprises of critiquing colonial oppression and neo-colonial inequality are not self-annihilating but complementary. In this sense, current neo-Victorian novels exhibit a significant palimpsestuous potential, uncannily drawing attention to contemporary inequities while pointing at the unresolved aftermath of Victorian imperialism in the neo-colonial present. Significantly, the postcolonial neo-Victorian novels under analysis aim their critiques, to a large extent, at the form of domination which Hardt and Negri identify to 'loom over' the present, namely capitalist globalisation.

The postcolonial perennial focus on imperialism as a subject-constituting project has left the material and economic conditions underlying imperialism critically

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. Peasantries were destroyed, along with subsistence, tributary and market economies . . . to be replaced by capitalized agriculture in one location, proletarianisation in another, with waves of migratory labor (more or less regulated, sometimes not at all) in between" (Lazarus, "What" 11).

unattended, particularly as they have seamlessly transmuted into current neo-colonial forms of dominance. It seems time to reconsider Marxist and materialist perspectives of "imperialism as a stage of capitalism" (Brantlinger, *Rule* 10) and redirect postcolonial criticism towards 'today's real enemy': capitalist forms of globalisation and exploitative neo-liberalism.

Partha Chatterjee tellingly claims that "globalization is not some great carnival of capital, technology, and goods where we are all free to walk away with what we want" (Chatterjee 85). Similarly Rumina Sethi censures "the monopoly of reason appropriated by institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank" (Sethi 4), to which we may add the procurement of low-cost labour which generally typifies capitalist globalisation. Refocusing its target on these improper forms of globalisation seems the most evident way out for postcolonialism to keep sharpening its critical edge. Postcolonial theory should not lose sight of the fact that "capital *was*, and *continues* to be, the main cause of separatism and the concomitant construction of oppositional binarism such as the West and the rest" (Dwivedi and Kich 13, original emphasis). The increasing postcolonial detachment from postmodernism suggests that postcolonialism is seeking to adopt a more acute approach towards the colonial past to analyse how past forms of colonial coercion have seamlessly transformed in neo-colonial forms of global domination. That being so, this thesis aims at analysing the Victorian maritime world as an early stage of global capitalism marking the inception of contemporary globalisation.

2.2. The Oceanic Turn: Maritime Perspectives in World History and Postcolonial Thought

On 2 September 2015, headlines in international newspapers shocked the world with the image of Aylan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian child who drowned in the

Mediterranean together with his five-year-old brother and their mother as they were trying to escape the military conflict between the Islamic State and Kurdish forces in Syria. The harrowing image of Aylan's small body lying lifeless on a Turkish beach, after his family's attempt to reach the Greek island of Kos (Smith, no pages), went around the world, becoming a ghastly symbol of the Syrian refugees crisis in particular and of the horrors of illegal sea migration in general. And yet, seas and oceans blocking asylum-seekers' escape are the same which still nurture First World capitalism. In fact, despite the advent of aircraft transport, around 90-95% of current world trade is transported by sea (Steinberg, *Social* 14; Cohen "Literary" 658). The ocean emerges as a contradictory and protean symbol in contemporary culture, featuring simultaneously as a barrier and a conduit.

Immigrants and asylum-seekers' bodies being washed away to Western shores as the flotsam and jetsam of global modernity, trying to reach "fortress Europe" (Thomas, *Afroeuropean* 8) as maritime trade keeps fertilizing Western economy, reiterate histories of colonial oppression and subaltern resistance at sea in the modern age. The ocean played a pivotal role in the making of western capitalist modernity, facilitating the circulation of people, goods, information and ideas from the age of explorations and all through the 18th and 19th centuries.[18] However, such maritime circulation which paved the way for Western hegemony dovetailed with histories of racial conflict, loss, dispersion, slavery, and forced migration. The ocean in contemporary culture emerges then as a complex symbol "in the making of

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[18]   The Internet is today the paramount channel for transmitting information. However, it is worth noting that the circulation of data on the Internet still evinces a maritime metaphor when we *surf* or *navigate* the web. Bernhard Klein provides further instances of these linguistic traces of the maritime past in the age of global information, such as to catch a plane at the air*port* or to *log on* to a computer (Klein, *Fictions* 10; original emphasis).

occidental modernity [which] propels us to set modernity on floating foundations" (Chambers, "Maritime" 679).[19]

That oceans and the maritime world were crucial in the making of Western modernity is the main claim upholding the renewed interest in cultural, historical and literary insights into the ocean which has characterised cultural criticism in the last decades. This 'oceanic turn', also referred to as the "new thalassology" (Mentz 101; Horden and Purcell 723), seems inserted into wider perspectives on social sciences and humanities that call for a 'spatial turn' in the analysis of the past, or the necessity of re-presenting the past from a spatial perspective. Philip J. Ethington claims the following:

> The past is the set of all places made by human action. The past cannot exist in time: only in space. Histories representing the past represent the places (*topoi*) of human action. Knowledge of the past, therefore, is literally cartographic . . . historical interpretation [is reconsidered as] the act of reading places, or *topoi* (Ethington 465-66, original emphasis).

In tune with this 'spatial turn', the 'oceanic turn' aims at dredging up the oceanic space, not simply as an intermediate locus between disparate locations, but as an actual *topos* of history. This notion seems to inform Bernhard Klein and Gesa Mackenthun's volume *Sea Changes: Historicizing the Ocean* (2004), which in its attempt to give the ocean a 'history', seeks to challenge "the cultural myth that the ocean is outside and beyond history" (Klein and Mackenthun 2).

Certainly, the ocean's position within society has been a debatable issue since at least the Early-Modern Period. The publication of the treatise *Mare Liberum* (*The Free Sea*) in 1608 by the Dutch philosopher and jurist Hugo Grotius already

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19   Iain Chambers follows Cesare Casarino in illustrating the unstable foundation of modernity with a 'floating' metaphor. Casarino claims that Western civilization since the Renaissance has "been run in all sorts of ways by ships" and therefore the inception of modernity rests on a "floating and itinerant foundation that had gone unnoticed for so long" (Casarino 12).

established the deep oceanic space as an international arena free from national jurisdictions to be freely crisscrossed by nations for trade and mobility.[20] Since then, the idea that the oceanic space escaped the states' control and dominion has triggered the ocean to be constructed as a non-place or a blank space outside society and history. Positively, this conception of the oceanic space was the one which dominated the construction of the ocean at the end of the eighteenth century and all through the nineteenth century. According to Philip E. Steinberg, during the industrial capitalist era "the deep sea – the area distant from coastal lands – was idealized . . . as a *great void* outside society and insulated from social forces. It was constructed as the wild antithesis of society (or place), the space of *anti-civilization*" (Steinberg, *Social* 112; original emphasis). The nineteenth-century sea was therefore a volatile terrain escaping land-locked parameters of control, society and history. The anthropologist and cultural historian John Mack puts it in this way:

> [The sea is] a space not a place. The sea is not somewhere with 'history', at least not recorded history . . . The predominant Western view of the sea might be characterized as that of a quintessential wilderness, a void without community other than that temporality established on boats crewed by those with the shared experience of being tossed about on its surface, and a space without ruins or other witness to the events which may have taken place on its surface" (Mack 17).

The categorisation of the ocean as a *space* rather than as a *place* opens the way for the ocean to be considered an arena of change, progress and transition. The historical geographer Charles W. J. Withers claims *space* to be a sphere for *action* and *movement* whereas *place* involves "stopping, resting, becoming, and becoming involved" (Withers 640). The placelessness and unceasing movement which characterises the ocean makes it a "laboratory of another modernity, in which the

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[20] The 'freedom of the seas' inherent in Hugo Grotius's *Mare Liberum* (1608) has garnered him distinction as the founding father of modern ocean law and modern international law (Steinberg, *Social* 31).

hegemonic time and space of capital are viewed askance, diverted and subverted"
(Chambers, "Maritime" 679), a domain where land-locked frameworks, such as racial
or national boundaries, can be subverted and challenged. This conception of the
ocean as a space for upheaval saturates Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's *The
Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the
Revolutionary Atlantic* (2000), which, as the title indicates, reveals the buried actions
of resistance and rebellion by dispossessed collectives in the Atlantic.

The construction of the ocean as an untamed space during the industrial-
capitalist era found its way through the literary field in Romanticism. Jonathan Raban
credits the Romantic writer Lord Byron to have conceived the nineteenth-century
literary sea (Raban 14), as is attested by the following verses from Canto IV in *Childe
Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-16):

> Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean – roll!
> Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;
> Man marks the earth with ruin – his control
> Stops with the shore; - upon the watery plain
> The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain
> A shadow of man's ravage, save his own,
> When for a moment, like a drop of rain,
> He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan,
> Without a grave, unknell'd, uncoffin'd and unknown (Byron 250).

Byron devises the ocean as a ruthless territory which, oblivious to human
suffering and death, bypasses social confinement and terrestrial control. The sea as
featured in the Romantic poetry of Lord Byron, Percy B. Shelley or Samuel Taylor
Coleridge was heavily influenced by the idea of the sublime developed in Edmund
Burke's aesthetic treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the
Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). The vastness and fierceness of the ocean makes it,
according to Burke, "an object of no small terror" (Burke 43) but simultaneously

"productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (Burke 13).[21] Romantic writers and artists assuredly capitalised on the sublime by rendering man-ocean encounters as an asymmetrical confrontation between human beings and the unimpeded forces of nature. Certainly the sublimation of the sea, although it lost some of its significance after the emergence of steam travel in the 1830s (I discuss this point in section 2.4), was bequeathed to Victorian culture and kept permeating nineteenth-century literature at least up to Joseph Conrad.[22]

Indeed, the sea has fascinated British authors and audiences for centuries. Since the performance and publication of William Shakespeare's *Perycles, Prince of Tyre* (1609) and *The Tempest* (1610), British literary works dealing to a greater or lesser extent with the sea include Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), Charlotte Brontë's *Villete* (1853), Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" (1867), Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), Lord Tennyson's "Crossing the Bar" (1889) or Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1900). American works such as Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) or Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838) and twentieth and twenty-first

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[21]   According to Jonathan Raban, Edmund Burke's construction of the ocean as the archetype of the sublime, as well as a wild space which produces horror and escapes human control is indebted to John Locke's disciple Joseph Addison, whose essay on the sea published in the *Spectator* (1712) is revealing: "Of all the objects that I have ever seen, there is none which affects my imagination so much as the sea or ocean . . . when it is worked up in a tempest, so that the Horizon on every side is nothing but foaming billows and floating mountains, it is impossible to describe the agreeable horrour that rises from such a prospect. A troubled ocean, to a man who sails upon it, is, I think, the biggest object that he can see in motion" (qtd. in Raban 8).

[22]   Consider this fragment from Joseph Conrad's autobiographical memoir *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906): "The sea . . . has no generosity. No display of manly qualities – courage, hardihood, endurance, faithfulness – has ever been known to touch its irresponsible consciousness of power. The ocean has the conscienceless temper of a savage autocrat spoiled by much adulation. He cannot brook the slightest appearance of defiance, and has remained the irreconcilable enemy of ships and men ever since ships and men ever since ships and men had the unheard-of audacity to go afloat together in the face of his frown. From that day he has gone on swallowing up fleets and men without his resentment being glutted by the number of victims" (Conrad, *Mirror* 166).

century British titles such as Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, the Sea* (1978), Marina Warner's *Indigo, or Mapping the Waters* (1992) or Ian McEwan's *On Chesil Beach* (2007) confirm a non-stop continuity in the lure of the ocean for the Anglo-American canon.

The literary appropriations of the sea and its related topographies (ships, beaches, islands) have provided a repository of symbols, similes, allegories and a long repertoire of metaphorical uses for past and present writers. Interestingly, Joanna Rostek claims that the literary sea illustrates postmodern perspectives on the past, as it is illustrated in her listing of contemporary writers' figurative uses of the ocean: "subjection and concurrent resistance to control and administration, the capacity to preserve but also to transform, the capability of swallowing and silencing people, the existence of unexplored and unknown realms, dangerousness, boundlessness, instability, unpredictability, permanent movement" (Rostek 17).

Tamsin Spargo's introduction to *Reading the Past: Literature and History* (2000) provides an interesting point here. Spargo affirms that the past, although it is "real but . . . by definition, irrecoverable in its pastness" (Spargo 1), refers to events prior to the present as they actually occurred whereas history is the discourse about what we know from the past and hence prone to change over time and to be affected by ideologies and biases. The unearthing of submerged histories in the oceans of history attests to the re-analysis and re-interpretation to which the past is subjected in contemporary culture. Postmodern historiography and fiction deal with the exploration of the conflicts and gaps between the past and history. The ocean, as a silent witness to the past, provides a watery archive of lost histories to be imaginatively retrieved.

The 'oceanic turn' aims, as I have already argued, to historicise the ocean as a territory that, "despite the idealization of the industrial capitalist-era ocean as an empty void outside society, [was] intensely used (and hence shaped) by society" (Steinberg, *Social* 125) and not at all unaffected by the forces of modernity. Michael S. Reidy's analysis of tidal research in British colonial history provides a pinpoint exponent of the projection of social control into the ocean. According to Reidy, mid-Victorian scientists carried out effective research into tide prediction and sea-lanes control resulting in the production of tide tables for British colonial territories. In Reidy's view, mid-Victorian scientific control over the ocean, even if it was cartographic, was exploited by Victorian imperial scientists as a vector for projecting power and ultimately securing imperial domination (Reidy 9-10).

Recent conceptualisations of the sea in maritime criticism seek then to rewrite the ocean out of modern constructions of the sea as a *void* space outside society, history and modernity, or in the oft-quoted words of Lewis Carroll, "a perfect and absolute blank" (Carroll 13).[23] Rethinking the sea, which has been traditionally conceived within human geography as an 'other' to land which cannot be populated and where "there can be no domus . . . no monumentalism, no stone memorials to the glory of human achievement" (Connery 688), brings about significant repercussions for the thinking of history itself. Thinking *from* the water, as Anderson and Peter suggest (4, original emphasis), challenges the steadiness of the historiographical archive and its seemingly hermetic national(ist) histories.

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[23]   Lewis Carroll's long epic poem *The Hunting of the Snark* (1876) is repeatedly referred to by social historians and geographers to illustrate the reduction of the ocean to a vacuous or blank space during the nineteenth-century (Anderson and Peters 3). Carroll's fantastical poem, dealing with a crew sailing in search of a fictional sea-creature, was published together with a series of illustrations by Henry Holiday, one of which presents an 'Ocean-Chart' that is, actually, a totally blank space (Steinberg, *Social* 115-116).

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari claimed in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987) that "history is always written from a sedentary point of view and in the name of a unitary State apparatus, at least a possible one, even when the topic is nomads. What is lacking is a Nomadology, the opposite of a history" (Deleuze and Guattari 23). Conversely, the fluctuation of history when unanchored at sea is in tune with what Iain Chambers, following Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1942), has called "history not from a stable point but through a movement in which historians, no longer the source of knowledge, emerge as subjects who can never fully command or comprehend their language" (Chambers, "Maritime" 682-683). History is set adrift when placed on the ocean and this correlates with the fact that maritime history is said to be endowed with autonomous timelines, distinct from ordinary eras in the Western World. The fluidity of timelines at sea disrupts the linearity of time and highlights discrepancies in land-based models of history and periodisation. In this respect, Margaret Cohen identifies the age of global sail to encompass four centuries, starting with the transoceanic voyages by European navigators in the 16th century and reaching the 1840s, which marks the invention of steam transport and the ensuing routinisation of sea travelling (Cohen, "Literary" 659).

In a similar fashion, maritime perspectives compel us to reconsider world history in general and global nineteenth-century history in particular. Michael Geyer and Charles Bright identify two strands of world historiography: one dealing with the study of grand civilisational studies and comparative studies of the history of power and another focused on maritime empires and the history of migration and nomadism (Geyer and Bright 1038-1039). The latter demands we reconsider world history through the lens of maritime diaspora as well as to reconsider national histories by

considering and acknowledging the impact of overseas migrants. Incorporating (sea) migration into world history may equally result, Donna R. Gabaccia and Dirk Hoerder point out, "in a critique of present-day understandings of global migrations and of globalization itself as new, recent and unprecedented" (Gabaccia and Hoerder 6).

Accordingly, this PhD thesis argues that recentring the literary and cultural analysis on the ocean neutralises the vexed question of historical specificity in postcolonial thought by virtue of a continuous negotiation between the local and the global. Local history still matters and the oceanic focus only reveals the global dimension of local cultures as they travel around the globe. Avtah Brah tellingly claims in *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (1996) that "a combination of the local and the global is always an important aspect of diasporic identities" (Brah 195). This combination should have acquired a particular significance for sea migrants in the nineteenth century, when it took months to travel around the seas. The texts under analysis reveal that oceanic diasporas refract the tension between the local and the global via a 'deterritorialization', to use Deleuze and Guattari's term, of culture and identity. In other words, maritime perspectives do not deny nor annihilate the "cultural differences that colonial discourse characteristically homogenises" (Barker, Hulme and Iversen 10) but rather recentres local knowledge and specificities in a global context.

Unquestionably, a great extent of British colonial history is basically oceanic history since the ocean has been a privileged setting of British colonial explorations and imperial conquests. Since the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 and up to 1914, the Royal Navy anchored Great Britain's glorious position as a supreme naval power in western historiography with British military victories in the Crimean War

(1854-56) or the Opium Wars (1839-42 and 1857-60). However the ocean also witnessed the demise of countless slaves in the infamous Middle Passage and, after the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire in 1833, the uprooting and displacement of South-Asian indentured labourers and seamen around the Indian Ocean in the 1830s and onwards.

One of the most influential readings of slavery and its aftermath from an oceanic perspective is Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). Although I delve deeper into Gilroy's work in the next section to deal with the impact of maritime mobility on diasporic identity, it seems relevant to point out now that, in the context of Western history, Gilroy considers slavery to be "deeply embedded in modernity" (Gilroy, *Black* 190). Similarly, the Martinican author Édouard Glissant places the very inception of modernity in the slave trade and the Atlantic. Alluding to the slavers' vicious practice of throwing chained slaves overboard to lighten the cargo whenever slave ships were chased by anti-slavery patrollers, Glissant graphically illustrates the ocean abyss as "marked by . . . balls and chains gone green" (Glissant 6). The sea, in its horizontal perspective, provides a bridge, a passage, an avenue allowing the circulation of peoples and ideas. But on its vertical perspective, the sea marks the contrast between the seabed and the surface, between historical oblivion and historical recognition. The sea bottom, quiet witness to shipwrecks, drowned immigrants, buried artefacts and oceanic debris, provides a liquid metaphor for historical *oblivion and effacement*. In Joanna Rostek's words, "the underwater world . . . is where myriads of African slaves lost their lives and thus a space - a tomb - of the colonised (as opposed to the sea's surface dominated by English ships). It is a storing-place of post/colonial histories that are still hidden but must be, to the extent that is possible, retrieved" (Rostek 280).

Contemporary novels which rewrite the Middle Passage and slavery as well as the Indian labour diaspora literally and metaphorically "reclaim the drowned" (Rostek 252), re-articulating the voices of those oppressed under colonial rule in the British maritime world. In this sense, postcolonial sea fiction posits a challenge both to adventure sea fiction which celebrated maritime expansion and conquer, and to western historiography on the history of the oceans, which has often ignored cross-cultural encounters which characterised the nineteenth-century maritime world and excavations into sea power prior to the hegemony of European empires. Indeed, recent historiography on oceanic history remarks that Eastern countries established a flowing circumnavigation network around the Indian Ocean prior to the emergence of Western naval hegemony. In particular, seamen from Persia, Arabia, India and Sri Lanka were involved in a blooming trade around the Indian Ocean before the 15th century (Connery 687).

In sum, the oceanic turn in postcolonial literature and culture draws attention to the role of the sea in the globalisation and hybridisation of the modern world and it also establishes connections between the nineteenth-century maritime world and broader aspects of transculturation, cosmopolitanism and empire. The colonial past haunts the post-colonial present as sea waves bring the floating debris of modernity ashore.

2.3. Liquid Spaces: Transoceanic Encounters and Diasporic Identities at Sea

The Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has often deployed 'liquid' metaphors in his philosophical insights into postmodernity and late-capitalist globalisation. In the foreword to the 2012 edition of his ground-breaking *Liquid Modernity* (2000), he delineates his vision about the watery character of modernity:

> Forms of modern life may differ in quite a few respects – but what unites them all is precisely their fragility, temporariness, vulnerability and inclination to constant change . . . What was some time ago dubbed (erroneously) 'post-modernity' and what I've chosen to call, more to the point, 'liquid modernity', is the growing conviction that change is the only permanence, and uncertainty the only certainty (Bauman, *Liquid* viii).

Bauman devised the concept of 'liquid modernity' to illustrate the absence of solid structures in the ever-changing modern world. As Mark Davis claims in his analysis of Bauman's philosophy, "as social bonds are liquidated, fragmented and weakened by [the] twin processes of globalisation and individualisation, the experience of social life is also acutely accelerated" (Davis, "Liquid" 2). In the state of flux which characterises modern globalised life, society and identity, just like liquids, do not readily maintain their form but they rather adopt the shape of their temporary containers. Bauman's concept of 'liquid modernity' seems an apt introductory metaphor to lay out the principles of sea crossings and their impact on identity in the nineteenth-century maritime world. After all, our current era of globalisation reverberates through the modern era of maritime migration in the mid-nineteenth century, in which seas served "as a mediator of historical experience shared between disparate places" (Gaynor 54).

In the previous section I already highlighted the ambivalent position of the sea as a conduit and barrier. Nevertheless, oceanic studies typically emphasise the connective (rather than separatory) potential of seas and oceans in the making of histories, cultures and ideas. Indeed, contemporary geography conceives the great oceans of the world – Atlantic, Indian, Pacific, Arctic – as "a single interconnected expanse, one continuous body of salt water that is the defining geographic feature of planet earth" (Tuerk 1). A similar claim is argued by Gabaccia and Hoerder who highlight "four inter-connected bodies of water – the Indian Ocean; the East and

Southeast Seas of Asia; the Atlantic; and the Pacific, all with their adjoining coasts and hinterlands" (Gabaccia and Hoerder 4).

Edward Said claims in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) that nineteenth-century imperialism and colonial discourses rested on "a hierarchy of spaces by which the metropolitan center and, gradually, the metropolitan economy are seen as dependent upon an overseas system of territorial control, economic exploitation, and a socio-cultural vision" (Said, *Culture* 59). This entails that postcolonial insights into Victorian literature and culture typically manifest a reliance on binaries inherited from Said's model of Orientalism. Tabish Khair, for instance, in his analysis of the obscure presence of non-Westerners in under-read Victorian literature, claims that "mainstream English literature gives a rather muted account of this presence of the imperial 'periphery' in the 'centre' of empire all through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (Khair 8).

What position does the ocean fulfil then between the metropolitan 'centre' and its colonial 'peripheries'? What role might the ocean play in the colonial maritime worlds which over-inhabit the neo-Victorian texts under analysis and how do we account for the impact of maritime mobility on the identities of the migrant protagonists? To begin with, the ocean feels like a liminal zone where the centre-periphery dichotomy is blurred. It is no coincidence that

> *maritime regions are understood to be intrinsically unstable* . . . ocean-oriented communities are repeatedly described as civilizations 'without a center' . . . That oceanic histories invert scholarly convention by turning political peripheries into regional cores is a recurrent theme (Wigen 720; original emphasis).

The colonial maritime world has the potential to liquefy national boundaries and parameters linked to the nation and to collapse the asymmetrical attachments

between the metropolitan centre and its colonial peripheries, even if this potential is temporally limited to the aqueous realms in which the maritime crossings take place.

Said's hierarchy of spaces referred to above is set adrift in the ocean and in the maritime world the crossing and transition are privileged over the points of departure or destination. Following Said's assumption that nineteenth-century travel literature was used to "bring the Orient closer to Europe, thereafter to absorb it entirely and – centrally important – to cancel, or at least subdue and reduce, its strangeness and . . . hostility" (Said, *Orientalism* 71), Jason Berger affirms that "maritime texts aid the conceptual mapping of foreign spaces and experiences" (Berger 15). Maritime literature articulates the reader's cognitive mapping of the origin and destination in sea crossings, and the manifold routes between the two.

Considering the construction of the sea as a *void* space outside society during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries referred above, the ocean's midway status between origin and destination turns it into a transitional locus where neither metropolitan nor colonial parameters are fully operative. In practice, the in-betweenness of the nineteenth-century maritime world brought about significant impacts on the identity of non-Western subjects at sea via the temporary effacement of land-locked racial demarcations, as it is illustrated by the Navigation Acts. Enacted by British Parliament in 1651 and in force until their repeal in 1851, the Navigation Acts underpin the fluidity of Britishness when applied to foreign sailors aboard British merchant and naval vessels. Indeed, as Linebaugh and Rediker have claimed, despite the nationalism exhaled from the Navigation Acts and their declaration that English ships must be sailed by English sailors, statistics indicate that many of the sailors on British ships were definitely not English (Linebaugh and Rediker 150).

Alan Gregor Cobley points out that, notwithstanding that originally the Navigation Acts demanded that three-quarters of the sailors in all British ships should be British, the demand for sailors during the American Revolutionary War (1777-1783) and the French Revolutionary Wars (1792-1802) triggered Britain to extend the category of 'Britishness' to black seafarers serving on British ships (Cobley 156). In fact, the Navigation Acts evince a fluid demarcation of British citizenship. Suffice it to mention that, according to the "Act for the further Encouragement of *British* Mariners," enacted on the 11th of June 1794, "foreign seamen serving three years in the navy in time of war may be employed as masters or *British* seamen on certificate of their service" (qtd. in Evans, Hammons and Granger 105; original emphasis) and that any subjects who have become "his Majesty's subjects" by denization or "by virtue of conquest . . . shall be deemed British Seamen" (qtd. in Evans, Hammons and Granger 105).[24] In plain terms, non-Western sailors on British ships were participatory, albeit temporarily, of British citizenship.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, British vessels were peopled by black seafarers, be it through the recruitment of slaves from the West Indies for unmanned ships, through the impressment of African Americans or out of the free will of black sailors (Bolster 103; Cobley 155-156). In the post-emancipation period, free black seafarers were joined by sailors from Asia and other territories around the Indian Ocean, typically named *lascars*. Although the restrictions in the Navigation Acts on the hiring of foreign seamen were presumably in force until the mid-Victorian period,

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[24] 'Denization' is an outdated legal term in English law alluding to the process by which a foreign subject may be considered 'British' with some reservations. A law dictionary published in 1764 states the following under the entry for the word 'Alien': "An alien born may become a subject of *England* two ways, by *denization* and by *naturalization*; denization is by the King's letters patent, which receive him into the society as a new man, and make him capable to purchase, and to transmit land by descent; but it doth not make him inheritable to any other relation" (Cunningham, no pages; original emphasis).

according to David A. Chappell demographic research estimates that the British merchant service recruited around 12,000 lascars native from India, Malaysia, China or Arabia and by the 1840s three thousand Indian seamen arrived in England every year out of English vessels (Chappell 79-81).

Placing the focus on the ocean unequivocally unfolds the cross-culturality and hybridity typifying the first wave of globalisation which reached a momentum point in the mid-nineteenth century. Gabaccia and Hoerder mark the years spanning between 1830 and 1940 as the first great age of global migration and the creation of the first global migration networks (Gabaccia and Hoerder 5), an assumption similarly supported by Adam McKeown, who identifies the global wave of transoceanic mass migration to reach between 1840s and 1930s (McKeown 42). These recent insights into oceanic global migration, which overstep nationalist perspectives in favour of transnational and transcultural approaches embedded in the trope of maritime diaspora, are no doubt inspired by Paul Gilroy's ground-breaking work *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993). Drawing on a reading of past and present black intellectuals and personalities such as Frederick Douglass, Toni Morrison, Martin Delaney, William Wells Brown or Alexander Crummell, Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* provides a critique of Eurocentric modernity which argues for a memory of the Atlantic shared between Africa, Europe and the Americas, challenging the notion of the West as an ethnically uniform category.

Gilroy conceptualises the Atlantic Ocean as a "single, complex unit of analysis" (Gilroy, *Black* 17) where the hybrid, fractal and transcultural circulation of subjects and ideas across the Atlantic ocean as a reverberation of the slave trade unearths black subjects as historical agents with an intellectual history (Gilroy, *Black* 4-6).

Additionally, Gilroy's cultural refocusing towards the ocean reveals the Atlantic experience of modernity as a transnational and multicultural phenomenon which surpasses ethnic boundaries and, most importantly, national and geographical frontiers. Indeed, Gilroy's vision on oceanic diasporas, in tune with world-history perspectives which I outlined in the previous section, distorts the hermeticism and homogeneity of national histories and celebrates pluriorigins, multidirectional crossings and hybrid identities, stressing "the incompatibility of the Atlantic as a cultural unit with the academic logic of viewing history in nationalist terms" (Klein and Mackenthun 5).

Paul Gilroy's devising of the Black Atlantic and its stress on watery networks between continents, peoples and cultures have inspired postcolonial writers, historians and diasporic collectives in non-Atlantic maritime areas to shed light on their transoceanic experiences. In this sense, McKeown has identified a growing *Atlanto-centrism* in contemporary social analyses of migration and world history. He points out a "world historical narrative in which processes that began in Western Europe gradually expand to engulf the world. In terms of migration, this narrative is grounded in a shared ignorance of migrations beyond the Atlantic" (McKeown 57). In a similar fashion, Geyer and Bright highlight the focalisation of world history in the European-Atlantic core and the necessity of integrating East Asian politics in the narration of the world's past (Geyer and Bright 1043).

Notwithstanding that Atlantic studies are becoming increasingly normative, Gilroy's Black Atlantic indeed provides a template to think, literally or metaphorically, on transoceanic experiences beyond the nation and their impact on diasporic identity, compelling us to advocate 'routes over roots' (Gilroy, *Black* 133), the transit over the

origin or destination. This refocusing significantly complicates centre/periphery views which typically inform postcolonial analyses of literature.[25] This thesis seeks therefore to retake Gilroy's transnational model of the Black Atlantic to move around and *beyond* the Atlantic in the context of (neo)Victorian waterworlds and their oceanic routes.

We have discussed so far crucial aspects of the impact of maritime mobility on diasporic subjects, namely the fluidity of land-locked parameters, national frontiers and racial demarcations. Also noticeable and worth exploring are the effects that oceanic travelling exert on sea migrants' psyche, particularly upon their perception of time and space. Anna Ryan's *Where Land Meets Sea: Coastal Explorations of Landscape, Representation and Spatial Experience* (2012) has recently provided an interdisciplinary vision on the relationship between subjects and their surroundings. Drawing on a considerable array of philosophical theories, including those of Maurice Merleau-Ponty or Gilles Deleuze, as well as on reports from travellers journeying through deserts and oceans, Ryan showcases the oceanic experience as one typifying human embodiment and as the quintessential confrontation between the self and the elementals.[26]

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[25]   Despite the lasting influence of Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* in literary and cultural studies, some limitations have been attributed to Gilroy's work which Véronique Bragard sums up in what follows: "It ignores the experience of women; it homogenizes and masculinises the definition of trans-oceanic voyaging; it disregards the specificities of class and regions, it does not take into account the ways in which nation states continue to patrol watered borders" (Bragard 68). An additional limitation ascribed to Gilroy's work is his insufficient acknowledgement of Caribbean or South American contributions to his transatlantic model (Goebel and Schabio 4).

[26]   Ryan rounds up her interdisciplinary research into spatiality and cultural geography by analysing sixty-two participants' reports about their experiences of the Irish coast in the form of interviews, photographs and drawings (Ryan 181-216).

Ryan's *Where Land Meets Sea* conceives the sea as an iterative space endowed with "an endless physical materiality" (Ryan 2), analogous to sky, desert, snow or ice, which enacts a disruption of time perception during the sea crossing:

> Distance is imploded: it is impossible to gauge the movement of [the] body marked against the passing physical environment. As a consequence of this non-measurability of movement, time is no longer functional. The cyclical rhythm of time is blurred by the singularity and on-going nature of the surroundings . . . physical movement forward [is] imperceptible in these places, any feeling of the passage of time is also not noticeable (Ryan 2).

The sea as an iterative, repetitive and incomplete space gives rise to an alternative time-space perception in which the linearity of time is obliterated and the subject experiences "an intensity of awareness of the present" (Ryan 2).[27] This particular temporality in sea crossings allows for a metaphorical reading of time and memory as cyclical and dynamic. Similar in spirit is Marina Warner's *Indigo, or, Mapping the Waters* (1992), a Caribbean retelling of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611) in which the sea works as a metaphor for the fluidity of time and memories:

> [Islanders] did not know time as a straight line that can be interrupted, even broken, as the people did who were arriving in their archipelago, the slaves from Africa, the adventurers from Europe . . . they did not possess a past, for they did not see themselves poised on a journey towards triumph, perhaps, or extinction . . .The indigenous islanders could conceive differently of the time and space they occupied, and see it as a churn or a bowl, in which substances and essences were tumbled and mixed, always returning, now emerging into personal form, now submerged into the mass (Warner 121-122).

Warner's island protagonists, in opposition to the British invaders, conceive time in a non-chronological way in which past events and memories evoke the ebb and flow of the ocean, intermittently rising to the surface (and the characters' conscience) to be submerged again into oblivion. This cyclical conception of memory purposefully

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[27]   Against the constant motion of the waves, stars generally outstand in sea narratives as "the only fixed references for the travelers" (Bragard 79), enabling somehow their cognitive self-mapping. Ocean navigators equally relied on the stars, the sun and heavenly bodies in general to chart their ongoing voyages until the invention of the magnetic compass in the 12th century (Coote 269-275).

evokes the historiographical reconstruction of drowned histories which come back with post-colonial tides.

Admittedly, from a postcolonial viewpoint, this oceanic formulation of time characterised by a cyclical and dynamic nature symbolically elicits the postcolonial mistrust on the linearity of time in the Western historiographical archive and discloses its dynamic potential for political regeneration and change. Significantly, Anne McClintock sees linearity as "one of the most tenacious tropes of colonialism" (McClintock "Angel" 253). She argues that

> in colonial discourse . . . space is time, and history is shaped around two, necessary movements: the 'progress' forward of humanity from slouching deprivation to erect, enlightened reason. The other movement presents the reverse: regression backwards from (white, male) adulthood to a primordial, black 'degeneracy' usually incarnated in women (McClintock, "Angel" 253).

Contrarily, postcolonial authors such as Salman Rushdie are reclaiming, in opposition to Western narratorial modes, the traditional oral narrative which is generally not linear or chronological but "it goes in great swoops, it goes in spirals or in loops, it every so often reiterates something that happened earlier to remind you, and then takes you off again" (Rushdie, "Midnight" 7). Ultimately, the obliteration of the linearity of time in oceanic terms, aligned to the perpetual flux of the sea, is a powerful liquid metaphor for diasporic identity itself, which is constantly transforming itself anew.

2.4. The Ship, or Maritime Heterotopias

In his foreword to Jon Anderson and Kimberley Peters' edited volume *Water Worlds: Human Geographies of the Ocean* (2014), Philip E. Steinberg highlights that human-ocean encounters are always interfered

> whether by ships, scuba tanks, surfboards, or bodily movements, as well as, less physically, by stories, memories, sea shanties, fears, or dreams, our

encounters with the sea are never 'pure'. There is always an outer layer between us and the sea that keeps us – and our experiences and thoughts – afloat" (Steinberg, "Foreword" xv).

The voluble materiality of the ocean and our ensuing inability to fully grasp it or inhabit it have encouraged humans to devise mediators which facilitate human experiences of the ocean. Among these mediators, the ship is by far the most privileged locus in human-ocean relations. A symbol of transport technology and the epitome of modern-capitalist circulation and exchange, ships are fully invested with conflicting meanings in Western culture, symbolising global connectivity, freedom and exploration but also forced migration, uprootedness and slavery.

Literary conceptions of the ship in European culture have been saturated by the "tension between the fluidity of the sea and the hydrarchy of the ship" (DeLoughrey, "Heavy" 708).[28] Indeed, the spatial self-containment of the ship in the immensity of the sea has articulated literary representations of ship-board communities as analogous to life on land. Anthony Trollope's novel *John Caldigate* (1879) illustrates this parallelism between living on board and life ashore. The eponymous protagonist, who is sea-travelling to Australia to make a fortune after being disinherited by his father, comments on his impressions on life on board: "How completely the society has formed itself into separate sets after the three or four first days! How thoroughly it is acknowledged that this is the aristocratic set, and that the plebeian! How determined are the aristocrats to admit no intrusion, and how anxious are the plebeians to intrude!" (Trollope 31). Trollope's description of shipboard life features

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[28]   Coined by the 17th century English philosopher Richard Braithwaite, the term 'hydrarchy' may allude to the ancestral command of water by human beings or, in its most modern sense, to the organisation of shipspace. Elizabeth M. Deloughrey is surely implementing the term to refer to the internal organisation and governance of a ship and its maritime community.

the ship as a microcosm where, via an enclosed rendition of land-locked life, the writer is actually speculating on domestic concerns on a different location.[29]

When placed against colonial history, the ship nevertheless acquires a more problematic dimension which exceeds the allegorical equation ship-society. The ship in colonial history navigates the dark corners of the Western imagination invoking the image of the slaver and the harrowing conditions of the slave trade as well as later coerced migrations. Contemporary rewritings of the Middle Passage by novelists of African or Caribbean origin, such as Fred D'Aguiar's *Feeding the Ghosts* (1997), Charles Johnson's *Middle Passage* (1990), or Caryl Phillips's *Cambridge* (1991) retrieve the oceanic memory of the Transatlantic slave trade to reveal the slaver as a shameful symbol of Western modernity, which overshadows Britain's naval history in the age of sail and its celebratory overtones. When the abolitionist movement gathered momentum in the late 18th century and slavery was finally abolished in 1833 throughout the British Empire,[30] the machinery of colonialism kept coercing individuals to migrate across oceans. In particular, after the abolition of slavery the British Empire shielded its economic interests by means of the Apprenticeship system and later by indentureship, whose labourers' lives, as I discuss in chapter 5, point towards a new system of slavery (Ramdin 49-52). The forceful displacement of

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[29]   According to John Peck's analysis of the novel, Trollope's humorous comment on lower classes trying to break their way up to the upper-class areas of the ship veils deep domestic concerns about working-class threats on the established social order (Peck 141). This interpretation endorses the idea that the locality of the ship is prototypically and occasionally appropriated as second-self to landed society.

[30]   Imperial historians have identified economic reasons underlying the abolition of slavery which problematise the humanitarian role of British abolitionism: "Although in the eighteenth century West Indian sugar was a one-way ticket to economic prosperity, it was fighting a losing battle against foreign competition by the early years of the nineteenth century. Many British sugar producers were losing money in the years which led up to abolition. The compensation offered by the British government gave the slave owners an easy was to escape from what was already looking like a bleak economic future" (McDonough 17). I provide a reading of Victorian (female) abolitionism as illustrated in Belinda Starling's neo-Victorian novel *The Journal of Dora Damage* (2007) in Martín-González (192-196).

indentured labourers from India (pejoratively known as 'coolies') to British colonial plantations in the Caribbean, South Africa or Mauritius since the 1830s and the ensuing diaspora which developed out of those early-Victorian migrations have been illustrated by Véronique Bragard under the label 'Indo-Black Atlantic' (Bragard 21, 59).

In *The Black Atlantic* and his analysis of modernity and slavery, Paul Gilroy often invokes the image of the ship as a crucial chronotope in his Black Atlantic model. The circulation of ships around the Atlantic, criss-crossing the ocean between Europe, Africa and the Americas, turns the ship into "a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion" that turns our "attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts" (Gilroy, *Black* 4). Gilroy acknowledges the conflicting uses and constructions of the transatlantic vessel, for although ships "refer us back to the middle passage, to the half-remembered micro-politics of the slave trade and its relationship to both industrialisation and modernisation," they also illustrate "a means to conduct political dissent and possibly a distinct mode of cultural production" (Gilroy, *Black* 17). Accordingly, in its transatlantic context the ship not only refocuses slavery as an unacknowledged component of Western modernity but it also potentially and subversively turns our attention to alternative Pan-African modernities.

Together with slavery, uprootedness and coercive migration, the history of the ship in the context of Victorian imperialism dovetails with tales of exploration, commerce and science. As I have already argued, ships were – and still are – crucial in the development of global commerce, labour and capitalism and the chief engine

facilitating the activities of trading companies. By the second half of the seventeenth century, Linebaugh and Rediker claim, the ship was a site for the exploitation of human labour which encapsulated all modes of production "in the sphere of circulation" (Linebaugh and Rediker, *Many-Headed* 149). They further claim that the ship "was thus not only the means of communication between continents, but also the first place where working people from those different continents communicated" (Linebaugh and Rediker, *Many-Headed* 152).

The rise of global commerce and capitalism in the seventeenth century coincides, not surprisingly, with the development of the East India Company. Founded in 1600, the East India Company is exemplary of the pivotal role that ships played in trading companies. Miles Ogborn, for instance, in his analysis of the East India Company in early-17th century global geographies, has suggested a three-fold understanding of the ship as "as a material space, as an accounting space and as a political space" (Ogborn 161). Susheila Nasta, significantly, reads the East India Company's early maritime travels as the outset of Britain's contemporary black and Asian diasporic populations (Nasta 3), which persuades us to trace the seeds of British multiculturalism on the ships of the East India Company.

In their review of the ship within the field of human geography, William Hasty and Kimberley Peters additionally underline the ship as a "scientific instrument" of cardinal importance for the production of knowledge (Hasty and Peters 661).[31] Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries ships aided scientists to chart the globe and the physical world and contributed significantly to the rise of natural

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[31] The construction of the ship as a scientific instrument is still relevant today, as ships are deployed as 'floating laboratories' to research the effects of climate change, the biodiversity of oceans or the underwater deposits of oil and gas, among other purposes (Hasty and Peters 662)

sciences. An emblematic exponent of the contribution of ships to nineteenth-century science is the second expedition of the *HMS Beagle*, in which Charles Darwin, together with other naturalists, circumnavigated around the globe researching about the natural history and geology of South America and Oceania. Darwin's report about his five-year circumnavigation aboard the *Beagle* provided, in the guise of journal entries, detailed sketches and observations on the flora, fauna and geology from the manifold locations charted during the voyage.[32] Darwin's observations on the expedition around the Falkland islands and the mouth of Santa Cruz in April 1834 are markedly tainted with an imperialistic discourse and the thrill of sailing through uncharted territories populated with foreign 'aliens':

> Beyond the place where we slept last night, the country is completely *terra incognita*, for it was there that Captain Stokes [captain of the 1st voyage of the *Beagle*] turned back. We saw in the distance a great smoke, and found the skeleton of a horse, so we knew that Indians were in the neighbourhood" (Darwin, *Voyage* 292, original emphasis).[33]

Ships were therefore the chief vector contributing to mythologise nineteenth-century explorers as national heroes, procurers of imperial knowledge and vehicles of civilisation and progress in the Western imagination.

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[32]   Darwin's account of the voyage, published in present-day editions as *The Voyage of the Beagle*, was published under the title *Journal and Remarks, 1832-1835* (1839). He published an extended second edition in 1845, entitled *Journal of Researches into the Natural History and Geology of the Countries Visited during the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle round the World* and significantly dedicated to Charles Lyell, author of *Principles of Geology* (1832) and, as Darwin himself acknowledged, an obvious antecedent of his evolutionary theories (Darwin, *Journal*, dedication; Darwin, *Correspondence* 55).

[33]   Barbara Korte has learnedly identified a series of strategies in Victorian travel writing to sustain the British imperialistic project which are identifiable in Darwin's report on the voyage of the *Beagle*. Korte argues that Victorian travel narratives typically evade the portrayal of interpersonal contact between the European and the indigenous inhabitant, the latter being significantly 'silenced' in the narration (Korte 188). She further argues that the description of the native population is totally split off from geographical and topographical sketches – the colonial land seems, then, unpopulated – and the stress on "landscape aesthetics is used to veil the ambition to conquer the land" (Korte 92-93).

The early Victorian era was marked by a crucial event in the history of shipping which altered significantly cultural responses to the sea: the invention of the steamship. A natural product of late-18th century river steamboats, ocean-going steamships navigated the seas at the opening of the nineteenth century and started to replace sailing vessels in the 1830s and 1840s. The sail-steam transition in those decades modulated significantly the 'sublimation' of the sea referred above. As steam-propelled ships cut their way through the waves, sea travelling was no longer perceived as a dangerous confrontation between man and nature. This transition, termed by Margaret Cohen as the "routinization of sea travel" (Cohen, "Literary" 659), contributed , coupled with the absence of further terra incognita to be explored in the mid-19th century, to an attenuation of the mythologising effects of oceanic travelling in the European imagination.[34]

Two references illuminating Victorian cultural responses to the rise of the steamship seem suitable here. The Romantic painter J.M.W Turner, celebrated for his seascapes and his pictorial depiction of light, notably illustrated the sail-steam transition in the early Victorian age in his oil painting *The Fighting Temeraire* (1839).[35] The painting features the *HMS Temeraire*, one of the most outstanding fighting ships during the Battle of Trafalgar under Lord Nelson's leadership, being towed up the Thames by a paddle-wheel steam tug on 6 September 1838 to be demolished (Stein 168). As the outline of the warship looks blurred against the blazing dusk, the dark tugboat and its ominous column of smoke stand out in the

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[34]   Barbara Korte claims that by the mid-Victorian period, "once Europe had 'discovered' Australia, there were no more continents to be found" (Korte 87).

[35]   Its full title is *The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last berth to be broken up, 1838* (1839). Turner is also famous for his renowned *Slave Ship* (*Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On* (1840), in Gilroy's view, an "invocation of racial terror, commerce, and England's ethico-political degeneration" (Gilroy, *Black* 16). See Plates 1 and 2 in the Appendix.

scene, symbolising the demise of the age of sail and the intrusion of steamshipping in Victorian maritime culture.[36] Similar in spirit in Joseph Conrad's "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'" (1897), a late-Victorian novella set in the Indian Ocean. At the beginning of the narration, the eponymous merchant vessel is being towed out of the Bombay Harbour into the sea. Conrad's description of the steam tug reads as follows:

> The tug turned short round and went away towards land. Twenty-six pairs of eyes watched her low broad stern crawling languidly over the beating water with fierce hurry. She resembled an enormous and aquatic black beetle, surprised by the light, overwhelmed by the sunshine . . . she left a lingering smudge of smoke on the sky, and two vanishing trails of foam on the water. On the place where she had stopped a round black patch of soot remained undulating on the swell — an unclean mark of the creature's rest (Conrad, "Nigger" 24).

Conrad's depiction of the tug in zoomorphic terms and the grimy trail left by the engine unveil the author's regressive views on steamshipping, signalling that a nostalgia for the age of sail still predated naval authors in the late-Victorian era. As Jonathan Raban points out, "in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature . . . the sea still belongs to sail. The ship moves in nature, propelled by the natural force of the wind. When steam engines, turbines, and diesels show up, they are there for special purposes, as intruders on a world over which the sailing ship rightfully reigns" (Raban 17).

The rise of steamshipping in the first half of the nineteenth century additionally broaches a point I raised above which is of major importance in this thesis: the multi-ethnic composition of ship crews. Historians such as Alan Gregor Cobley have recorded a parallelism between the rise of steamshipping and the growing number of non-British sailors serving on British ships. As the new steamships demanded less

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[36]   Significantly, a strand of contemporary naval fiction, including authors such as Alexander Kent or Patrick O'Brian, focuses on the Royal Navy and the years around the Napoleonic Wars, just before the age of sail faded with the arrival of steamships.

sailors skilled in rigging and sailing, Cobley reports, they required more unqualified sailors to feed and stoke the furnaces (Cobley 158). The growing mechanisation of ships in the first half of the nineteenth-century, together with the lax enforcement and final repeal of the Navigation Acts in 1851 as explained above, facilitated the increasing hybridisation of nineteenth-century ship crews.

The hybridity of ship crews resulted in non-white sailors finding that "the hardships and dangers they shared with white colleagues at sea helped to promote an atmosphere of nonracial egalitarianism and mutual respect unknown ashore" (Cobley 156), a camaraderie which, according to Pedro L. V. Welch, could have infiltrated onto littoral cities and further inland (Welch 92). In his report of nineteenth-century American whaling and the sinking of the Nantucket whaleship *Essex*,[37] Nathaniel Philbrick is more specific about the equality and transcultural solidarity between white and black sailors. Even if black seamen should have faced discrimination from their peers on board or from littoral collectives, Philbrick argues, "they were assured of being paid no less that a white person with the same qualifications . . . in a tight spot, a captain didn't care if a seaman was white or black; he just wanted to know he could count on the man to complete his appointed task" (Philbrick 26). Additionally, American black sailors were often appealed to on religious grounds, particularly in times of peril, and asked to pray on the crew's behalf, as white sailors looked up to black evangelical worshipping (Philbrick 132).

In light of this, this PhD thesis seeks to read the ship as a materialisation of Bhabha's Third Space in which hybridity is shaped as a surrogate social order.

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[37] The whale-ship *Essex* that set sail from the small island of Nantucket (next to the coast of New England) was sunk by a sperm whale in the Pacific Ocean in 1821. It is an event widely known in American maritime culture today and it allegedly inspired Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851).

Considering the ship as Third Space adds a spatial dimension to Bhabha's concept of that interstitial location which generates hybridity and post-colonial identities. From a critical point of view, shipspace becomes therefore a "mini-state where such questions about the moral condition of society can be studied in a microcosm" and "the gap between the regime of the ship and the management of shore-based life is a reflection of competing impulses in social thinking" (Peck, *Maritime* 5). The ship, as represented in the neo-Victorian novels under analysis, emerges as a chronotope, to use Mikhail Bakhtin's term, where the racial politics of land-based Victorian culture are played out, encapsulated and problematised, condensing "all the contradictions of social antagonism . . . in its timbers" (Linebaugh and Rediker 152). For these ends, I pursue a two-fold and complementary critical appraisal of the ship: ship as *heterotopia* and ship as *contact zone*.

Firstly, I draw upon an understanding of the ship that is indebted to Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia. Originally an anatomical term, Foucault's own delineation of the term as applied to the social sciences is generally sketchy and was initially and briefly devised as a linguistic concept.[38] I actually call on the French philosopher's less ambiguous account of the term in his posthumous essay "Of other Spaces" (1986). In it, Foucault defines heterotopias as

> places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society . . .
> which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in
> which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the

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[38] In his preface to *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966), Michel Foucault first developed his concept of heterotopia out of his analysis of Jorge Luis Borges's essay "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins" (1942). Foucault delves into Borges's "certain Chinese encyclopedia" and its bizarre animal taxonomy (Borges 103) to reflect on the arbitrariness of the linguistic categorisation and ordering of the world and describe heterotopias as "disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance . . . heterotopias . . . desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source" (Foucault, *Order* xix).

culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted (Foucault, "Other" 24).

In light of Foucault's cursory definition of the term, we might initially consider heterotopias as self-enclosed socio-cultural locations that simultaneously mirror and contest the world outside, "a social or cultural space that is both in place and out of place" (Johnson, "Geographies" 797).

Among the manifold and conflicting readings of Foucault's heterotopia in a variety of disciplines, the sociologist Kevin Hetherington has provided a clarificatory interpretation of the term. He defines heterotopias as "*spaces of alternate ordering* [that] organize a bit of the social world in a way different to that which surrounds them. That *alternate ordering* marks them out as *Other* and allows them to be seen as an example of an alternative way of doing things" (Hetherington viii; my emphasis). Hetherington anchors his understanding of Foucault's heterotopia around the notion of social order and therefore heterotopias emerge as social spaces where things occur in a surrogate way to that of outer society.

Because of the term's marked relation to otherness, alterity and non-hegemony, heterotopias have been frequently read as spaces for transgression and resistance, in a similar fashion to Bhabha's Third Space. Nevertheless, as Teresa Davis argues, "while Bhabha's Third Space is explicitly defined as a space from where resistance and subversion are born, especially in relation to cultural dominance, Foucault's heterotopias are not explicitly such sites of resistance" (Davis, "Third" 663). Davis seems right is establishing this contrast between heterotopia and Third Space, given that, as it transpires from Foucault's work, heterotopias are not wholly detached from the hegemonic structures of social order, but seem to articulate a challenge from within those very structures.

Even so, sociologists and theorists of social space such as Henri Lefebvre or Edward W. Soja have facilitated readings of heterotopia as spaces of transgression. In *The Production of Space* (1991) Lefebvre argues that "[spatial] differences endure or arise on the margins of the homogenized realm, either in the form of resistances or in the form of externalities (lateral, heterotopical, heterological)" (Lefebvre 373). Following Lefebvre, Edward W. Soja similarly develops his theory of Thirdspace in parallel to Foucault's heterotopia, arguing that it is an "intentional *ambiguity* that keeps Thirdspace open and inclusive rather than confined and securely bounded by authoritative protocols" (Soja 162; my emphasis).[39] Accordingly, if heterotopias are *spaces of alternate ordering*, as Hetherington understands them, which facilitate resistance, ambiguity and marginality, they should be seen at least as conterminous to Bhabha's Third Space of enunciation.

Contrary to utopias, which have no real place, heterotopias are indeed localisable and Foucault cites examples such as the prison, the boarding school, the cemetery, the museum or travelling fairs. Nevertheless, for Foucault "the ship is the heterotopia *par excellence*" (Foucault "Other" 27; original emphasis). "Linked . . . to time in its most fleeting, transitory, precarious aspect," Foucault argues, the ship "is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea" (Foucault "Other" 26, 27).

In light of Foucault's words, the ship as heterotopia facilitates a distinct linearity of time, unveiling the "epistemological limits in recording the immensity of ocean

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[39]   Soja unhooks his markedly spatial category Thirdspace from that of Bhabha's Third Space, which he describes as "occasionally teasingly on the edge of being a spatially ungrounded literary trope, a floating metaphor for a critical *historical* consciousness that inadvertently masks a continued privileging of temporality over spatiality" (Soja 141-142; original emphasis).

history, which paradoxically, is depicted in the condensed chronotope of [the] ship" (Deloughrey, "Heavy" 704). Such 'fleeting' character of time aboard the vessel amid the immensity of the sea can be illustrated in the following excerpt from Joseph Conrad's "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'": "the smiling greatness of the sea dwarfed the extent of time. The days raced after one another, brilliant and quick like the flashes of a lighthouse, and the nights, eventful and short, resembled fleeting dreams" (Conrad, "Nigger" 26). The ship as heterotopia features then as a spatio-temporal locus where the temporalities of either origin or destination are provisionally disrupted.

The adjoining boundaries between heterotopia and Third Space aforementioned can equally be recorded in the context of the shipspace during the nineteenth century. As I argued earlier, the markedly multicultural character of seafaring crews in the nineteenth century allows for a reading of shipspace as Third Space, that is, as a spot facilitating the hybridity of identity which challenged Victorian essentialist conceptions of culture. Nevertheless, it would be naive to ignore the fact that ships were above all an instrument of vital importance for the political, economic, and scientific development of European powers. This entails that ships were conceived as a natural extension of imperial domination and were therefore linked to land-locked protocols of social control. Hence that in his maritime memoir *Two Years before the Mast* (1840), Richard Henry Dana Jr. noted the lack of agency and resistance for sailors in the Anglo-American maritime world: "What is there for sailors to do? If they resist, it is mutiny; and if they succeed, and take the vessel, it is piracy. If they every yield again, their punishment must come . . . if a sailor resists his commander, he resists the law, and piracy or submission in his only alternative" (Dana 114).

Richard Henry Dana's personal account is corroborated by social historians such as Jann M. Witt, who relies on memoirs of seamen, codices of maritime legislation and records of maritime court trials to reveal the asymmetrical relations between captain and sailors. Although the captain did not have judicial power nor could put a sailor on trial on board, Witt illustrates the captain in the nineteenth-century maritime world as a "master next to God," which meant that "seamen did not have the right to resign before the end of the voyage, or the expiration of the contract. Except in certain cases, such as shipwreck or the sale of the ship, only if the captain agreed could a seamen could [sic] leave the ship before the contract expired" (Witt 239-240). This entails that desertion was the only way to escape harsh treatment of a ruthless captain or unfair working conditions. In parallel to the contrast between heterotopia and Third Space, my literary-cultural reading of the ship will therefore lie upon this tension between control and rebellion, hegemony and resistance.

To close this section, I pursue a secondary and complementary critical reading of the ship that is indebted to Mary Louise Pratt's concept of *contact zone*. Initially introduced in the keynote article "Arts of the Contact Zone" (1991) and further developed in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992), the concept borrows from the linguistic notion of 'contact language' to theorise on the geographical loci of colonial encounters. Pratt uses the term 'contact zone' to refer "the space of imperial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (Pratt, *Imperial* 8). Therefore Bhabha's Third Space, itself a dialogical

category of enunciation and hybridity, presupposes a physical, cultural or linguistic association that is encapsulated in the spatial category of 'contact zone.'

Within the versatile application of the term deployed by Mary Louise Pratt in her literary and cultural analysis of imperialism, she points out two effects or phenomena arising out of contact zones. Firstly, she borrows the term *transculturation*

> to describe how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture. While subjugated peoples cannot readily control what the dominant culture visits upon them, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, how they use it, and what they make it mean (Pratt, *Imperial* 7).

As Pratt acknowledges, the term 'transculturation' was coined by the Cuban anthropologist and sociologist Fernando Ortiz in the 1940s to replace the terms 'acculturation' and 'deculturation' in his analysis of Afro-Cuban culture (Pratt, *Imperial* 244-245). From a transcultural perspective, the relations between the imperial metropolis and peripheral cultures are no longer seen as a one-way transference that serves the interests of the former. Rather, transculturation is a dynamic and reciprocal process in which subordinated groups creatively adapt and transform the culture and material transmitted to them by dominant or metropolitan groups.

The second phenomenon arising in contact zones, and largely a product of their transcultural character, is *autoethnography*. By autoethnographic expressions, Pratt refers to "instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer's terms" (Pratt, *Imperial* 9, original emphasis). Differing from native forms of self-representation, autoethnography alludes to "texts the others construct in response to or in dialogue with . . . metropolitan representations" and involve "partly collaborating with and appropriating the idioms of the conqueror" (Pratt, *Imperial* 9). These forms of self-representation, Low and

Wolfreys argue, divest imperial ethnography "of its disciplinary claims to truth and knowledge" and become "fully cognizant of its subjective origins" (Low and Wolfreys 209).

In light of the aforesaid, and given the multicultural character of ship communities illustrated above, the ship as contact zone fits Pratt's definition of her spatial category as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – such as colonialism and slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (Pratt, *Imperial* 7). The ship as contact zone therefore dismantles the opposition between centre and periphery, a dichotomy that, according to Caroline Reitz, became part of "a Victorian self-fashioning," which disavowed "the manifold interdependencies between" the metropolitan centre and colonial periphery (Reitz xvii) and is in keeping with postcolonial theorists' insistence on the fact that the colonial periphery informs the metropolitan kernel. As I will illustrate in the analysis of the primary works, the ship as contact zone equally compels us to reimagine life on board as the very genesis of hybridity and transnationalism. The chronotope of the ship, as a mobile contact zone, foregrounds the apparent lack of collectivity of sea people and the elusion of their ethnic identity or historical origin as founded on place (Gaynor 63-64) to reveal the transcultural and composite character of their identity. The ship, therefore, emerges not only as a geographical location but as a trope of "historical presence/absence" (Bragard 75).

3. The Victorians on the Globe: Postcolonial Neo-Victorianism and the Neo-Victorian Maritime Novel in the 21st Century

This chapter provides a critical account of neo-Victorianism and its most relevant debates and contexts in relation to the transoceanic scope of this PhD thesis. Section 3.1 provides an overview of the neo-Victorian novel from its earliest manifestations to its late development in the twenty-first century. Firstly I delve into the origins of the neo-Victorian novel and trace its development in relation to the postmodern paradigm and the different terminology that has been deployed to make sense of the genre. Then I situate my discussion of neo-Victorianism in wider debates on historiography, the rewriting of the past and the arguable exhaustion of postmodernism, providing instances of key texts in the genre. In section 3.2 I turn my attention to one of the most significant strands of the neo-Victorian novel, that of postcolonial neo-Victorianism. This section sets off from the idea that the lasting trauma of Victorian imperialism has naturally spun off a variety of neo-Victorian responses that are endowed with a political revisionist drive. The section firstly provides an overview of racial – and racist – discourse in the Victorian Age, briefly discussing key texts, thinkers and ideas from the era. I then proceed to analyse neo-Victorian responses to the post-colonial legacy of Victorianism, drawing intersections with post-colonial thought and discussing representative texts in the genre. Finally, in section 3.3 I reorient my discussion of the neo-Victorian novel towards the sea and the globe. Firstly, the section discusses one of the latest debates in neo-Victorian criticism, namely that of the genre's position within non-Western and global contexts. Among other claims, I argue that the neo-Victorian maritime novel can potentially neutralise the homogenising drives of global neo-Victorianism as long as the genre is engaged with deconstructing the material legacy of Victorian imperialism. Then, I provide a

brief discussion of the role of the sea in Victorian culture and literature, providing instances of Victorian sea narratives. Finally, the section moves to analyse the neo-Victorian maritime novel. Setting off from Elizabeth Ho's 'neo-Victorian-at-sea' – to date, the only contribution to neo-Victorian criticism from a maritime perspective –, I illustrate the contours that this neo-Victorian subgenre has been adopting, briefly analysing key texts and situating the inquiry in critical debates on globalisation and cosmopolitanism.

3.1. The Neo-Victorian Novel: Definitions, Contexts and Criticism

Neo-Victorianism is a cultural and aesthetic movement which rewrites and re-analyses the Victorian era from contemporary points of view. A phenomenon encompassing disparate fields such as literature, fashion or architecture, neo-Victorianism has become the dominant cultural form to mediate the reception of the Victorians in contemporary culture and its development evinces the complexities of the Victorian Age and what it has represented to different generations through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

From a strictly chronological viewpoint, the term 'Victorian' refers to the period between Queen Victoria's ascension to the British throne in 1837 and her death in 1901, despite the fact that the features, cultural reach and aesthetics of what we perceive today as 'Victorian' may extend beyond the reign of the British monarch into the 'long nineteenth-century,' with some scholars opting instead for marking the inauguration of the period in 1832 with the death of Walter Scott and the passing of Reform Bill.[40] However, the uniformity prototypically associated with the term 'Victorian' has come under sharp scrutiny:

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[40]   This explains, Louisa Hadley argues, that insights on heritage films and adaptations of Jane Austen and E.M. Foster are often integrated within discussions of Victorian culture (Hadley 11).

> There is a strong case for arguing that, except in the most rigorously controlled of contexts, 'Victorian' and 'Victorianism' are terms we could well do without. They are all too frequently employed in ways that are chronologically indefensible, historically dubious, intellectually confusing, and ideologically unacceptable . . . 'Victorian' in particular is used to imply a cultural and political homogeneity which . . . never existed (Lucas 29)

The untenability of a political and cultural homogeneity of what we call 'Victorian Age', "which owes the illusion of its spiritual unity to the longevity of a single person" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 3), is indicative of the fact that, since the death of Queen Victoria in 1901, the term 'Victorian' has been very much contested and debated to articulate disparate responses to the nineteenth century. Andrea Kirchknopf cites the Edwardians' rejection of Victorian values as the earliest connotative use of the term 'Victorian' (Kirchknopf, "(Re)workings" 56), a rejection that was accentuated during the Modernist period after the First World War.[41] Modernist endeavours to 'othering' Victorian culture and values, exemplified by authors such as Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey or George Orwell, are oft-cited as an 'oedipal drive' to kill their parental predecessors (Hadley 1; Bullen 2; Moore 137).[42]

Later on, Kirchknopf points out the 1960s as a decade in which the term 'Victorian' became synonymous with 'sexual repression', materialising the still persistent association between Victorianism and hypocrisy, strict morality or prudery

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Similarly, for Jennifer Green-Lewis the term 'Victorian' is constructed today aesthetically, encompassing since Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf, that is, since Romanticism and the Regency era to the Edwardian era, regardless of Queen Victoria's reign (Green-Lewis 30).

[41]   Other scholars interestingly argue that critical responses to Victorianism and the Victorian status quo started in the 1880s and 1890s, when authors such as Oscar Wilde, George Gissing or George Bernard Shaw, and the rise of Decadentism, Dandyism and the New Woman stood in frontal opposition to mid-Victorian values (Moore 136; Johnston and Waters 5). Grace Moore goes further in identifying a continuum between late-Victorian responses to the mid-Victorian status quo and twentieth-century reworkings of the Victorian era (Moore 137).

[42]   Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* (1918) is generally regarded as an oft-cited landmark of Modernist debasement of Victorian values. Similarly Virginia Woolf lamented in *Mr Bennet and Mrs Brown* (1924) the survival of Victorianism after the death of Queen Victoria, perceiving a continuation of Victorian values in the Edwardian period (Woolf 4-5). Later on George Orwell would satirise Victorian imperial values in his essay "Shooting an Elephant" (1836).

(Kirchknopf, "(Re)workings" 56). At the same time, Kirchknopf argues, following Cora Kaplan (*Victoriana,* 85-86), that in the same decade "the deconstruction and reassessment of the coherence of the Victorians' supposed sexual repression began to take place" (Kirchknopf, "(Re)workings" 56).[43]

Visceral responses to Victorianism were further replayed during the 1980s, when Margaret Thatcher and Neil Kinnock, Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition respectively between 1983 and 1992, articulated opposing visions of Victorianism to promote their political projects. Whereas Thatcher identified Victorianism with progress, respectability, national pride and prosperity, Kinnock associated it to poverty, inequality and want (Kirchknopf, "(Re)workings" 56). Margaret Thatcher's so-called defence of Victorian values, severely criticised for championing "rampant individualism and the free market economy" and for dismantling the welfare state (Shuttleworth, "From" 180), articulated and influenced neo-Victorian works to a considerable degree. Christian Gutleben and Julian Wolfreys state so when they claim:

> One reason for the rise and proliferation of neo-Victorian fiction and Victorian pastiche in the 1980s was, in the UK at least, an indirect reaction against Margaret Thatcher's neo-liberalism, particularly in its laissez-faire and free market economies, themselves echoes of much Victorian economic policy and the ideologies that it mediated and was mediated by (Gutleben and Wolfreys 57).[44]

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[43]   Grace Moore sets this reassessment earlier in the 1950s, particularly following the 1951 centenary of the Great Exhibition, after which the Victorian came to be associated more with progress and less with sexual repression (Moore 138). Regarding the perception of sexual repression as a staple of Victorianism, Cora Kaplan highlights the publication of Steven Marcus's *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-nineteenth Century England* (1964) as instrumental in the reassessment and renewed fascination with Victorian sexuality in the 1960s (Kaplan, *Victoriana* 86).

[44]   Notwithstanding the correspondences between Thatcher's neo-liberalism and Victorian economic policy alluded to by Gutleben and Wolfreys, Thatcher's policy of small government and the subsequent reduction of state economic interventionism (to the detriment of the Welfare State) ironically contrasts with "arguably the most substantial twentieth-century legacy of the Victorian era, the public service ethic" (Samuel 11).

The conflicting (mis)uses of Victorianism that have been discussed so far compel us to be alert to the potentially ideological constructions of the Victorians today, long after the death of Queen Victoria. The contemporary fascination with all things Victorian, of which the neo-Victorian novel is but a single manifestation, reveals the cultural appeal of the term, signifying alternatively progress and civilisation on the one hand, sexual repression, hypocrisy and misery on the other. In this sense, Cora Kaplan interestingly argues that Victoriana should be considered "a conceptual nomad" or "a discourse though which both the conservative and progressive elements of Anglophone cultures reshaped their ideas of the past, present and future" (Kaplan, *Victoriana* 3, 4).[45]

Out of the cornucopia of twentieth and twenty-first-century cultural responses to the Victorian era, this section focuses on neo-Victorian fiction, a genre whose inception has been set side to side with the rise of postmodernism. Chronologically, two novels from the 1960s are usually marked as foundational texts for the neo-Victorian genre: Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969). While Fowles's and/or Rhys's novels are usually underlined as precursors of the genre by a variety of scholars (Shuttleworth, "Natural" 256; Jukic 70; Gutleben, *Nostalgic* 5; Kaplan, *Victoriana* 8), other specialists have traced the roots of the genre in earlier texts.

Robin Gilmour cites Michael Sadleir's *Fanny by Gaslight* (1940) and Marghanita Laski's *The Victorian Chaise-Longue* (1953) as forerunners of the neo-Victorian novel (Gilmour 189) whereas Matthew Beaumont moves back to the 1930s to point

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[45]   Originally devised to refer restrictedly to material objects and collectors' items from the period, the term 'Victoriana' has been put forward by Cora Kaplan to "embrace the whole phenomenon, the astonishing range of representations and reproductions for which the Victorian . . . is the common referent" (Kaplan, *Victoriana* 3).

out Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) and Max Ernst's *Une Semaine de Bonté* (1934) as early examples of the genre (Beaumont, "Cutting up" 12).[46] Regardless of these proto-neo-Victorian works, it seems that the publication of Fowles's and Rhys's novels brought about "a conscious articulation of the desire to re-write, re-vision and challenge the nineteenth-century's assumptions and dominance" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 8).

Since the rise of neo-Victorianism in the wake of postmodernism the neo-Victorian novel has been subjected to an intense and still ongoing critical debate. Although the term 'neo-Victorian' seems now well-established to refer to this growing body of literature, one of the most debated questions around the genre has been that of terminology. In fact, when the journal *Neo-Victorian Studies* was launched in 2008 to officially signal the critical fertility of the field, scholars were still considering the neo-, post-, retro- , faux- and pseudo- prefixes to designate the genre.

Among the manifold labels applied to contemporary rewritings of the Victorian era, the pseudo- (Gutleben, *Nostalgic* 50-56; Letissier 111; Gutleben and Onega 12) and faux- (Constantini 33; Flint, *Victorians* 10) terms are the ones that have gained less acceptance. It can be argued that both pseudo-Victorian and faux-Victorian place the genre in a subordinate position to Victorian fiction, marking contemporary rewritings of the Victorian age as inauthentic in opposition to their Victorian counterparts. Such is the point supported by Christian Gutleben in *Nostalgic Postmodernism: The Victorian Tradition and the Contemporary British Novel* (2001). In Gutleben's early (and largely criticised) view on the genre, neo-Victorian authors'

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[46]   Beaumont argues that Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934) and Max Ernst's *Une Semaine de Bonté* (1934) present opposing versions of neo-Victorianism, the former featuring a conservative rehabilitation of Victorian values while the latter simply appropriates Victorian aesthetics and form (Beaumont, "Cutting up" 24).

worshipping of the Victorian literary tradition deems neo-Victorian novels merely imitative and derivate works in the shadow of their Victorian precursors (Gutleben, *Nostalgic* 84-85) – a point obliquely supported by Llewellyn in his promotion of neo-Victorian fiction as a facilitator or "mediator into the experience of reading the 'real' [Victorian] thing" (Llewellyn, "What" 168).[47] That the faux- and pseudo- prefixes have been dropped from neo-Victorian criticism coalesces with the fact that neo-Victorian fiction is currently considered a genre in its own right which re-writes and re-envisions the Victorian age from a contemporary perspective rather than merely imitating its Victorian referents.

Andrea Kirchknopf has supported the term 'post-Victorian' following Dianne F. Sadoff and John Kucich, who adopt this appellation because it highlights "the paradoxes of historical continuity and disruption" (Sadoff and Kucich xiii; qtd. in Kirchknopf, "(Re)workings" 64). Kirchknopf equally draws upon Georges Letissier (Letissier 111) to claim that the term 'post-Victorian' "connotatively blends the Victorian, the modernist and the postmodernist eras" and denotes both posteriority and consequentiality, in that post-Victorian culture comes after the Victorian and stems from it (Kirchknopf, "(Re)workings" 64).[48]

Similarly paying heed to the postmodern connections of the genre, the term 'retro-Victorian' was coined by Sally Shuttleworth in her discussion of Victorian-

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[47]   Llewellyn seems to echo an interview on Jeannette Winterson in which she dismisses neo-Victorian novels as merely imitative of nineteenth-century novels: "If you want to read nineteenth-century novels, there are plenty for you to read, and you may as well read the *real thing* and not go out and buy a reproduction. Personally, I loathe reproduction furniture" (Winterson, no pages; my emphasis).

[48]   Anne Humpherys has similarly coined the term 'aftering' "to describe the 'writing over' of Victorian novels that has been such a distinctive part of the late twentieth-century literary scene" and acknowledges the postmodern traits in such 20th century 'afterings' of Victorian culture albeit being wary of the potential "slipperiness" of the term 'postmodernism' (Humpherys 442).

centred novels dealing with natural history. In her view, retro-Victorian novels "generally display an informed postmodern self-consciousness in their interrogation of the relationship between fiction and history [but] reveal, nonetheless, an absolute, non-ironic, fascination with the details of the period, and with our relations to it" (Shuttleworth, "Natural" 253).

In opposition to the terms discussed so far, the term 'neo-Victorian' seems to have taken root (Heilmann and Llewellyn 5).[49] Arguably the post- and retro- terms posit obstacles to the recent crystallisation and development of the neo-Victorian novel. Although Kirchknopf's favouring of the post-term does not immediately take a "stance on the hierarchy of the eras" (Kirchknopf, "(Re)workings" 66), it seems to foreground the genre as merely stemming directly from the Victorian novel. Similarly, 'retro-Victorian' suggests that contemporary rewritings of Victorian culture, in plain terms, retrogressively and nostalgically come back to the nineteenth-century abandoning present concerns. It can be argued instead that neo-Victorian fiction features a new literary genre that, by means of its privileged positioning in the gap between the Victorian past and the present, re-imagines and re-writes the Victorian era for contemporary audiences.

Whereas the debates on the terminology of the genre seem to have become sterile, the varying definitions and the elements of a neo-Victorian novel to qualify as such still keep a prominent position in neo-Victorian criticism. An apt starting point is

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[49]   Dana Shiller was the first scholar to deploy a sustained use of the term 'neo-Victorian' in her analysis of the genre. Nevertheless, in 1972 Patrick Brantlinger had already hinted at a "flourishing 'neo-Victorian' subculture" in his analysis of John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (Brantlinger, "French" 339). Coincidentally in the same year, the historian Hugh Tinker published his article "Race & Neo-Victorianism", in which he discussed Victorian notions of race and their impact on British policies of immigration at the time. Although Tinker was not concerned with the rise of the neo-Victorian novel, his text illustrates one of the staples of neo-Victorian criticism, namely the permanence of the Victorian age in the present: "The Age of Victoria . . . is still with us" (Tinker 47).

Dana Shiller's typology of the neo-Victorian novel, which includes "texts that revise specific Victorian precursors, texts that imagine new adventures for familiar Victorian characters, and 'new' Victorian fictions that imitate nineteenth-century literary conventions" (Shiller 558).[50] Accordingly, neo-Victorian novels typically revise specific Victorian genres such as the sensation novel, the bildungsroman or the detective novel, and appropriate prominent nineteenth-century narrative voices such as the first person narrator or the third person omniscient narrator. Thematically, Kirchknopf adds, the neo-Victorian novel "invoke[s] typical Victorian controversies, such as the definition and status of science, religion, morals, nationhood and identity" (Kirchknopf, *Rewriting* 6).

Although the conventional formal and thematic components of a neo-Victorian novel seem evident, scholars are still engaged in setting forth competing definitions of the genre. An oft-quoted definition of the neo-Victorian novel that has been contributory in explaining and narrowing down the genre is that provided by Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn in their seminal work *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century* (2010):

> The 'neo-Victorian' is *more than* historical fiction set in the nineteenth century. To be part of the neo-Victorianism we discuss in this book, texts (literary, filmic, audio/visual) must in some respect be *self-consciously engaged with the act of (re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians*" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 4; original emphasis).

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[50]   Shiller cites Valerie Martin's *Mary Reilly* (1990), a rewriting of Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), as representative of the first category. Peter Ackroyd's detective novel *Chatterton* (1987) and A.S. Byatt's novella "The Conjugial Angel" (1990) are placed in the second type and thirdly A.S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990) and Charles Palliser's *The Quincunx* (1989) are exemplary of the final category (Shiller 558).

As can be observed, Heilmann and Llewellyn consider self-consciousness and metafictional strategies as essential aspects of neo-Victorianism.[51] Such self-reflexive and metafictional approaches to the Victorian era are singled out as key elements in neo-Victorian texts and arguably they trigger, Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss suggest, a bifurcation between 'strong definitions' of neo-Victorianism which uphold those elements as inherent in the genre and 'soft definitions' which are more inclusive (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss, "Introduction" 2).

Marie-Luise Kohlke is among the critics who advocate comprehensive definitions of the neo-Victorian novel as they are "suitably elastic and *more* rather than less responsive . . . to encompass the neo-Victorian's ongoing shape-shifting" (Kohlke, "Mining" 27; original emphasis). Louisa Hadley provides one of such malleable definitions of neo-Victorian fiction, which is described in a broad sense "as contemporary fiction that engages with the Victorian era, at either the level of plot, structure, or both" (Hadley 4).

Nevertheless, I argue that all-encompassing definitions of the neo-Victorian novel run the risk of reducing the genre to a merely atmospheric mimesis of the Victorian age. In this sense, I share Heilmann and Llewellyn's division between fiction set in the nineteenth-century (or neo-nineteenth century fiction) and neo-Victorian fiction, a division which is marked by the "divide between parody and innovation, pastiche and reinterpretation" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 6). Similarly, Sally Shuttleworth is not content with neo-Victorian fiction being merely set in the

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[51]   Elodie Rousselot considers this self-analytic drive and the conscious re-interpretation and interrogation of the past to be displayed more broadly by neo-historical fiction which revises other historical periods, such as the Tudor era - Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall* (2009) and *Bring up the Bodies* (2012) -, the inter-war period - Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989) -, or the eighteenth-century - David Mitchell's *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* (2010) - (Rousselot, "Introduction" 2).

nineteenth-century. Instead she calls upon the genre to be endowed with a "self-conscious questioning of our relations to the Victorian era . . . and awareness of its own placement in time" (Shuttleworth, "From" 191).[52]

In light of Shuttleworth's call for neo-Victorianism to be self-consciously aware of 'its own placement in time,' it can be argued that the role of the neo-Victorian creator is consonant with that of the historian, since both are engaged in an interpretation of history which foregrounds the historical referent while it simultaneously gets to grips with how the historical context illuminates (and is illuminated by) the contemporary context. Dominick LaCapra's model of history sheds light on this negotiation between past and present which characterises historical narratives:

> The narratives of historians may be opened to some extent by the attempt to explore alternative possibilities in the past that are themselves suggested by the retrospective or deferred effects of later knowledge . . . The past is not simply a finished story to be narrated but a process linked to each historian's own time of narration. In a word, historians are involved in the effort to understand both what something meant in its own time and what it may mean for us today (LaCapra 18).

Similarly, neo-Victorian writers take the most of their contemporary standpoint and the accessible historical foreknowledge to construct an alternative view of the Victorian past and its uses in the present.[53] This turns the neo-Victorian novel into a genuinely dialogic genre which codifies the transactions between Victorian past and

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[52] While Heilmann and Llewellyn and Shuttleworth consider self-reflexivity as a key element in neo-Victorian fiction, Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss have recently argued that "self-reflexivity should not be paramount in any definition of neo-Victorianism as it forestalls the analysis of immersive practices of reception and consumption, which may turn out to be equally defining features of the neo-Victorian project" (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss, "Introduction" 7).

[53] Because of the genre's commitment to the Victorian historical context, Louisa Hadley sifts neo-Victorian fiction out of the widespread fascination with all things Victorian which permeates contemporary culture. In Hadley's view, the latter often "results in the erasure of the historical specificity of the Victorians" and consequently Victorians are rendered as removed from their historical context and therefore 'out of history' (Hadley 6, 8).

present. In this respect, Kate Mitchell notes that neo-Victorian fictions "explore both our continuity with, and our difference from, our Victorian forebears, and formulate our relationship to the period as a series of repetitions which produce both the shock of recognition and the fright of estrangement" (Mitchell, *History* 177). Analogously, this tension between similarity and difference is also referred to by Cora Kaplan, who points out that in contemporary engagements with the Victorian Age, a homely affect for the Victorian period and the aesthetic pleasures of revisiting its literature and culture get intertwined with incensed critiques on the class, gender and race injustices of the era (Kaplan 5).

Neo-Victorianism does actually reconsider and revise the Victorian past but it also keeps an eye on present concerns. Indeed, neo-Victorian works have become a site where nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries enter a fruitful dialogue, stripping away the striking similarities and differences between current contemporary culture and the Victorians, as well as the latter's repressed secrets or long-silenced voices. Neo-Victorian critiques on marginalised collectives include postcolonial and global perspectives on the Victorian age (to be dealt with in section 3.2) as well as marginalised sexualities, feminist revisions or any "generally 'different' versions of the Victorian" (Llewellyn, "What" 165). Sarah Waters' neo-Victorian lesbian-focused trilogy, comprising *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Affinity* (1999) and *Fingersmith* (2002) is a prominent case, as it is Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002), whose protagonist Sugar, a prostitute, and the portrayal of the Victorian underworld

make "the intention clear to give voice to the real, i.e. numerically significant, but hitherto silenced other Victorians" (Voigts-Virchow, "In-yer-Victorian-face" 115).[54]

As we have discussed earlier, the rise of postmodernism and the neo-Victorian novel converged such that critics consider the genre as exemplary of postmodern literature. Certainly the foregrounding of self-reflexivity, metafictional approaches and "knowledgeable revisitation" (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss, "Introduction" 2) in neo-Victorian narratives allow for a consideration of the genre within the category of postmodern historical fiction, of which the above-mentioned John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is a representative example. Fowles's neo-Victorian narration portrays the naturalist and Darwinist Charles Smithson, whose acute existential crisis and his torn affection for his fiancée Ernestina, the Victorian ideal of femininity, and for Sarah, an enigmatic 'fallen woman', provide both a parody of Victorian sexuality and an account of the gulf between the Victorians and us which is contradictorily both condescending and nostalgic.[55]

Fowles's experimental novel equally exhibits archetypal elements of postmodern aesthetics. As the quotation below illustrates, the author's inclusion of a self-reflexive twentieth-century consciousness in the form of a metafictional narrator

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[54]   Christian Gutleben has asserted that the inclusion of historically silenced or non-normative individuals in neo-Victorian fiction, such as homosexuals, immigrants or colonials, has become over-used and redundant because of the growing normalisation those collectives possess today (Gutleben, *Nostalgic* 168). Although Gutleben's claim seems sound, it should be argued that the visibility granted to these collectives is not matched by social or human rights and political representation.

[55]   In *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, John Fowles introduces each chapter with epigraphs from reputed Victorian novelists and poets. Christian Gutleben extends this citational practice from the literatures of the past to postmodern novels in general. In Gutleben's view, the fact that postmodern novelists rarely quote from their coeval writers – whereas Victorian authors did so from their contemporaneous – can only be resultant from nostalgia or from "an acknowledgement of the unsurpassed quality of the quoted texts, that is, a record of powerlessness or a complex of inferiority" (Gutleben, *Nostalgic* 19). Although Gutleben's charges of nostalgia have been critically contested (Carroll 174), Fowles's hybrid style and attitude to narrate the Victorian age "has made the novel so distinctive, experimental and famous as a model of metafictional postmodernism" (Pesso-Miquel 120).

together with his fragmentary style – including three alternative endings – deconstructs the way in which Victorian literature and history are narrated:

> After all, [Charles Smithson] was a Victorian. We could not expect him to see what we are only just beginning – and with so much more knowledge and the lessons of existentialist philosophy at our disposal – to realize ourselves: that the desire to hold and the desire to enjoy are mutually destructive. His statement of himself should have been, 'I possess this now, therefore I am happy', instead of what it so Victorianly was: I cannot possess this for ever, and therefore am sad.' (Fowles 72).[56]

Fowles's style has made *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Samantha J. Carroll argues, "exemplary of an emergent literary category that triangulated history, fiction and postmodern critical thought" (Carroll 182). Carroll is alluding to historiographic metafiction, a term coined by Linda Hutcheon in her influential *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) to refer to those postmodern historical novels that exhibit a "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 5).

Historiographic metafiction can be thought of as a circumvention to the ostensible ahistorical character of postmodernism as defended by the Marxist theorist Fredric Jameson. In fact, responses to the postmodernist "historical deafness" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* xi) alleged by the influential scholar, to which I will come back later, can be seen as a logbook to trace the development of postmodernism itself. Hutcheon's devising of historiographic metafiction takes issue with Jameson's purported postmodern crisis of historical representation (Jameson, *Ideologies* 180), and argues that historiographic metafiction subverts such

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[56] In *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002), Michel Faber provides another notable instance of a knowing and metafictional narrator who appropriates the foreknowledge of a twentieth-century perspective and discloses the artificiality of the reader's contemporary stance. In the memorable opening of the novel, Faber calls the reader to "watch your step . . . the truth is that you are an alien from another time and place altogether" (Faber 3) and as the reader is introduced to a prostitute called Caroline who lives in squalor, the narrator states that "Of Jack the Ripper she need have no fear; it's almost fourteen years too early" (Faber 7).

ahistoricism by problematising the very concept of history (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 112).

For Hutcheon, Jameson "appears to mistake a challenge to the 'master' status of narrative history for a denial of history itself (or of histories, in Lyotard's terms)" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 112).

Consequently, historiographic metafiction, as a postmodern subgenre, does manifest a commitment to historical representation, while it simultaneously and paradoxically acknowledges that access to the past is always textual, fragmentary and open to reinterpretation. In this sense, history and fiction "are both identified as linguistic constructs, highly conventionalized in their narrative forms, and not at all transparent either in terms of language or structure" (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 105).[57] In other words, "historiographic metafiction is more concerned with representing the process of historical representation than with reconstituting the past" (Mitchell and Parsons 3).

Together with John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, A.S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* (1990) is frequently cited as a quintessential instance of historiographic metafiction.[58] Marking the rise of the popularity of the neo-Victorian novel in the twentieth century and a crux in neo-Victorian criticism, Byatt's narration of two modern-day scholars researching the lives and work of two fictional Victorian

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[57]   Historiographic metafiction is perhaps better understood in opposition to traditional historical novels. According to Frederick M. Holmes, such novels "sustain throughout the pretence of supplying direct access to the past in all of its fullness and particularity. Such novels employ the methods of formal realism . . . to combine as seamlessly as possible wholly fictional ingredients with information garnered from actual historical sources" (Holmes, *Historical* 11).

[58]   Christian Gutleben, oft-quoted as the critic who most fiercely has bemoaned neo-Victorianism's depart from postmodern aesthetics, argues that A.S. Byatt's *Possession* is among the few neo-Victorian texts that have followed the postmodern trail of John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. The fragmentary and heteroglossic style of Byatt's novel, including third-person narratives, fragments of poems, letters, diary entries or passages from a biography, displays a "disruption of the narrative continuum . . . [that] bring[s] to the fore the novel's postmodern otherness" (Gutleben, *Nostalgic* 79).

poets epitomises postmodern scepticism about the retrieval of the past. Such is the concern of Dana Shiller in her influential essay "The Redemptive Past in the Neo-Victorian Novel", for whom "*Possession* constructs a notion of history predicated on interpretation, not on the discovery of historical 'truths'" (Shiller 552). Byatt's Postscript to her novel, which is quoted below, illustrates what Shiller terms "the provisionality of historical knowledge" (Shiller 557):

> There are things that happen and leave no discernible trace, are not spoken of or written of, though it would be very wrong to say that subsequent event go on indifferently, all the same, as though such things had never been (Byatt, *Possession* 552).

Following the previous line of reasoning, neo-Victorian novels have recorded what Kathleen Brogan has termed "the tectonic epistemological shift we have witnessed since the seventies in the social sciences (Brogan, "American" 151). As Brogan argues, "a reevaluation of historical methodology, indeed, of what can be identified as history ("fact") versus story ("fiction"), has profoundly changed our understanding of how the past is translated" (Brogan, "American" 151). Chiming with the disavowal of the boundaries between fact and fiction which has characterised the postmodern paradigm, neo-Victorian novels illustrate the impossibility of reaching a conclusive and unambiguous rendition of the (Victorian) past by exposing the textual reliance of postmodern historiography – and hence its potentially plural and polyphonic discourse.[59]

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[59] History and fiction are considered interdependent by postmodern historiography because both are basically narrations relying on similar rhetorical and textual manoeuvres, including what Hayden White has called "emplotment" (White 83). Indeed, as Graham Allen argues, "Historical events themselves . . . only come to the historian through what Hutcheon, following Genette, calls 'paratexts'. Whether it be newspaper accounts, diaries, military reports . . . History is only available to the contemporary historian through a network of prior texts, all infused with the traces of prior authors with their . . . presuppositions and prejudices" (Allen 191-192).

The postmodern character of Byatt's *Possession* is not only visible in its treatment of history but also in its intertextual and mixed approach. Byatt's concoction of narrative strategies, including diary entries, letters and pastiches of Victorian poems, brings to the fore issues of representability, truth and authenticity, particularly the dismissive notion that neo-Victorian novels may be attributed with "charges of nostalgia and a weakening of historicity that replaces a sense of historical process by a pastiche of lifeless styles" (Voigts-Virchow, "In-yer-Victorian-Face" 112).

The charges referred to above are concomitant with Fredric Jameson's critique of postmodernism and "the insensible colonization of the present by the nostalgia mode" (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 20). Jameson mistrusts postmodern scepticism about the effectiveness of historical narratives to represent the past:

> The retrospective dimension indispensable to any vital reorientation of our collective future . . . has meanwhile itself become a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum . . . In faithful conformity to poststructuralist linguistic theory, the past as "referent" finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 18).

In conjunction with the ostensible unrepresentability of the past by postmodern historicity, Jameson also negatively criticises the way pastiche has replaced parody as the dominant mode of historical mimicry (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 17). However, in light of the increasingly complex relation to the Victorian past exhibited by neo-Victorian works, scholars have been vigilant to the evolution of neo-Victorianism and have devised arguments which seek to sift the genre out of the paradoxes of postmodernism. For example, Dana Shiller and Louisa Hadley have both tackled Jameson's negative view of pastiche and argue that the term is clearly unsatisfactory for neo-Victorianism due to its authors' commitment to the rehabilitation of the

Victorian past and their attention to the Victorian referent (Shiller 545; Hadley 159). Christian Gutleben and Julian Wolfreys have opted for foregrounding a positive view of pastiche as an adequate form for neo-Victorian representations of the past to aspire to truth. In their view

> Each instance of pastiche represents a quest for a fragment of individual truth, so it should be clear that the truth which is at stake here is not an absolute concept but a relative and plural one . . . the refusal to forget, implicit in the neo-Victorian quest for truth, reveals a thoroughly ethical character . . . the neo-Victorian's vocation, then, appears to be a movement favouring pastiche to look for an emphatic, and hence ethical, concurrence with the other (Gutleben and Wolfreys 66).

If the neo-Victorian genre is up for the postmodern tasks of foregrounding issues of ethics and the other, deconstructing unitary notions of truth and subjectivity and unearthing silenced or marginalised groups, it seems apposite to wonder why neo-Victorian works revert to the traditional form of Victorian classic realism. Beyond Christian Gutleben's early charges of neo-conservatism which extended to late postmodernism in general (Gutleben, *Nostalgic* 193), Gutleben and Wolfreys have marked neo-Victorian returns to the nineteenth century as a search for solace and security, a way out of the traumatic loss of history and identity which has characterised the postmodern present (Gutleben and Wolfreys 54).

A more commonplace motive is provided by Heilmann and Llewellyn, who point out a "desire for a 'good read' [that] supersedes narrative innovation, fragmentation, and the invention of new forms in order to return to the potential certainties, satisfactions, and comforts of a more traditional mode of representation" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 16). Similarly, Samantha J. Carroll argues that "neo-Victorian fiction's refusal to reproduce the jarring disruptions of more experimental fiction ought not to condemn it to conservative homage or a blind nostalgia for the securities of fictional realism" (Carroll 185). In other words, just because postmodern revisionist fiction has

become more reader-friendly and accessible does not mean that it has lost its capacity to deconstruct grand narratives and unearth alternative perspectives on the past. I would argue instead that neo-Victorianism's most effective and radical way of debunking master narratives and notions of truth and objectivity and imaginatively challenging traditional historiography on the Victorian age is conferring the narrative coherence and textual order which characterised Victorian realist fiction to traditionally marginalised narratives. Postmodern revisionist fiction, then, seems to be still postmodern in spirit but not so much in form.

The representability of a plurality of truths that the neo-Victorian pursues is fuelled by "a revisionist approach to the past, borrowing from postmodern historiography to explore how present circumstances shape historical narrative" (Shiller, 539-540). This revisionist approach alluded to by Shiller is recording, some critics argue, a transition from postmodern historiographic metafiction towards a new category which may be termed revisionist historical fiction. In this category, Suzanne Keen argues,

> the history you thought you already knew receives vigorous challenge . . . but the techniques employed have more to do with the insights produced by writing history from below or from alternative perspectives, than with the frontal assault on the nature of facts, evidence, and the very possibility of a knowable past often found in postmodern fiction (Keen, "Historical" 179).[60]

This revisionist approach which characterises recent historical fiction does not seem to undermine its aspirations to objectivity, historical accuracy and critical distance in the way postmodern historical fiction and its metafictional playfulness and fragmentation do but it rather illuminates shadowy areas in the past which may inform the present and it is capable of making truth statements. Voigts-Virchow

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[60]   Barry Unsworth's *Sacred Hunger* (1992), Timothy Mo's *An Insular Possession* (1986), Brian Moore's *Black Robe* (1985) or Roddy Doyle's *A Star Called Henry* (1999) are some of the texts mentioned by Keen in her analysis of revisionist historical fiction (Keen 179).

exemplifies the revisionism that characterises recent neo-Victorian literature and its ensuing shift from historiographic metafiction with Sarah Waters's neo-Victorian lesbian trilogy, particularly in *Fingersmith*. In particular, Voigts-Virchow points out that Waters's strategy is projecting "a queering of Victorianism" which avoids metahistoriographical elements such as a parallel contemporary plot or a twenty-first-century consciousness, although contemporary concerns are indeed evoked because of the author's focus on lesbianism (Voigts-Virchow, "In-yer-Victorian-face" 121).

This transition from postmodern historical fiction to revisionist historical fiction evinces a divergence from postmodernism. A thought-provoking rationale to this ostensible exhaustion of the postmodern paradigm as seen in the neo-Victorian novel is that provided by Rosario Arias, who argues that in neo-Victorian authors such John Harwood, Sarah Waters, A.S. Byatt or Belinda Starling, the postmodern sense of loss of history is replaced with the foregrounding of the historical referent, what seems to entail that the neo-Victorian novel is evolving in opposition to postmodern historical fiction as illustrated by Linda Hutcheon (Arias, "Traces" 114). Arias further cements her argument by highlighting the growing "critical interest in analysing tools to challenge death and arrest loss in neo-Victorian novels" and "the orientation towards survival and presence (rather than death and loss) [that] seems to prevail in the work carried out by neo-Victorian critics" (Arias, "Traces" 114,122).[61]

A similar logic is followed by Julian Wolfreys, whose application of the trope of spectrality suggests that the imaginative rehabilitation of repressed narratives in neo-

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[61]   Arias articulates her analysis of recent neo-Victorian literature as detaching from postmodern historical fiction around the critical notion of the 'trace', as understood by Jacques Derrida, Abraham and Torok, Paul Ricoeur and Emmanuel Levinas, because it "offers a sense of direct connection to the referent and engages with a more material relationship with the past" (Arias, "Traces" 112).

Victorian works may challenge discourses about the irretrievability and inaccessibility of the past which characterises postmodern notions of history:

> The 'past' is given not simply as representation, imaginary slideshow if you will, but in being re-presented, in coming to appear in revenant, spectral manifestation, it invites the reader to contrast what the reader believes he or she knows of the nineteenth century with the inventions of the neo-Victorian . . . the images of neo-Victorian and neo-nineteenth century narratives play between residual images of already well-known clichés . . . and return in the form of fictive images that which has never been a presence so that it has an effect in what we call the 'present' (Wolfreys, "Notes" 164).

Put simply, revisionist neo-Victorian works enable the repressed Victorian past to survive, albeit in a spectral form, not only in textualised traces, but also in the readers' present and imagination, floating among their received notions of the Victorian. What critics such as Rosario Arias and Julian Wolfreys indicate in their emphases on presentness and survival is that there is a "large number of contemporary historical novels that do seek to remember, represent, and imaginatively restore the past, rather than simply reflect on the problematics of such representation" (Mitchell and Parsons 13) and this suggests that recent neo-Victorian works are exhibiting a growing scepticism about post-modernism.

All in all, the general tenor in neo-Victorian criticism seems to stress the dialogic character of the genre. As Barbara Garlick notes, the interaction between the Victorian age and the twenty-first century "may be viewed more comfortably as a dialogue, rather than a confrontation. The nineteenth century is . . . still eminently accessible and will continue to provide us with material for critical and artistic exploitation well into this twenty-first century" (Garlick 194). In short, neo-Victorianism is unearthing the controversies and contradictions of the nineteenth century to reflect upon social and political concerns which keep dominating the contemporary agenda,

but avoiding escapism or nostalgia in favour of a revisionist and dynamic perspective on the Victorian past and its impact upon the present.

3.2. Empire, Race and the Victorians: Post-Colonial Neo-Victorianism

Representations and re-interpretations of race, colonialism and the British Empire are some of the most predominant themes in the neo-Victorian novel. Concerning the relation between Victorian literature and empire, Spivak has claimed that "it should not be possible to read nineteenth-century British literature without remembering that imperialism… was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English" (Spivak, "Three Women" 243). Similarly, Heilmann and Llewellyn have pointed out, following Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), the investment of mainstream Victorian novels in upholding the imperial project, even if colonial worlds were somewhat obliquely represented (Heilmann and Llewellyn 67).[62] This gravitation of the Victorian novel around colonialism and empire becomes replicated and explicit in neo-Victorianism and hence postcolonial neo-Victorian novels have become critical sites for negotiating race relations and the memory of the British Empire in contemporary culture.

The neo-Victorian novel in its postcolonial mode is fuelled by "the lingering trauma embodied by the catastrophic failure of the Victorian imperial era, which found a fertile ground in the challenging of grand narratives of early postmodernism and in the ethical revival of late postmodernism" (Gutleben and Wolfreys 62). Louisa Hadley has claimed that "the Victorians occupy a similar place to our grandparents.

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[62]   Heilmann and Llewellyn cite Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre,* Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* as Victorian novels which hint at the tangled connections between Britons and the colonies. Actually the protagonists in those texts are either sent off to the colonies or receive an unexpected income as a result of British involvement in colonialism (Heilmann and Llewellyn 67).

Removed by a generation, we escape the 'anxiety of influence' that characterized the Modernists' reaction to the Victorians and prompted the disparagement of writers like Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf" (Hadley 7). However, Hadley's portrayal of Victorians as benevolent grandparents, evoking Margaret Thatcher's appeal to her Victorian grandmother, is problematic from a postcolonial point of view, for in countries with a colonial past the Victorian powerfully invokes notions of imperial oppression and domination. Grace Moore broaches this subject by arguing that "owing to the expanse of Victorian cultural imperialism and its legacy in the era of decolonisation, revisionism has, in recent years, become a much more global phenomenon" and therefore "postcolonial novelists frequently reveal an animosity towards the nineteenth century" (Moore 137). Accordingly, postcolonial responses to the Victorian typically mark the nineteenth century as the inception of many modern-day inequities and an era mirroring the current age of neo-imperialism.

As it was argued above, the periodisation of the Victorian age is slippery and the reach of what we call 'Victorianism' extended beyond its strict timeline. In the same fashion, Simon Joyce has stressed the necessity "to understand the precise forms and areas of life in which [the Victorian] has lingered in places like India, Africa, Australia, and the Caribbean . . . 'the Victorian' need not be set in opposition to 'the modern' and may even be a signifier of modernity in some instances" (Joyce 15). I agree with Joyce in signalling the Victorian as an abiding category in former colonies and its lasting significance as symbol of modernity, both in the present and in the past. Certainly, as I outline in chapter 4, Victorianism was often equated with modernity by African Americans travelling to Victorian Britain in their abolitionist activities. Conversely, as I argue later, the irruption of Western (Victorian) modernity in other colonial areas equally involved the coercive introduction of capitalism and

cash economy at the expense of other alternative 'modernities' which were seamlessly linked to pre-colonial cultures. This contrast illustrates the varying and conflicting resonances invoked by Victorianism from a postcolonial point of view.

Even though postcolonial approaches to the Victorian era have belatedly proliferated in the last three decades,[63] a few early examples in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s already analysed the heritage of Victorian colonialism and were themselves narrative responses to decolonisation: J.G. Farrell's *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973), which provides a postcolonial reading of the Indian Mutiny (1857); Robert Drewe's *The Savage Crowes* (1976), which delves into Australian history and the mass killing of Tasmanian aborigines; or Timothy Mo's *An Insular Possession* (1986) that, just like Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy, records British involvement in the First Opium War. Nevertheless, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) still remains the most emblematic postcolonial response to Victorian literature and culture. Considered a precursor of the neo-Victorian novel, as I argued above, the narration of the Dominican writer provides a feminist and postcolonial revision of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and features as a paradigmatic example of the empire 'writing back' against the colonial centre.[64]

Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* rescues Brontë's madwoman in the attic Bertha, renamed here Antoinette, and situates her in the centre of the narration against

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[63]   Together with the novels analysed in this thesis, recent neo-Victorian novels dealing with race, colonialism and empire include Andrea Barrett's *The Voyage of the Narwal* (1998), Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1998), Matthew Kneale's *English Passengers* (2000), Barbara Chase-Riboud's *Hottentot Venus* (2004), Julian Barnes's *Arthur and George* (2005), Belinda Starling's *The Journal of Dora Damage* (2006) or Iliya Troyanov's *The Collector of Worlds* (2008).

[64]   In postcolonial thinking, the phrase 'write back' involves literary practices in countries with a colonial past that try to debunk Eurocentric representations of literature and culture. The expression references Salman Rushdie's article "The Empire Writes Back with a Vengeance" (1982) and it was also used by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their volume *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989).

Brontë's protagonists Jane and Rochester, the former being denied any voice in the narration and the latter left nameless. Although Rhys claimed to have written her novel "with 'a deep curtesy' to Charlotte Brontë," she nevertheless considered Brontë's portrayal of Jamaican Creoles to provide "only the English side" (qtd. in Ashworth ix). Rhys's words are echoed in the novel when Antoinette, facing her husband's accusations of madness after he has received a spiteful letter from one her father's illegitimate children, claims "there is always the other side, always" (Rhys 116).

The race relations exhibited in *Wide Sargasso Sea* are nevertheless too complex to be reduced to a coloniser/colonised matrix. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* has been argued to uphold, in the character of the eponymous protagonist, white British female agency at the expense of her Creole 'Other', Bertha/Antoinette, whose death in the novel clears the way for Jane and Rochester's marriage. Nevertheless, as Gayatri Spivak has astutely pointed out, in *Wide Sargasso Sea* Antoinette is "a white Creole child growing up at the time of emancipation in Jamaica . . . caught between the English imperialist and the black native" (Spivak, "Three Women" 250), and, very importantly, is herself a white West Indian mistress to other black servants in the plantation, represented in the character of Christophine. The complex position of Antoinette in the narration therefore makes Rhys's novel, Peter Hulme argues, "fundamentally sympathetic to the planter class ruined by Emancipation" (Hulme 72). In spite of this, Rhys's novel can be still considered a landmark revisionist text for spotlighting the unrecognised heritage and legacy of colonialism in the Victorian novel, a compelling portrayal of hybrid identities and an apt starting point for postcolonial neo-Victorianism.

In his book *Taming Cannibals: Race and the Victorians* (2011), Patrick Brantlinger unambiguously affirms that "the discursive roots of modern racism lie in British, European, and colonial writing that deals with the slave trade and imperialist expansion" (Brantlinger, *Taming* 6-7). Peter Fryar makes a similarly bold claim by marking the golden age of British Empire, or the period between 1840 and 1940, as "the golden age of British racism too" (Fryar 165). Although imperial racism first emerged, Fryar argues, after the Regulation Act of 1773, through which the British government took over the East India Company and eventually led to the formal parliamentary control of India (Fryar 165),[65] it was the mid-Victorian period that witnessed the rise of pseudo-scientific theories under the auspices of disciplines such as phrenology, anthropology, ethnology, teleology or evolutionism. All of these theories converged upon the idea that non-white races were innately inferior, incapable of thinking or learning and therefore "racially unfitted for 'advanced' British institutions such as representative democracy" (Curtin 50). In other words, pseudo-scientific racism in the nineteenth century sought to establish an inborn connection between race and culture or civilisation.[66]

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[65] In the second half of the eighteenth century the East India Company was in financial distress. The Regulation Act of 1773 was passed to regulate and control the activities of the Company, a regulation that was tightened under the India Act of 1784. The Indian Mutiny (1857) and its violent aftereffects finally led to the Government of India Act (1858) which granted the British government full control over the East India Company and marked the beginning of direct formal rule, or the British Raj, in India (Judd 27, 74).

[66] An effect of the rise of mid-Victorian pseudo-scientific racism which is worth noting was the rise of immigration control in the late nineteenth century. Despite the cheap labour supplied by Asian and African immigrants, Adam McKeown argues, the rise of racism and racial ideologies inspired in the 1880s the creation of the first national borders and anti-immigration policies and laws in the form of "pioneering technologies to sift through migrants one by one, determine their status, create identities for them, and demand that states around the world would produce standardized paperwork that would help lodge those identities in cross-referenced files" (McKeown 55). This explains that Indian overseas migration to non-Asian destinations fell from 30 percent in the 1840s and 1850s to a 5 percent in the 1880s (McKeown 49).

Robert Knox's *The Races of Men* (1850) is an exemplary work of mid-Victorian pseudo-scientific racist thought. Representative of the brand of evolutionary racism,[67] Knox argues that 'dark races', among which he includes Negros, South Africans, Jews, 'Kaffirs,' Mongols and Gypsies, are "destined by the nature of their race to run, like all other animals, a certain limited course of existence, it matters little how their extinction is brought about" (Knox 302). Knox's opprobrious text sinisterly wonders "what signify these dark races to us? Who cares particularly for the Negro, or the Hottentot, or the Kaffir? These latter have proved a very troublesome race, and the sooner they are put out of the way the better" (Knox 179) to later pave the way for "fair races [to] cultivate or inhabit the tropical regions of the earth" (Knox 192).

Less inclined towards genocidal measures was James Hunt, founder of the Anthropological Society of London in 1863. His thought illustrates a more teleological view on race in tune with Thomas Carlyle's infamous "Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question" (1953). In his essay "On the Negro's Place in Nature" (1864), arguing that "the Negro is inferior intellectually to the European," James Hunt concludes that "the Negro becomes more humanised when in his natural subordination to the European than under any other circumstances" and "can only be humanised and civilised by Europeans" (Hunt xvi).

According to Christine Bolt in her influential *Victorian Attitudes to Race* (1971), since the late eighteenth century, two basic theories on race dominated scientific thought. The monogenetic theory, derived from Christian beliefs, asserted that all races had their origin in a single human species and therefore different races were

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[67] According to Peter Fryar, evolutionary racism, that started to develop in Britain in the 1830s, suggested that the disappearance of 'lower races' was just "nature's way of making room for a higher race" and it soon was determinant in the debates surrounding the appropriate foreign policy to follow in Australia, Canada, New Zealand or South Africa (Fryar 173).

fertile with each other. On the contrary, polygenesis argued that different races stemmed from distinct species and therefore crossbreeding and miscegenation led to the degeneration of the superior race, producing abnormal and barren hybrids (Bolt 9-10).

As Charles Darwin set forth his theory of evolution, as developed in *On the Origin of the Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871), it was proved that all human beings were connected to apes and therefore Europeans and Africans were related as well. The debate between polygenists and monogenists was now over in favour of the latter. Nevertheless, Darwin's theories seemed to emphasise the abysmal differences between the different racial stocks (Bolt 11). Accordingly Darwinism eventually fuelled racist ideas of white superiority because "white skin and 'Anglo-Saxon' civilisation were seen as the culmination of the evolutionary process" (Fryar 179). Darwin's ideas were further distorted with the rise of Social Darwinism, particularly under the persona of Herbert Spencer and other anthropologists. Spencer's philosophy transferred Darwin's notions of biological evolution to the study of society and human psychology. In "The Comparative Psychology of Man" (1976), Herbert Spencer argued that the "unlikeness between the juvenile mind and the adult mind . . . typifies the unlikeness between the minds of savage and civilized" (Spencer 9). This engendered the doctrine of the 'survival of the fittest' in which natural selection applied to social groups, therefore entailing that 'primitive' peoples would eventually disappear and in turn providing "an ideological prop from empire-building – a self-justification for a 'great power' that was expanding aggressively at the expense of 'primitive' and 'inferior' peoples" (Fryar 181).

The Victorian period generates therefore a *reification* of race; race in the Victorian period "was no longer a barely conceived prejudice" but "the subject of both academic discourse and popular journalism" (West 2) and a tangible and concrete category ready to be discussed both by fierce defenders of imperialism and the 'civilising mission' as well as by anti-imperialists and abolitionists, whose campaigns had been thriving since the eighteenth century and continued to do so throughout the Victorian period. Responses in Victorian public opinion with regards to racial politics often resulted in polarising views, as it is the case of the Jamaican Rebellion of 1865 and its devastating suppression by Governor Edward Eyre.[68] Those who were highly critical on Governor Eyre and sought to prosecute him on trial, gathered under the Jamaica Committee, included John Stuart Mill, Thomas Huxley, Herbert Spencer or Charles Darwin. At the other side of the controversy stood supporters of Eyre and his cruel repression of the rebellion, among which we might name Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, Charles Dickens, Alfred Lord Tennyson, Matthew Arnold or James Hunt (Fryar 178). Further contributions to racial politics in the Victorian period included suggestions by mid-Victorian scientists to bring slavery back to the West Indies – Benjamin Disraeli also suggested so obliquely in 1846 in Parliament (Fryar 173) – or more visceral responses as that of Charles Dickens, who ferociously called for the extermination of the Indian race after the Indian Mutiny.[69]

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[68]   Black Jamaicans had been fully emancipated after the abolition of slavery and the end of the Apprenticeship system in 1838. However, the widespread misery and poverty of black population under the planter class after years of drought, epidemics and crop failures and the persistent denial of civil, social and political rights for the ex-slaves led to a rising tension ending in violence, riots and arsons at Morant Bay in 1865. Governor Eyre mercilessly suppressed the rebellion, executing over 400 people, including the rebels as well as innocent children and women (Johnson, *British Imperialism* 103).

[69]   In a letter dated in October 1857, Charles Dickens wrote: "I wish I were Commander in Chief in India . . . I should do my utmost to exterminate the Race upon whom the stain of the late cruelties rested . . . to blot it out of mankind and raze it off the face of the Earth" (qtd in Joshi 49). In his

Abolitionists were obviously also participant in Victorian debates on race. In the transition from the eighteenth century to the Victorian era, with the founding of the Anti-Slavery Society in 1823 by William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson, Britain moved from being a remarkable slave-trading country to being the leading world nation in abolitionism. According to John Oldfield, between 1823 and the final abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833, British abolitionists sent over 5,000 petitions to Parliament, asking firstly for the improvement of conditions for slaves in the West Indies and later for the final abolition of the slave system (Oldfield 44). Throughout the nineteenth century, Oldfield argues, abolitionism became integrated in the fabric of Victorian politics and "inextricably linked to the morality and purpose of the Victorian Empire . . . absolving [Britons] of responsibility for slavery and, instead, highlighting the role that the British had played in bringing slavery to an end" (Olfield 56).

The overnight transition from a slave-trading nation to a country morally committed to abolitionism was not free from contradictions though. Together with the economic background and the decay of the sugar industry surrounding abolitionism and the implementation of Apprenticeship and indentureship, imperial historians highlight equally the role of black resistance: "in practice . . . it can be argued that slavery disappeared in England 'sometime between the 1760s and 1790s' not so much through the processes of law but as a consequence of the resistance and escape of the slaves themselves" (Holmes, *John Bull's* 9-10).

For all the aforementioned omnipresence of race in nineteenth-century scientific circles and Victorian public opinion, race as an explicit subject in Victorian fiction is

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biography of the Victorian author, Peter Ackroyd has sardonically remarked that "it is not often that a great novelist recommends genocide" (Ackroyd 799).

characterised by its obliqueness, peripherality or utter absence. Celia R. Daileader points out that "talking about race in the nineteenth-century Anglo-American canon often feels like navigating around a black hole . . . black characters are either simply not there at all, or so brutally abjected, demonized or stereotyped as to seem unworthy of intelligent critical comment" (Daileader 75). An evident exception is American abolitionist literature, which became immensely popular in Victorian England. British writers, unlike their American counterparts, could choose to ignore the topic of slavery and let Victorian readers consume avidly slave narratives by African Americans or abolitionist novels such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), the success of which stoked up Britain's self-image as the leading nation in abolitionism.

Neo-Victorian interventions into the traumatic and conflicting memory of the empire and race relations showcases that the genre

> honours the dead and silenced . . . especially in the way it textualises concerns with (mis)representations of the past, often revisiting and revising the position allocated to those who have been underrepresented, marginalised or dismissed by the dominant culture" (Arias, "Talking" 87).

In this sense, postcolonial neo-Victorianism evinces a commitment to "cultural memory work, including mourning, commemorative practices, and the construction of both public and private memory" (Kohlke, "Introduction" 9).

Postcolonial neo-Victorian novels have repeatedly portrayed the nineteenth century as an era deeply marked by racial inequalities, and this has contributed to an 'Othering' of the Victorians. Regarding this, Grace Moore has argued that

> there is something sinisterly akin to imperialism entangled in revisionism, in that the Victorians themselves are now being constructed as 'historical others'. The re-writing of the nineteenth-century novel involves an apportioning of blame, and implicit in any attack on prejudices that are identified with a specific historical era is the notion that the new critique is

somehow able to transcend its own context. By labelling racial, economic, gender, or any other form of discrimination 'Victorian' we deny its continued existence in our society" (Moore 140).

Contrary to Moore's reasoning, some of the neo-Victorian novels I analyse in this PhD thesis actually highlight the continuity of past (Victorian) forms of inequality in current forms of discrimination, balancing that 'apportioning of blame' by illustrating the similarity – rather than the estrangement – between the Victorian past and the present. Postcolonial neo-Victorian narrations provide fodder for engaging, following Kohlke, in "consolations of retrospectively 'liberating history' [that] translate into ethical and/or political engagement and action in our own time" (Kohlke, "Introduction" 10-11), such as underscoring the evident affinities between Victorian imperialism and the emergence of the United States as a global superpower after the Cold War, let alone their military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Postcolonial neo-Victorian narrations adopt the subaltern's perspective, filling in the gaps of cultural memory and the blind spots of history as well as restoring the agency of colonised collectives and their cultural practices. Barbara Chase-Riboud's neo-slave narrative *Hottentot Venus* (2003) is exemplary of the neo-Victorian take on the recovery of the subaltern's viewpoint. Set in the 1910s but extending to the mid-Victorian period and 2006, Chase-Riboud's biofiction records the life of the 'hottentot Venus' Saartjie or Sarah Baartman.[70] The novel counts among other fictional and non-fictional attempts to reconstruct Baartman's fragmented persona, whose

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[70]   Saartjie, or Sarah Baartman, was a South-African Khoikhoi woman who was taken to Europe under doubtful circumstances and was exhibited in freak shows all over Britain and France during the Napoleonic period. After her death in 1815, Sarah was dissected by the French anatomist Georges Cuvier, and her skeleton, brain and genitalia were exhibited in the Parisian Museum of Natural History well into the twentieth century, until she was finally expatriated to South Africa in 2002. Barbara Chase-Riboud's novel concurs with other non-fictional excavations into the historical Saartjie Baartman, such as Rachel Holmes's *The Hottentot Venus: The Life and Death of Saartjie Baartman: Born 1789 – Buried 2002* (2007) and Clifton Crais and Pamela Scully's *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus* (2009) or other creative engagements such as Elizabeth Alexander's *The Venus Hottentot: Poems* (1990) or Suzan-Lori Parks's play *Venus* (1996).

documentary evidence is limited to her baptism and death certificates, newspapers and caricatures advertising her freak shows and pseudo-scientific writings by nineteenth-century anatomists. As Suzanne Keen points out, postcolonial perspectives "are not served by the abandonment of truth and the jettisoning of facts, as they struggle to recover cultural practices and experiences of the past in danger of erasure or forgetting" (Keen 213).

In this spirit Chase-Riboud struggles to retrieve the persona and identity of Saartjie Baartman and her role as historical agent, imbuing her voice with resistance against the racist and sexist discourses that enabled her objectification and subjugation: "Just because I consent to this life doesn't mean I chose it… I'm not a slave… I'm a free woman" (Chase-Riboud 134). Chase-Riboud's creative attempt at reassembling the political agency and voice of silenced subjects, and in turn unearthing the underbelly of colonial history from the point of view of the oppressed, showcases the proficiency of postcolonial neo-Victorianism to outmanoeuvre the problematisation of the representation of the past, which has become the entrenched bulwark of postmodern thought.

Chase-Riboud's literary-historical reconstruction of Baartman's voice and subjectivity obviously raises concerns over the ethics and aesthetics of representation and 'speaking for' the racial Other. Marie-Luise Kohlke has argued that Chase-Riboud's novel "instrumentalises Baartman in the cause of postcolonial and feminist identity politics, restoring voice to the historically marginalised and oppressed through an act of ventriloquism, conducted under the pretence of Baartman speaking for herself" (Kohlke, "Biofiction" 6). Harsher still is Natasha Maria Gordon-Chipembere, who accuses Chase-Riboud of appropriating Baartman's voice

and body for an African American female agenda, ultimately "silenc[ing] her experience as Khoisan woman" and misunderstanding "the specific history of genocide embedded in Khoisan history" (Gordon-Chipembere 55).

Quite contrarily, I would argue that Chase-Riboud's narration, except for insurmountable language obstacles,[71] succeeds at rehabilitating the South African background and Khoekhoe culture of Baartman in the first section of the novel before her captivity, 'Early Life in South Africa,' via a careful reconstruction of Khoekhoe religion, values, mythology and pre-colonial cultural practices. Similarly, the novel excels at restoring the subjectivity of Baartman as well as her psychopathological dependency complex under the coercive apparatus of imperialism.[72] Considering that to our knowledge no surviving records or self-representations of Baartman exist – as Heilmann and Llewellyn claim, "the 'real' Baartman is largely a product of the imagination" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 121) – being too critical of neo-Victorian acts of ventriloquism for the dispossessed and the underrepresented would risk depriving historical fiction of its potential for illuminating shadowy spots in the past. This potential seems to tally with Chase-Riboud's attempt to imagine and recover the 'real' Baartman behind the cultural icon and imperial victim.

Chase-Riboud's *Hottentot Venus* also engages with the mid-Victorian scientific racism outlined above and proselytises the postcolonial view that nineteenth-century racial sciences were 'ahistorical,' in the sense that they did not consider the actual

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[71]   "I am speaking now in Khoe, my maternal language, a language white men have never mastered, a language complex and subtle enough to express anything I have to say in English or Dutch" (Chase-Riboud 13).

[72]   Baartman seems to exhibit a psychopathological dependency complex (Brantlinger, *Taming* 16) when she narrates how she is hung in a suspended cage as a wild animal and she is cheered and insulted by the audience: "Why I really endured it, I do not know. Just as I didn't know why I still remained inert and lifeless in my bath when the door to escape was open" (Chase-Riboud 9).

circumstances of non-British people and their assimilation into Victorian Britain. In Douglas Lorimer's wording, "the construction of a scientific discourse rested on the assumption that human beings, for Victorian anthropologists invariably the colonial Other, could be treated as natural objects situated in an ahistorical Nature constructed by the observers" (Lorimer 188). Rather than obtaining empirical knowledge on dark subjects, Victorian pseudo-sciences sought to confirm biased theories on non-white races formulated in advance (Bolt 110). This is illustrated in a fictional conversation between the sculptor Nicolas Tiedeman and Charles Darwin: "Why is it, Doctor, continued Master Tiedman, that white freaks are always exhibited as oddities, the exception that proves the rule, while black freaks, on the contrary, are exhibited as *typical* of their race?" (Chase-Riboud 302; original emphasis).

As the novel illustrates, early-nineteenth-century racial sciences often operated in highly unethical, violent and perverse ways. Baartman's self and body become a point of collision for concomitant discourses of race, sex, science and empire, aptly summarised by Heilmann and Llewellyn in their analysis of the novel.[73] The narration's most powerful and creative protest against nineteenth-century scientific, racial and sexual hierarchies is channelled through Sarah's ghostly voice during her autopsy and dissection by Dr. Cuvier. Highly charged with sexual, scopophilic and imperial undertones, Cuvier's speech while publicly dissecting and disembowelling Sarah's body reveals the brutally commodifying and dehumanising character of racial science, as Sarah's disembodied voice reveals:

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[73] Heilmann and Llewellyn identify seven interconnected contexts which co-exist in the persona of Baartman and the abuse to which she was subjected: "imperialism; ethnographic influences on cultural constructions of black women; scientific scopophilia and the pornographic gaze; racial categorizations; cultural practices of collection and exhibition; abolitionism; and the ethics underlying museum collections" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 121).

His hands probed deep into my uncharted cadaver while uttering the sighs of a man in the throes of overwhelming passion . . . My cadaver became the unexplored Africa, the Dark Continent, dissected, violated, probed, raped by dead white men since Roman times" (Chase-Riboud 281).

Charles Darwin's fictional 1860 visit to case number 33, exhibiting Sarah's skeleton and death mold, at the French Museum of Natural History, finally confirms the transition and enduring legacy of early-nineteenth-century scientific racism in the second half of the Victorian period.

Another remarkable neo-Victorian novel that addresses racial and imperial issues in the Victorian period is Belinda Starling's *The Journal of Dora Damage* (2007).[74] Among other concerns, this novel provides an interrogation of female abolitionism and Victorian Britain's role in the post-slavery period and the American Civil War as well as an engagement with the presence of African Americans in Victorian Britain – I tackle this latter point in detail in chapter 4. The novel deals with a Victorian lower-class woman, Dora, who must take up the family business, a bookbindery, because her husband suffers from rheumatism. Little by little Dora gets entangled in the sordid trade of binding Victorian racist pornography in the hands of a pseudo-scientific group called Les Sauvages Nobles, in which the pornographer Mr Diprose and the scientist Sir Jocelyn Knightley are its most infamous participants. To complicate the plot, Dora is obliged to take as an apprentice Din Nelson, a former slave fleeing the American Civil War, with whom she enters into an intimate relationship and who has been brought to Britain by Lady Knightley and her Ladies' Society for Fugitive Slaves. Lady Knightley's "charming nigger philanthropy" (Starling 105), as it is referred to derogatorily by Sir Knightley, conceals dark motives though:

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[74]   In what follows, as well as in my analysis of transatlantic abolitionism in chapter 4, I reproduce sections from my article on Belinda Starling's novel (Martín-González 192).

Sir Knightley's wife and her fellow female abolitionists sexually exploit freed slaves by compelling them to pose semi-nude in order to enact rape fantasies.

Starling's racy account of female abolitionism pinpoints the sexual innuendo which filtered, on the one hand, into nineteenth-century abolitionist writings and slave narratives, and on the other into the tales of white women raped by black slaves which circulated in the British press, illustrated by one of the volumes which Dora is set to bind in the workshop: "The Negro's Revenge. Young wife violated by Negro in revenge for cruelties by master" (Starling 204).[75] Regarding the former, as it has been argued, Victorian readers were familiar with slave narratives from African Americans, and these indeed depicted highly sexualised images of torture, flagellation, abuse and sadism. Colette Colligan puts it bluntly: "Information about the graphic violence and corrupt sexuality of the slave system produced sympathy and disgust among many British citizens, but for some it also elicited sexual arousal and fantasy" (Colligan 68). Lady Knightley's philanthropic work in the assistance of fugitive slaves, which takes on a veneer of respectability in her attendance to lectures by former American slaves, serves only to cloak her prurient gaze over the sordid aspects of American slavery and in broader terms, to underscore mid-Victorian thirst for titillation and sensationalist details of sex and violence in the American slave system which concerned the Victorian press.[76]

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[75]   The trope of the black male abusing the white female proves a problematic point in the novel. Starling's provocative portrayal of Lady Knightley's Society for Fugitive Slaves, in its re-enactment of rape fantasies, seems aimed at contesting tales of black males abusing white women which pervaded the Victorian press. The novel seems to provide in this sub-plot an exponent of what Celia R. Daileader has called *Othellophilia*, or the English myth about the black male's sexual rapacity which sought to perpetuate sexist and racist hegemonies (Daileader 1-8). However, as it is suggested by Caterina Novák, once it is revealed that Sir Knightley is of mixed parentage after his mother was raped by a black man in Algeria, the novel thwarts its critique on Victorian racism by suggesting that tales of violent black males abusing white women were actually true (Novák 132).

[76]   In *American Slaves in Victorian England* (2001), Audrey Fisch exemplifies the worries of the Victorian press over the 'sexsationalising' details in American slave narratives and African American

To further complicate the strained links between gender and racial discourses in the novel, Dora and Din initiate an intimate inter-racial love affair, letting their mutual attraction for each other run free. Failing to accomplish the one-year mourning period expected to be fulfilled by Victorian widows, Dora's sexual entanglement with Din clashes with the widespread Victorian abhorrence of miscegenation, as it is exhibited in Dora's shame right after they have sexually consummated their attraction (Starling 365). As Marie-Luise Kohlke points out, Starling's neo-Victorian novel illustrates in Dora and Din's relationship a remarkably under-represented topic in neo-Victorian literature, that of interracial love affairs (Kohlke, "Corporis" 198). Certainly, in the Victorian canon interracial couples were exhibited at their best by sidestepping the racial Otherness of one of the lovers – a mainstream example is Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) – and at their worst by utterly demonizing interracialism – as it is the case of Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* (1897).[77]

Nevertheless, some neo-Victorian scholars have taken Dora and Din's intimation as a target of criticism rather than as an attempt to re-inscribe interracialism in Victorian culture. In particular, Kohlke affirms that "Dora and Din's relationship proves one of the weak points of Starling's novel, inevitably recycling the black man/white woman fantasy it critiques" (Kohlke, "Corporis" 198), a criticism seemingly endorsed by Caterina Novák (132). In the novel Mr Diprose hints at the

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lecture tours in Britain in the persona of J.B Estlin, a white abolitionist from Bristol who refused to circulate Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* on grounds of English taste and protection over British young women until certain sexually explicit sections were omitted (Fisch 1-2). Fisch rightly indicates that Estlin's attempt to bowdlerise Douglass's *Narrative* seemed an idiosyncratic drive to maintain personal respectability and social values, in sharp contrast with the sensationalism which permeated Victorian reading habits in the mid-nineteenth century (Fisch 3).

[77]   In Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Heathcliff is repeatedly referred to as a 'gypsy' and the manifold 'blackening' references to his physical features indicate that he is definitely not white (Daileader 143-147). See H.L Malchow's *Gothic Images of Race in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (1996) for an overview of the 'contagion' overtones of Victorian perceptions on miscegenation, the demonisation and gothicisation of interracial relations in Victorian popular fiction and their resonance in the Victorian press (Malchow 168-171, 239-243).

arguable morbid nuances in Dora's infatuation with the ex-slave, as it is indicated in his disgusting teasing of the protagonist: "It is quite extraordinary, the number of seemingly respectable women who lose all sense of decorum at the smell of black meat . . . Is it true, then, Mrs Damage, what they say about the nether parts of monkeys?" (Starling 221). However, a closer scrutiny of Dora's relationship with "Dinjerous Din," as Din's fellow ex-slaves call him, reveals a more positive view on its function in the novel. Specifically I contend that it catalyses the female protagonist's feminist agenda, following Nadine Muller's telling affirmation that Dora's attainment of sexual pleasure with Din, in contrast with her sexless marriage, marks the female protagonist's disregard of the racist, sexist and sadomasochistic practices which are illustrated in the pornographic volumes she is compelled to bind every day (Muller 127).

In truth, on her first sexual encounter with Din (Starling 361), Dora tries unsuccessfully to reproduce what she has observed in Sir Knightley's pornographic books, failing to see that Victorian racist pornographic narratives are targeted simultaneously for the delectation of males and the subjugation of females and non-white Others rather than for female sexual pleasure. It is only when she lets her attraction for Din grow naturally, in their subsequent sexual encounters, that she truly acquires sexual knowledge: "I learnt more over those five days about the inner workings of our hearts and bodies that I had done in over a year of binding erotic texts" (Starling 371). Dora's sexual intimation with Din, therefore, marks the neo-Victorian heroine's sexual awakening but most importantly, her personal challenge to the sexual and racist discourses from which ironically she profits to feed her family. Far from being a weak point in the narration, Dora and Din's mutual affection for each other articulates their personal reaction against the sexual and racial strictures

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imposed upon them by Victorian society before they may embark on their personal/political projects: female liberation and a financially independent life in the case of Dora and in the case of Din, the emancipation of his race in the American Civil War.

3.3. The Neo-Victorian Maritime Novel: Maritime Culture and Globalisation in Neo-Victorianism

The previous section has addressed Victorian ideas of race and their representation in postcolonial engagements in neo-Victorian fiction, discussing key texts in the genre. As I discussed in the closing pages of section 2.1, postcolonial thought has been exhibiting symptoms of exhaustion due to its redundant dependence on postmodernism and post-structuralist theory. The growing dissatisfaction of postcolonialism's capacity to critique the material after-effects of colonialism has begotten a reorientation of postcolonial thought towards what seems to be today's most obvious legacy of colonialism and transoceanic exploits: capitalist globalisation. In the wake of recent critical initiatives to highlight the global reach both of Victorian and neo-Victorian studies, the rest of this section pursues a similar reorientation for the neo-Victorian novel. By situating the (neo)Victorian in its global and maritime dimension, I argue, the neo-Victorian genre may effectively get to grips with the material legacy of Victorian imperialism in current forms of global exploitation.

Miles Taylor has recently argued that, notwithstanding the developing of shipping technology and the increasing importance of ports such as London, Southampton or the ports of South Wales and their growing maritime connectivity to global trade during the Victorian age, "it remains a debatable point whether domestic awareness of empire actually deepened during the Victorian era" (Taylor 8). Nevertheless, a growing number of scholars in the last decade have been striving to

refashion Victorian literature as a sort of world literature deeply implicated in global channels of power, influence and reception and accordingly permeable to cultures outside the British nation.

A commendable attempt at reframing Victorian literature and culture within a global frame is that of Lauren Goodlad in what she calls the "Victorian geopolitical aesthetic" (Goodlad, "Cosmopolitanism" 399).[78] Through this notion, Goodlad calls for a "Victorianist cosmopolitan practice" which "in grasping the globalizing dynamics of the nineteenth century, illuminates the literature and culture of that era" (Goodlad, "Cosmopolitanism" 399). The purpose of such a practice

> would not (or not often) be to valorize Victorian geopolitics but, rather, to *recognize the nineteenth century as the precursor to our own globalizing moment*: the scene of multifarious world perspectives, democratic projects, heterogeneous publics, and transnational encounters (some recuperable for present-day ethics, a great many more worthy of illuminating historicization) (Goodlad, "Cosmopolitanism" 400; my emphasis).

Goodlad's call for globalising Victorian studies is crystallising apace and increasingly more critical works are paying heed to how transnational exchanges shaped Victorian literature.[79] These works spring from a meticulous attention to transnational and global forces and a conscious rejection of the nation-state as a

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[78]   Goodlad borrows her concept 'Victorian geopolitical aesthetic' from Fredric Jameson's analysis on contemporary world cinema *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (1992). Goodlad first devised her concept in her article "Cosmopolitanism's Actually Existing Beyond: Towards a Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic" (2010) to later pursue a book-length application of the term in *The Victorian Geopolitical Aesthetic: Realism, Sovereignty, and Transnational Experience* (2015).

[79]   For example: Julia Son-Joo Lee's monograph *The American Slave Narrative and the Victorian Novel* (2010) outlines the circulation, reception and influence of American slave narratives on the Victorian novel; Bruce Robbins's article "Victorian Cosmopolitanism, Interrupted" reads George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871) and Charles Dickens' *Dombey and Son* (1848) in the context of Britain's conflicts with Peru because of the former investment in Peruvian nitrate mines; or Priya Goshi's *In Another Country*: *Colonialism, Culture and the English Novel in India* (2002), that traces the origin of the contemporary Indian English novel back to the circulation and consumption of Victorian novels in nineteenth-century India.

coherent unit of analysis, in keeping with the spirit of Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (1993).

As neo-Victorianism has propagated outside Britain, with neo-Victorian works being produced by writers in countries both within the confines of the former Victorian Empire and beyond, it is logical that one of the latest debates within neo-Victorian criticism is the discussion of the genre's position within global contexts. That the scope and confines of neo-Victorianism as a genre are a contentious issue was already pointed out by Cora Kaplan in *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism* (2007), where she highlighted the potential of the genre to get involved "in a much wider, transnational as well as national debate, reaching beyond the boundaries of Britain's former empire" (Kaplan 162).[80] Since then, global uses of neo-Victorianism have become commonplace and reworkings of the Victorian era permeate contemporary cultures in non-Western and non-Anglophone spheres.

The global reach of the genre has become a pressing issue in neo-Victorian criticism, as is signalled by the publication of the special issue "Neo-Victorianism and Globalisation: Transnational Dissemination of Nineteenth-Century Cultural Texts" (2015) in the journal *Neo-Victorian Studies*. In their introduction to this special issue Antonija Primorac and Monika Pietrzak-Franger encourage neo-Victorian criticism to go beyond the Anglosphere and the borders of the former British Empire. Crediting Elizabeth Ho's *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of the Empire* (2012) – that I will discuss in what follows – as a postcolonial corrective to the Anglocentricity of neo-Victorian criticism, Primorac and Pietrzak-Franger point out the limited critical

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[80] Kaplan's own contribution to foreground that transnational and global debate is provided in chapter 4, which analyses Jane Campion's film *The Piano* (1993) as a prominent exponent of "global Victoriana" (Kaplan 10).

engagement of neo-Victorianism in its global dimension and demand the necessity to "embrace the plurality of attitudes, contexts and mindsets from which the long nineteenth century and its neo-Victorian incarnations can be viewed" (Primorac and Pietrzak-Franger 4).

Nevertheless, some scholars have frowned upon contemporary global engagements with Victorian literature and culture that are occurring beyond the borders of the former British Empire. For example, Mark Llewellyn and Ann Heilmann have expressed their concerns over the potentially colonising bent of global neo-Victorianism. They argue that "the replacement – or displacement – of the term 'neo-Victorianism' into international and global contexts is not without its own perils, suggesting as it does an overarching narrative that erases the specificities of cultural memory and inculcates a homogenisation of heritage (Llewellyn and Heilmann 26). Understandably, neo-Victorianism in its global incarnations runs the risk of becoming a blanket narrative that may potentially subsume every creative work around the globe engaging with the nineteenth century. A similar but more categorical claim is provided by Jessica Cox, who affirms unambiguously that "those works which deal exclusively with the history of countries and cultures beyond the Victorian must remain outside the neo-Victorian genre . . . to acknowledge the existence of global and cultural traditions *beyond* the Victorian, and to avoid neo-imperialistic claims of belonging" (Cox 123; original emphasis). The reasonable mistrust over the deployment of the term 'neo-Victorianism' in global contexts beyond the reach of the British Empire, which is informed by the debatable position of the genre in world fictions, is in tune with postcolonial thinkers' scepticism about global literatures. Regenia Gagnier tellingly points out that

a position often expressed by postcolonial critics is that world literature as a field tends to universalise and depoliticise literatures: its homogenising processes are rooted in the encyclopaedic ambitions and evolutionary models of nineteenth-century thought; it distorts the uniqueness of the objects compared, reducing them to variants on a common standard; it relies on a devaluing of certain cultures in relation to others (Gagnier 7).

This PhD thesis should not be seen as implicated in the problematics of the global reach of neo-Victorianism since the primary texts under analysis still feature Victorian Britain as an obvious referent or are deeply engaged in representing Victorian imperialism within the boundaries of the British Empire. Nevertheless, it is worth wondering, Simon Joyce points out, "to what extent . . . a label like "Victorian" [is] applicable to the present or past subjects of colonial rule" (Joyce 166). Marie-Luise Kohlke indicates that the term 'neo-Victorian' may involve ethical questions when applied to postcolonial or subaltern literatures but she concedes that "such terminological tensions catalyse rather than curtail crucial debates about cultural memory and forgetting" (Kohlke, "Mining" 26). In keeping with Kohlke's concession, I am supportive of keeping the term 'neo-Victorian' in postcolonial novels as long as the works purposefully engage in representations of the British Empire or lay claim to deconstructing the legacy and memory of Victorian colonial rule.

Beside the 2015 special issue in *Neo-Victorian Studies* aforementioned, Elizabeth Ho's *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of the Empire* (2012) is the only sustained study of postcolonial neo-Victorianism in its global dimension to date. Ho's monograph is concerned with an "ever-growing number of neo-Victorian texts produced within and without the West concerned, however ambivalently, with the aftermath of the empire and its reappearance in processes of globalization" (Ho 5). Ho gathers under the critical scope of her monograph already familiar and widely-discussed neo-Victorian texts such as Alan Moore's serialised graphic novel *From*

Hell (1988-98), Peter Carey's *Jack Maggs* (1997) and Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996), but she also pushes against the boundaries of the genre to include Jackie Chan's neo-Victorian films *Project A* (1984), *Shangai Noon* (2001) and *Shangai Knights* (2003) and their negotiation of neo-colonial anxieties in Hong Kong[81] or Otomo Katsuhiro's anime film *Steamboy* (2004) in the context of steampunk.

Together with her attempt at developing neo-Victorianism's process of canonisation towards more popular forms, the virtues of Ho's monograph lie on its convincing arguments to make sense of the motives of postcolonial authors who lay claim to the neo-Victorian. For Ho, "neo-Victorianism offers those situated in various postcolonial moments and specific locations a powerful conceptual and aesthetic vocabulary for exploring the past – which, in turn, offers ways of coping with the temporal palimpsests of the present" (Ho 6). The purchase of the neo-Victorian in postcolonial literatures should not be seen therefore as a problematic association since "neo-Victorianism allows for the creative and critical juxtaposition of imperialism in the past with neo-imperialist formations in play in a supposedly postcolonial present" (Ho 171).

Nevertheless, the aspect of Elizabeth Ho's *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of the Empire* (2012) which most concerns this PhD thesis is her final chapter dealing

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[81]   Hong Kong holds a particular position in the history of British imperialism since the hand-over of the island from the British government to China marked the official end of the British Empire in 1997, after both countries made effective the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984. Up to this point Hong Kong has been developing as a truly global city. As the sovereignty of Hong Kong has been passed from a Western power to an Eastern one, and as Hong Kong people have developed an identity that differs significantly from mainland Chinese inhabitants, Ackbar Abbas points out that "we may expect to find a situation that is quasi-colonial, but with an important historical twist: the colonized state, while politically subordinate, is in many other crucial respects *not* in a dependent subaltern position but is in fact more advanced—in terms of education, technology, access to international networks, and so forth—than the colonizing state" (Abbas 5-6).

with maritime perspectives in neo-Victorianism (Ho 171-201).[82] Ho's delving into the 'neo-Victorian-at-sea',[83] out of a scrutiny of texts such as Andrea Barrett's *The Voyage of the Narwhal* (1998), Matthew Kneale's *English Passengers* (2000), or Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008), privileges the sea crossing both as a metaphorical and actual space of globalisation, "forcing us to rethink even further the usual structures of centre and periphery that mark most postcolonial fiction" (Ho 174). This PhD thesis resumes Ho's refocusing of the neo-Victorian on sea crossings to participate in the transnational perspectives on neo-Victorianism discussed so far and ascertain what can be gained from analysing neo-Victorianism from a maritime perspective.

The works selected by Ho in her brief analysis of the neo-Victorian-at-sea – focusing particularly on Matthew Kneale's *English Passengers* (2000), Andrea Barret's *The Voyage of the Narwhal* (1998) and Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008) – are just a small representation of a growing corpus of neo-Victorian novels which showcase maritime settings. Besides the primary works selected for analysis in this PhD thesis, novels that fit the description of what I term the neo-Victorian maritime novel include Timothy Mo's *An Insular Possession* (1986), Joseph O'Connor's *The Star of the Sea* (2004), Peter Behrens's *The Law of Dreams* (2006), Harry Thompson's *This Thing of Darkness* (2006), Nathaniel Philbrick's *In the Heart of the Sea* (2005), Carsten Jensen's *We, the Drowned* (2011), Shahida Rahman's *Lascar* (2012), Sarah Stovell's *The Night Flower* (2013) or Valerie Martin's *The Ghost of the Mary Celeste* (2014). In this PhD thesis I aim at pushing beyond Ho's neo-

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[82]   This final chapter, entitled "The Neo-Victorian-at-Sea: Toward a Global Memory of the Victorian," was republished under the same title in Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss's edited volume *Neo-Victorian Literature and Culture: Immersions and Revisitations* (2014).

[83]   From this point on, I use Ho's phrase 'neo-Victorian-at-sea' without inverted commas.

Victorian-at-sea by signalling the neo-Victorian maritime novel as an emerging sub-genre of contemporary historical fiction. My contribution goes beyond Ho's neo-Victorian-at-sea by situating the neo-Victorian maritime novel in sustained and balanced intersection with postcolonial thought, neo-Victorianism and maritime criticism in order to delineate the aesthetic and socio-political contours of the sub-genre and lay the groundwork for further follow-up inquiry.

One of my main contentions is that the sea might feature as a place where the colonising and homogenising drives of global neo-Victorianism referred to by Llewellyn and Heilmann above can be circumvented. In opposition to their concerns and some postcolonial critics' mistrust over world literatures, I argue that the sea features as a fluid territory where the global and the local can co-exist and feed on each other. In particular, I attest that the ocean is a liminal space suited to resist and liquefy a double-driven strain: that of the colonising bent of global neo-Victorianism, on the one hand, and on the other, that of nationalist accounts of Victorian history which tend to expurgate the infiltration of the foreign or migrant element. In other words, the neo-Victorian-at-sea dissolves the terracentrism associated with conventional neo-Victorian novels and promotes the adoption of a transnational approach to Victorian history and culture.

Gabaccia and Horder claim that the nineteenth century is the

great era of nation-building worldwide . . . nations and nation-states emerged within a context of sweeping and sizeable migrations rather than in their absence and they emerged in the context of a global plantation belt, global mining investments, and global searches for raw materials (Gabaccia and Horder 7).

In light of this, the neo-Victorian-at-sea seems appropriate for problematizing and questioning notions of the nation then and today. After all, Miles Taylor claims,

"between the defeat of Napoleon and the partition of Africa, it is the sea that stands out as the connecting thread of the British Empire" (Taylor 11).

Early nineteenth-century and Victorian fiction exhibited a certain investment in highlighting the connections between maritime economy and trade and British domestic bourgeois life. For example, John Peck illustrates the transactions between the seafaring world and British domestic life in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814): the Bertram family, Fanny's relations, have interests in the West Indies and Fanny's brother is in the Royal Navy, which means that the maritime world shapes the domestic life in Austen's narration (Peck 3). Similarly, in Austen's *Persuasion* (1818), the Royal Navy is portrayed as a means of male social mobility, as Captain Frederick Wentworth comes back rich and with a respectable social rank from a seven-year naval service in the Napoleonic Wars – and seems now a better match for the female protagonist Anne Elliot after an early frustrated engagement. A mid-Victorian example is Elizabeth Gaskell's *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863), which is concerned with the press gang, littoral life, and the emergence of the middle-classes out of maritime trade (Peck 133-134).

Victorian works more explicitly focused on the sea, such as the fictions of Joseph Conrad, Frederick Marryat or William Clark Russell, similarly broach the interrelations between British domestic life and the maritime experience, although their main interest resides on making sense of Britain's global stance at the time, exhibiting "an awareness of the emergence of a global cultural, social and economic space" and a drive to "'cognitively map' an emerging global reality" (Wegner 247). The following extract from Frederick Marryat's *Mr Midshipman Easy* (1836) illustrates

this cognitive mapping of the ocean as a global locus and the social construction of the ocean as a territory beyond nationalist sovereignty that I outlined in section 2.2.:

> Although the whole earth has been so nefariously divided among the few . . . the waters at least are the property of all. No man claims his share of the sea –every one may there plough as he pleases, without being taken up for a trespasser. Even war makes no difference; every one may go on as he pleases, and if they meet, it is nothing but a neutral ground on which the parties contend. It is, then, only upon the ocean that [it is] likely to find that equality and rights of man, which we are so anxious to establish on shore (Marryat 44).

Marryat's vision of the sea as 'the property of all' brings to the fore the multi-ethnic and cosmopolitan configuration of shipboard communities that I discussed above. William Clark Russell's nautical novel *John Holdsworth* (1895) explicitly alludes to such multicultural configuration when the narrator describes the crew: "It was a queer sight to see their busy figures in the twilight of the forecastle – here the black face of a negro; there the broad features of a Dutchman; here a mulatto; there a lantern-jawed Yankee...They were most of them friends already" (Russell 21). Bonds of solidarity and hospitality among sailors of different ethnicities predictably surface in times of peril at sea. Before the sinking of the ship the captain in Russell's *John Holdsworth* addresses his sailors, stating "you are most of you Englishmen, and those who are not are all brave fellows, and no man can be better than that, let him hail from what port he may" (Russell 76). Similarly in Joseph Conrad's "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'" sailors of the titular vessel risk their lives as they descend down the sinking 'Narcissus' to save James Wait, the black sailor of the title who is dying from tuberculosis.

As can be inferred, the maritime worlds created by Victorian nautical novelists were built around strong notions of masculinity. Victorian maritime fiction was certainly almost exclusively male-oriented and male-impersonated. As John Peck

argues, "the masculine culture of the ship, business and war is set against the feminine-influenced values that dominate domestic life" (Peck 5-6) and there exist numerous sea shanties and sailors' memories alerting seamen of the bad luck brought about by bringing women on board (Pearson 695).[84] This deliberate absence of women in narrations of the sea is being challenged by maritime historiography. For example, Margaret S. Creighton and Lisa Norling's edited volume *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World. 1700-1920* (1996) provides evidence of female pirates, cross-dressed sea captains, or captains' wives on board whaling ships, challenging the received notion that the maritime experience was an exclusively male domain.[85]

As I outline in my analysis of Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy, neo-Victorian fiction is also modulating this trend and increasingly more neo-Victorian works have been portraying the experiences of female characters at sea. Barbara Chase-Riboud's *Hottentot Venus* records Sarah Baartman's voyage from South-Africa to London aboard *HMS Exeter*, in which she befriends some black sailors against white passengers' rejection (Chase-Riboud 74), or the protagonist expresses the impact of the sea voyage upon her psyche during a storm between the Cape of Good Hope and St. Helena in a language that is reminiscent of the sublime (Chase-Riboud 76-78). In a particularly evocative section, Sara stands on the storm-battered deck imagining the storm's voice and its indifference to racial differences: "Drenched on deck, I listened to the storm's voice . . . want to leave the Cape of Storms? it seemed

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[84] It is quite significant that William Clark Russell, considered the greatest nautical novelist in the mid-Victorian era and admired by Oscar Wilde, Arthur Conan Doyle and Herman Melville, used female pseudonyms when he tried his hand at writing sensation fiction (Nash 2-4), being the sensation novel conventionally associated with a female readership at the time.

[85] See also Ulrike Klausman, Marion Meinzerin and Gabriel Kuhn's *Women Pirates and the Politics of the Jolly Roger* (1997) and Vanessa Smith's chapter "Costume Changes: Passing at Sea and on the Beach" in Klein and Mackenthun's volume *Sea Changes: Historicizing the Ocean* (2004).

to say . . . You will have to get past me. For I rule here, not white men. The sea is mine and no man, white or black, can outrun me or outstare me" (Chase-Riboud 76).

Female sea migrancy during the Victorian period also features in Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996). Atwood's novel is a fictionalisation of the life of Grace Marks and the murders of Thomas Kinnear and his housekeeper and mistress Nancy Montgomery in 1843 Upper Canada. Two servants, Grace Marks and James McDermott, were declared guilty for the crime and sentenced to hanging and life imprisonment respectively. Atwood's novel depicts, in the form of a patchwork style which combines Marks's unreliable first-person voice with newspaper articles, poems and other characters' perspectives, the life of Grace Marks since her sea crossing from Ireland. Set in the years preceding the Irish Famine, Marks's narration exhibits the interstitial position of her identity, being Irish but, as she states, "our family were Protestants, and that is different" (Atwood 103).[86] Neither English nor fully (Catholic) Irish, Marks' identity is played out during her voyage from the misery of Northern Ireland to Upper Canada. Atwood's account of Marks' transatlantic voyage, which illustrates what scholars have recently termed the 'Green Atlantic,'[87] evinces the flattening and reconfiguration of cultural differences at sea that I outlined above:

> The passengers were Catholic and Protestant mixed, with some English and Scots come over from Liverpool thrown into the bargain . . .Those who would cheerfully have cut each other's throats on land, were often to be seen holding each other's heads . . . I have sometimes noted the same thing in prison, as necessity does make strange bedfellows. A sea voyage and a prison may be God's reminder to us that we are all flesh (Atwood 117).

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[86]   The Irish Potato Famine – or Great Hunger – was a period of starvation and misery in Ireland between 1845 and 1851. In the mid-Victorian period, Irish peasant farmers were heavily dependent on potato crops for their daily diet. When the crop failed in 1845 with devastating effects, Irish peasants faced the prospect of emigrating or starving (Hollet 11).

[87]   Obviously set against and in relation to Paul Gilroy's 'Black Atlantic', the Green Atlantic seeks to incorporate narrations and memories of transatlantic Irish crossings into the dialogues and critical debates of transatlantic exchanges in Atlantic studies. See Peter D. O'Neill and David Lloyd's edited volume *The Black and Green Atlantic: Cross-Currents of the African and Irish Diasporas* (2009).

If the neo-Victorian maritime novel is reconstructing female perspectives of the sea, so it is doing with the viewpoint of the colonised and the oppressed. As I have already stated, Victorian maritime fiction did illustrate the multicultural character of ship crews and did replay and often transform land-locked race relations. Nevertheless, as Siobhan Carroll has recently pointed out in *An Empire of Air and Water: Uncolonizable Space in the British Imagination, 1750-1850* (2015), Victorian maritime novels did *not* speak "from the perspective of exploited colonial peoples but from the perspective of an alienated community of imperial labor formed in the black space between imperial center and colonial periphery" (Carroll, *Empire* 76).[88] Accordingly, another aspect of Victorian maritime novels which is modulated by their neo-Victorian counterparts is the inclusion of the perspective of the colonised and their engagement in denouncing imperial violence and oppression from a postcolonial point of view.

Matthew Kneale's *English Passengers* (2000) provides an example of the neo-Victorian-at-sea deeply concerned with racism, the viewpoint of the colonised and the devastating effects of Victorian imperialism. Ambitiously narrated by over twenty first-person narrators – including scientists, Tasmanian aborigines, governors, sailors, reverends, or Tasmanian white settlers – the novel unfolds in two parallel narrations in two different time frames, set in the 1820s and 1850s respectively. The narration

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[88]   This claim resonates with sustained perspectives in maritime criticism from Marxist points of view. Increasingly more scholars are considering nineteenth-century seafarers, in their cooperation, struggle and collective resistance, as the genesis of the international working class. Philip E. Steinberg follows Marcus Rediker in affirming that "late mercantilist-era sailors established many of the norms and solidarities that went on to characterize the industrial capitalist-era proletariat" (Steinberg, *Social* 191) and in turn "early twentieth-century anarcho-syndicalists . . . saw in the international sailing class the roots of a new, non-nation-state-based social order created first on sea and then on land" (Steinberg, *Social* 197). Additionally it is worth pointing out that black sailors incorporated their strategies of slave resistance to modern wage labour resistance (Cobley 161).

opens in 1857 with the happenings leading up to the departure of the *Sincerity*, a ship bound for Tasmania – at the time known as Van Diemen's Land – on a scientific and religious expedition, to move back to 1820s Tasmania. The early nineteenth-century narration is told, among other minor narrators, through Peevay, a mixed-breed Tasmanian product of his Aborigine mother being raped by a white settler, who recounts the destructive effects of the white settlers on his people and the Aborigines' plight to adapt to the cultural changes imposed upon them. As the *Sincerity* arrives in Tasmania, the two narrations collide for the conclusion as the Tasmanian Aborigines are facing their imminent extinction.

The titular passengers in the *Sincerity* showcase a construction of the ship as a vector for the projection of power and the procurement of scientific knowledge. Reverend Geoffrey Wilson is an Anglican priest who, deluded by mystical visions and Religious fanaticism, hires the ship to find the Garden of Eden, which he is convinced is somewhere in the island of Tasmania. To this expedition joins the equally fanatic Dr. Thomas Potter – a character modelled on Robert Knox – who expects to find scientific evidence among the Tasmanian Aborigines for his racist theories. Both Wilson and Potter are surrogates of British imperialism, representing religion and science respectively as instruments legitimising the British imperial project.

Nevertheless, the *Sincerity* also illustrates a more subversive perspective of transoceanic exchanges, as is illustrated by its Manx captain Illiam Quillian Kewley and his crew. The Manx crew have fitted their ship to make it double hulled, the space in between the two hulls devoted to smuggle tobacco and brandy. In order to dupe British Customs officials, the room allocating the trapdoors to the illegal cargo are decorated with prints of Queen Victoria and her family, together with two busts of

the English monarch and Prince Albert. This fake display of British nationalism comically contrasts with Kewley and his Manx crew's disdain for "interfering English politicians" (Kneale 2) and English people in general. Laughing at a damaged wet English rifle, Kewley mocks the whole imperial project:

> Day and night . . . Englishmen go boasting about how clever they are with their steel and railways and ships that they're saying the whole world wants to have, and now it turned out their rifles couldn't even take a little wet. Did they expect everyone to go fighting Russians and hunting tigers only in fine sunny weather? Truly, it was a miracle to me how they'd ever managed to conquer half the world like they had (Kneale 413).

Kneale's satirical portrayal of Kewley and his crew from the Isle of Man – still today a self-governing Crown Dependency with significant control over its own affairs – mobilises and liquefies stable conceptions of the nation, turning the deck of the *Sincerity* into a whirlpool for competing versions of Britishness. It is revealing, John Glendening points out, that "Kewley characterizes the empire, along with other flawed indices of national greatness, as English rather than British; it appears that as a Manxman he feels too much connection with the Celtic portions of Britain to include them. He reserves his disgust for the English" (Glendening 91-92). Kewley's dislike for the English appears justified when he learns about the "purest gibberish" (Kneale 442) of Dr. Potter's racial theories, that qualify "the Celtic Type (instance: Manx)" as "altogether inferior in physique to the Saxon, being smaller, darker . . . lacking in strength . . . of inferior intelligence" (Kneale 119). Similarly, it seems no coincidence that on the *Sincerity*'s arrival in Cape Colony, Kewley expresses his pity and compassion for Africans and Indians and how they are mistreated by English and Dutch settlers (Kneale 172).

As the previous brief analysis of Mathew Kneale's *English Passengers* demonstrates, the neo-Victorian maritime novel unmoors competing and often

silenced visions of the globe. The protagonists criss-crossing the oceans and populating the ships under analysis in this thesis are the dispossessed, the subaltern, the victims of Victorian colonial oppression who made sense of their identities out of their global geopolitical awareness and had their own and singular cosmopolitan views of an unfolding globalisation. In this sense, the neo-Victorian maritime novel is recording, I argue, the changing notions of cosmopolitanism that are being put forward in global studies. Bruce Robbins claims in his introduction to *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (1998) that

> Cosmopolitanism has often seemed to claim universality by virtue of its independence, its detachment from the bonds, commitments, and affiliations that constrain ordinary nation-bound lives. It has seemed to be a luxuriously free-floating view from above. But many voices now insist . . . that *the term should be extended to transnational experiences that are particular rather than universal and that are unprivileged – indeed, often coerced* (Robbins, "Introduction" 1; my emphasis).

Robbins has also suggested elsewhere that "the old wisdom on the subject would suggest that the great century of cosmopolitanism is the eighteenth, while the nineteenth century on the contrary sees an exponential growth in nationalism and racism" (Robbins, "Victorian" 422). In contrast to the aloof and abstract conception of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism, I argue that neo-Victorian maritime novels unearth a concrete and "actually existing cosmopolitanism" (Robbins, "Introduction" 3), that belonging to nineteenth-century migrants, lascars, South-Asian indentured labourers, runaway African American slaves, all of whom forged and configured their cosmopolitan identities in an emerging global world, even if their cosmopolitanisms were *coerced*, *unprivileged* and against their will.

The analysis of the maritime neo-Victorian novel that I set about to articulate now is useful in ensuring "the vitality of a cosmopolitan ethico-political project as in providing a richer history of globalization's Victorian antecedents" (Goodlad,

"Trollopian" 438). The ensuing analysis may demonstrate that maritime perspectives of postcolonial neo-Victorianism can provide a fecund ground for underscoring Meghnad Desai's claim that "globalisation is a phase of capitalism, but not so much a new phenomenon as a revival or resumption of a similar phase in the late 19th century" (Desai, "Globalisation" 16). Out of the cosmopolitan viewpoints expressed by the transoceanic exchanges narrated in the novels under analysis, I expect to mobilise ideas of the nation, signalling the (neo)Victorian waterworlds and maritime routes as the inception of capitalist globalisation and re-orienting contemporary political actions towards the unfair legacies of colonialism in the neo-liberal present.

4. 'Black America's Romance with Victorian Britain': African Americans in Neo-Victorian Narratives of the Atlantic

John M. Picker has recently pointed out that transatlantic studies, albeit very often focused on the mid-nineteenth century, generally lack any involvement in Victorian studies (Picker 595). Notwithstanding that this is symptomatic of the counter-nationalistic drive which characterises maritime perspectives on history, culture and literature, a growing body of scholarship is tackling the intersections between transatlanticism and Victorianism, no doubt inspired by Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*. Works such as Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina's edited volume *Black Victorians, Black Victoriana* (2003), Vanessa D. Dickerson's *Dark Victorians* (2008) and Julia Sun-Joo Lee's *The American Slave Narrative and the Victorian Novel* (2010) in particular, while tentatively delineating "what forms a Victorian transatlanticism would take" (Picker 595), address the ways in which blacks around the Atlantic and Victorian Britons engaged with each other. Whereas Dickerson's and Lee's respective volumes are very much targeted at the engagements between African Americans and Victorian Britain, Gerzina's edited collection adopts a wider focus around the Atlantic world to trace the lives of black individuals in Victorian Britain.

These works and their interest in unearthing the subjectivities of black subjects in Victorian Britain can be considered part of a wider 'Afroeuropean' project that seeks to analyse black culture and identity in the European territory, with a view to provide a more diverse and hybrid perspective on Europe. This nascent field of Afroeuropean studies aims therefore at hybridising our European cultural memory, establishing as a basic premise that Europe has been a multicultural territory from the very beginnings of Western civilisation, despite the fact that traditionally the presence of African, Latin American or Caribbean subjects has been effaced from the

European imagination.[89] This line of thought informs this chapter, which focuses on the transatlantic interactions between African Americans and Victorian Britain and the cultural transactions between them, and seeks to reinforce cultural historians' efforts to bring black subjects back to the historical record.

Vanessa D. Dickerson has appealingly referred to "black America's romance with Victorian Britain" (Dickerson 4) as a catchphrase to illustrate the way in which African Americans extolled Victorian Britain as a model of democracy, respectability and freedom, the very values of citizenship that they were denied by the American Slave system. Simon Gikandi goes further in identifying a 'Black Victorianism' or an 'Afro-Victorian discourse' in nineteenth-century blacks living in Victorian Britain and in the Americas, who transformed "colonial Victorianism into a discourse of their own liberation from imperialism" (Gikandi 168). These transatlantic perspectives between Victorian Britain and Black America, which crystallised in African Americans' involvement in Victorian labour movement and Chartist radicalism, illuminates the Atlantic as an arena of cross-cultural fertilisation, suggesting that "'a real or fabricated Africanist presence' played a role in the construction of Englishness" (DeVere Brody 11).

This chapter delves into neo-Victorian narrations of the Atlantic that retrieve oceanic transactions between African Americans and Victorian Britain and Ireland in the context of crucial historical events in the nineteenth century, namely the American Civil War and the Irish Famine. I seek to analyse the neo-Victorian-at-sea,

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89   A salient project which is worth mentioning is "Afroeuropeans: Black Identities and Cultures in Europe", an international project and research group directed by Marta Sofía López Rodríguez (Universidad de León) funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Technology. The launching of the online journal *Afroeuropa: Journal of Afroeuropean Studies* in 2007, associated to the previous project and edited by both national and international scholars, attests for the increasing importance of the field.

specifically Nora Hague's *Letters from an Age of Reason* (2001) and Colum McCann's *TransAtlantic* (2013), as participant in the memory of the Black Atlantic, analysing the subaltern protagonists' diasporic consciousness in terms of their transnational relation to Victorian culture and the globe.

4.1. Nora Hague's *Letters from an Age of Reason* (2001)

Nora Hague's neo-Victorian novel *Letters from an Age of Reason* (2001) has been largely under-read in literary criticism. Despite the rich variety of topics which the narration touches upon, including gender and sexuality, migration, spiritualism or interracialism, the novel has been largely ignored by scholars, including those within neo-Victorian criticism. Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn make a brief reference to the novel in their work *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century*; they acknowledge Nora Hague's effort in researching the period but they also point out the author's arguable failure to create believable characters (Heilmann and Llewellyn 248). I argue instead that the novel provides a stimulating study of the migratory subject in the Atlantic matrix during the nineteenth century and a productive engagement with the non-nationalist cultural model provided in Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*. Indeed Hague's novel fully embraces the maritime connectivity that characterised the nineteenth-century Atlantic world. The narration, told in epistolary and diary form and set alternately in New York, New Orleans, London and Aix-in-Provence, is split into two narrative voices matching the two star-crossed protagonists. The female protagonist, Arabella Leeds, is the young spirited daughter of a wealthy New York family with British lineage, who, in the concealed entries of her diary, reveals her sexual awakening and her drives to defy conventions, in stark contrast to Victorian constraints on the female gender. The male protagonist, Aubrey Bennet, is the light-skinned house slave of the Paxtons, a family with French

ancestry settled in New Orleans. Through letters aimed at her grandmother, Aubrey unveils how his privileged position over the other servants is shattered when the American Civil war breaks out. Arabella's and Aubrey's narratives collide as their encounter in Victorian London and their subsequent mutual attraction challenge Victorian notions on gender and race.

Whereas Arabella's narration is ripe for illustrating widely discussed topics in neo-Victorian criticism, such as gender, feminism and sexuality, Aubrey's tale encapsulates the fluidity of racial demarcations in the nineteenth-century Atlantic world. Aubrey's light skin and indulged position over the rest of the servants in the Paxton house, together with his suspicions that Mr Paxton, his master, might also be his father and his unconventional upbringing as a sort of foster-brother to Paxton's children, Thomas and Louella, have prompted him to develop an internalised racism against the black race:

> It was obvious to me that my life resembled the Paxtons' because I myself resembled the Paxtons: straight-haired, fine-boned, white-skinned, and light-eyed. I never felt any of myself . . . reflected in the dusky color and incomprehensible speech of the typical house Negroes, not to mention that of the bestial and barbaric field niggers (Hague 44).

When the American Civil War breaks out, Aubrey's illusion shatters and he feels compelled to renegotiate his identity. After getting his emancipation papers and achieving civilian status, Aubrey moves to the unblockaded North to arrive in New York, where he gets a passage as a cook's assistant in the *HMS Artemis*, a steamer vessel heading for Victorian Britain. What truly transpires out of the transatlantic context of the novel is the potential of the transoceanic journey to counteract the protagonist's colonised mind and his rigid conception of racial boundaries. The multicultural character of the Atlantic world is soon revealed as Aubrey is joined in the *Artemis* by Sven Oha (Norway), Ibrahim (Ghana), Aurelio (Spain) together with

Irishmen and other Americans among the bottom-ranking crew. It is Ibrahim with whom Aubrey's reticence to engage in personal acquaintances with black individuals and his deep-seated psychological anxiety regarding his own racial identity begin to dissolve:

> Closest to us were a Negro so dark he appeared almost blue, and a swarthy, shorter man speaking in what I recognized as Spanish. . . I've had little desire to make the acquaintance of the few Negroes I have observed in New York, but the one behind us had an exotic air which piqued my curiosity' (Hague 291).

The *Artemis* illustrates "the rhizomorphic, fractal structure of the transcultural, international formation" of the Black Atlantic (Gilroy, *Black* 4) and features as a portable oceanic "contact zone", Mary Louise Pratt's term for "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (Pratt 584).

Aubrey's miserable feelings of belonging "nowhere and to no one" (Hague 302) embody the strife generated by the *double consciousness* which afflicts subaltern groups within an oppressive ethnocentric society. W.E.B. Du Bois coined the concept of double consciousness in his sociological work about African American identity *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) and the term plays a role of enormous importance in Gilroy's articulation of black Atlantic identities in *The Black Atlantic*. For Du Bois, African Americans must continually rework their identities in terms of them being both *Black* and *American*, two identities which racist discourses seek to present as mutually incompatible:

> From the double life every American Negro must live, as a Negro and as an American . . . from this must arise a painful self-consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality and a moral hesistancy [sic] which is fatal to self-confidence . . . Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretence or to revolt, to hypocrisy or to radicalism (Du Bois 151-152).

This double consciousness, "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (Du Bois 5) matches Aubrey's feeling of homelessness, that seems to shout at him that, as an African American, he does not belong either to America or to Africa.

Aubrey's troubled psyche is opposed to Ibrahim, a free Muslim black who celebrates maritime nomadism as his lifestyle: "I am never any man's slave. I am a free man, from I leave Africa to this day . . . I left Africa at twenty yeards" (Hague 305). For Aubrey, who has never met any African black and becomes curious about Muslim practices when he observes Ibrahim performing his ritual water purification (Hague 302), the ship and the maritime routes towards Victorian Britain feature as a space enabling nineteenth-century black connectivity and Pan-Africanism, joining black individuals from different cultures across nations to create a Pan-Atlantic discourse of liberation.

The Pan-African collusion between Aubrey and Ibrahim illustrates more broadly the fluid negotiation between the local and the global which characterises oceanic encounters and which I referred to in section 2.2. In this light, black maritime connectivity as constructed by Hague's novel correlates with a capital corollary in the postcolonial agenda, namely that imperial discourses dismissively reduced local colonial cultures to ahistorical categories in order to satisfy metropolitan interests and therefore postcolonial memory work must necessarily reconstitute local colonial histories and differences. Additionally, these fluid transactions between the local and the global which inhere within maritime connectivity project the very core of diasporic identities, which are "*at once local and global . . . networks of transnational identifications encompassing 'imagined' and 'encountered' communities*" (Brah 196,

original emphasis). In this light, *Letters from an Age of Reason* constructs a vision of Pan-African maritime fluidity which eases the postcolonial tension between local specificities and globalism and showcases the liberatory possibilities of resituating local black cultures in a global (oceanic) dimension.

Certainly the author juxtaposes Aubrey's character, a freedman but still exhibiting a colonised mind, with Ibrahim's self-governing psyche. As they share latrine duty on board, Aubrey unveils to his black ship-fellow his suspicions about Paxton being his father and his resentment for it:

> I hate him for it. And for his silence, which condemned me to the lot and status of a Negro. As his heir I should have laid claim to whiteness. Whereas now I may only aspire to it . . . I am not referring to the behavior of particular white men . . . but to the broader *culture*, to the ethic it embodies, which is to say, what it *stands* for (Hague 307, original emphasis).

Aubrey's words, illustrating the shocking extent to which he has internalised the rhetoric of the nineteenth-century slave system which misplaced modernity, civilisation and citizenship as irretrievably white, are wisely cancelled by Ibrahim, who claims "what's a skin stand for, when ya don't ask for it, don't earn it, can't change it?" (Hague 307). Ibrahim's discourse counter-acts what the American anthropologist Ashley Montagu called the 'fallacy of race' or the notion that race does not entail significant biological differences between individuals but is a socially constructed artefact (Montagu 31). If Aubrey's aspirations to *white* culture are clearly modelled on Frantz Fanon's dependency complex and the psychopathology of colonialism (Fanon 12), Ibrahim's nomadism and self-ruling mindset patently disclose the heterotopic power of the ship to disrupt hegemonic conceptions of time and space and land-locked racialist attributions of identity. "The Protean nature associated with ships" (Mackenthun 145) therefore catalyses subaltern sea-migrants' disassociation from

binary hierarchies on dry land in favour of a transnational and transcultural perspective on identity.

Ibrahim's diasporic psyche foregrounds a cosmopolitan modernity not focused on the nation state, in tune with Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* and its promotion of diaspora as an intermediate position between anti-essentialist and identitarian perspectives on blackness.[90] In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy seeks to fight back two perspectives on black identity. On the one hand, Gilroy strives to counteract anti-essentialism, which privileges difference on sameness. An anti-essentialist viewpoint on blackness would mean to state that blacks around the world have nothing in common. Gilroy suggests instead an "anti-anti-essentialism that sees racialised subjectivity as the product of the social practices that supposedly derive from it" (Gilroy, *Black* 102). In light of this, the trauma of slavery is seen as having an inescapable effect on black identity, as a collective memory shared by all people of African descent.

On the other hand, Gilroy also argues against identitarian perspectives on blackness, which privilege sameness over difference. These perspectives seem to favour a conception of race as an inner essence, as internally given or pre-social. That race is a socially constructed notion is now an almost undisputed idea and hence, Gilroy argues, "the attempt to locate the cultural practices, motifs, or political agendas that might connect the dispersed and divided blacks of the new world and of Europe with each other and even with Africa is dismissed as essentialism or idealism or both" (Gilroy, *Black* 80).

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[90] I would like to acknowledge the enlightening ideas provided by Miguel Mellino (University of Naples) in two research seminars on the European Refugee Crisis (6th March 2018) and Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (7th March 2018) that I attended in Liverpool John Moores University during a research stay, as well as his illuminating personal views on current immigration, neo-liberalism and European politics.

Gilroy wants to situate his thinking between anti-essentialist and identitarian perspectives on blackness, an intermediate position which may facilitate the negotiation of the dialectics between difference and sameness. This position is articulated through the concept of diaspora. Gilroy's adoption of the notion diaspora to analyse black identity promotes a cosmopolitan modernity not centred on the nation state. In Hague's novel, Ibrahim represents a model of black identity grounded in diaspora and developed out of free migration and maritime mobility. As Ibrahim tells Aubrey about his transatlantic travels since he left Africa, he interestingly anchors his self-image and way of life on the sea:

> Africa is beautiful, so beautiful ya cry to see it, but once ya get a peek at another kinda life, great cities, London an Paris, big houses an modern things, it's hard getting back to the mud huts an dirt floor, like how we build the houses in the village. So I go back on the sea. Never did marry (Hague 306).

Ibrahim asserts proudly his diasporic lifestyle, reclaiming his status as 'Free African' against "a thousand Africans [who] leave in chains for every one as leave a free man, and no difference between us except time an luck" (Hague 306). He foregrounds a vision of 'home' not necessarily rooted in a specific nation or place but based on travel and a fluid and deterritorialised vision of identity. Ibrahim embodies Le Roi Jones' concept of *changing same*, or the idea that black identity is always in a state of flux, always prone to be mobilised between the axes of permanence and transformation.[91] As a diasporic subject whose consciousness is articulated by transatlantic mobility, the Ghanaian character exhibits a privileged anti-Manichean

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[91] Le Roi Jones (also known as Amiri Baraka) alluded to the concept of *changing same* in his essay "The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music)" (1966), an analysis of black music in the context of the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and the contribution of black avant-garde jazz musicians to the history of jazz music. The concept of *changing same* can be extrapolated to narrate black identity as decentred and always changing, as being constantly negotiating the weight of African heritage with the confrontation with new forms of oppression and discrimination. Following this, it is worth recalling Malcolm X's well-known definition of racist discrimination: "Racism is like a Cadillac, they bring out a new model every year" (qtd. in Jong 7).

position between nations and cultures across the Atlantic, which enables him to recognise both the inequalities of Victorian Britain as well as the shortcomings of his own Ghanaian culture – he acknowledges to Aubrey the often oblique fact that Africans themselves took an active part in transatlantic slavery: "my folk carryin on about the white man come and taking slaves, but two miles down the road is chiefs who once sell they own people off widdout a thought, or raid they neighbors and trade 'em" (Hague 305).

Ibrahim's Atlantic identity and diasporic consciousness illustrate accordingly an anti-nationalist notion of "flexible citizenship" (Chambers, "Signs" 53) based on (maritime) transition and passage. This illustrates an anti-nationalist counterculture of modernity via an interrogation of the nation and "offers a critique of discourses of fixed origins, while taking account of a homing desire which is not the same thing as desire for a 'homeland'. This distinction is important, not least because not all diasporas sustain an ideology of 'return'" (Brah 180).

In sum, Aubrey and Ibrahim's encounter aboard the *Artemis* is the most powerful narrative device deployed by Hague to reconstruct black Atlantic identity. Aubrey's "immediate sense of familiarity" (Hague 292) with Ibrahim and the fact Aubrey only manages to open himself up to his black Ghanaian ship-fellow, despite their radically different origins, illustrates Paul Gilroy's anti-anti-essentialist approach to black identity in the Atlantic world. The stories of Aubrey and Ibrahim, as former slave and a free African respectively, lay out the intricate position of blacks in Atlantic history and reveal racism, colonialism and "racial terror" (Gilroy, *Black* 30) as the unacknowledged dark side of modernity, despite Victorian Britain built her self-image

as a leading abolitionist country. In this sense, Iain Chambers claims, "the sea becomes the countersite or heterotopia of modernity" (Chambers, "Maritime" 679).

Accordingly, from the point of view of blacks, Atlantic modernity is far from being seen as liberating. The unearthing of black Atlantic cultures as counter-cultures of modernity exemplify one of the milestones of postcolonial theory: it is not possible to think of European identity and culture without the experience of non-westerners, colonialism and imperialism. In turn, the potential of neo-Victorian maritime novels such as Hague's narration, in terms of their reconstruction of Atlantic modernity and black identity, lies in portraying Victorian status quo and global markets as derived from colonial power and racial inequality in parallel to contemporary global modernity in Europe, which still feeds upon resources from third world countries and dovetails with stories of Africans gasping for breath in Mediterranean waters or lying dead on European beaches, of "refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants – the waste products of globalization" (Bauman, *Wasted* 63). Jason Berger has claimed, following Cesare Casarino, that the nineteenth-century sea narrative features as a testing area, or a 'laboratory' to the crisis arising from the emergence of modernity and global capitalism, signalling "the nineteenth century's conception and construction of a world in flux" (Berger 4). By extension, I argue that the neo-Victorian sea narrative contributes to conceptualise the inequalities of contemporary global modernity by placing its inception in transatlantic capitalism and global markets during the nineteenth century.

The potentiality of sea routes to dissolve ethnic boundaries in the nineteenth-century maritime realm coalesces with the flourishing of unconventional sexual identities among seaborne collectives. Maritime historians such as Jo Stanley

highlight that shipboard life has often allowed male sailors to develop unorthodox sexualities which, in their view, would not have been readily accepted on land (Stanley 230). Indeed, the flourishing of homoeroticism among sailors concords with the fluctuation of gender identity which characterised Victorian maritime fiction. Occasionally, John Peck claims, sailors in maritime fiction were portrayed ambivalently to possess physical toughness and feminine sensitivity (Peck 145).[92] In a similar fashion, H.L. Malchow claims in his analysis of nautical gothic that the combination of cannibalism and the ambivalent sexual identities of cabin boys opens the way for speculating about the arising of unconventional sexual desires in the maritime world (Malchow 100).[93]

In the novel Sven Oha finds an outlet for his homosexual proclivities on-board when he makes sexual advances toward Aubrey (Hague 314). The separateness of the navigating ship from land (and land-locked social conscriptions) allows for the fluidity of non-heteronormative sexual behaviours in parallel to hybrid identities. Aubrey, who thinks that "such things did not occur among men, could not be perpetrated by men upon men, for then the order of civilized life failed utterly" (Hague 315), represents a hetero-normative conventional masculinity, inherent in mid-Victorian society, in opposition to Oha, whose maritime wandering around the globe has caused him to develop an open-minded mentality free from land-based social

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[92]   For example, the protagonist in William Clark Russell's *John Holdsworth, Chief Mate* (1875) is said to possess "a heart as gentle as a maiden's" (Russell 183).

[93]   Cross-dressing has occasionally featured both in Victorian and neo-Victorian maritime fiction. For instance, in James Fenimore Cooper's *The Red Rover: A Tale* (1827), the cabin boy Roderick is revealed to be a young girl in disguise at the end of the novel. Within the neo-Victorian genre, Patricia Duncker's *James Miranda Barry* (2011) fictionalises the fascinating life of James Barry, a military surgeon who was born a woman but passed for a man for fifty years. Barry widely travelled around overseas British colonies, including Cape Town, Mauritius or Jamaica, and her birth sex was only publicly revealed after her death in 1865. For a recent account of the cultural significance of James Miranda Barry, see Ann Heilmann's *Neo-/Victorian Biographilia and James Miranda Barry: A Study in Transgender and Transgenre* (2018).

conventions. Ibrahim downplays Oha's homosexuality and confirms the widespread homosexual practices among mariners: "It ain't so much [Oha] go for the gents – There's lots, especially in the sailin trade, they don't know what a woman is for' (Hague 316). Aubrey must confront the sexual hierarchies he has inherited on dry land out of his patriarchal upbringing. He does not know yet that those Anglo-American sexual hierarchies, which trigger him to abhor his shipmate's homosexuality, are the same which will posit obstacles on his relationship with Arabella in Victorian London. The fluctuating character of ethnic and sexual parameters in sea crossings attests, therefore, for the impact of maritime mobility on individual and collective identities.

Notwithstanding the fluidity of racial and sexual boundaries among Victorian shipboard communities and the dislocation deriving from nineteenth-century transoceanic mobility, often involving the rupture of family ties, the scattering of communal inmates and a coercive negotiation between the cultures of departure and destination, oceanic perspectives in literary and cultural criticism typically emphasise the connective (rather than dividing) potential of seas and oceans in the making of histories, cultures and ideas. Postcolonial perspectives on black transatlanticism reconceptualise the circum-Atlantic hemisphere as a network of mutual influences and multicultural exchanges arising out of the Middle Passage and reverberating all through the Victorian era. Carl Pedersen alludes to this constructive and connective perspective on the transatlantic slave trade when he argues that "the Middle Passage emerges as more of a bridge than a breach, a space-in-between where memory entails reconstructing the horrors of the voyage westward and retracing the journey of Africans to the Americas" (Pedersen 43). Similarly W. Jeffrey Bolster argues that "the process of cultural adaptation referred to as 'creolization,' through which Africans

transformed themselves into African Americans, began, not on the shore of America, but on those of Africa, and aboard the slavers that bridged the two" (Bolster 53).

The maritime routes between Victorian Britain and her (ex) American colonies, once deployed for the transatlantic slave trade, were all through the Victorian era appropriated by blacks on both sides of the Atlantic for abolitionist purposes, as well as for rehearsing their access to modernity and citizenship. In other words, black individuals crossing the Atlantic and engaging in transatlantic journeys between Victorian Britain, Africa and America reinscribe the "'trialectics' of triangular trade" giving way to "modern movements that aspired towards the abolition of racial slavery, the acquisition of citizenship and the disaggregation of Euro-American modernity's colour-coded utopias" (Gilroy, "Route Work" 22).

A common staple in nineteenth-century maritime perspectives on literature and culture is the capacity of the ocean for speeding up globalisation and disseminating modernity via the circulation of people, information, ideas and objects (Cohen 658; Gilroy, *Black* 4; Peck 2). Nora Hague's narration displays the integrating and connective potentiality of Victorian transatlanticism in its portrayal of the dissemination of African-based practices of occultism and voodoo. Before the outbreak of the American Civil War, Aubrey learns from Faith, a newly-arrived slave from Haiti in the Paxton residence, about tales of zombies, Papist and African Saints and cutting birds' throats (Hague 73). Faith's recounting of Haitian 'obeah' are juxtaposed to Aubrey's warm memories from his grandmother whose healing rituals, involved herbal remedies, statues of the Holy family, crucifixes and wooden rosaries (Hague 73). The similarities between Faith's voodoo rituals in Haiti and Granevangeline's African-oriented Christian practices, as recognised by Aubrey,

compel the protagonist to acknowledge in Faith "all of the spirit and suffering such as I myself might lay claim to" (Hague 74), despite their different upbringings and backgrounds.

Granevangeline's and Faith's syncretism and creolised rituals are a direct product of missionary Christianity and evangelicalism after the Middle Passage. Historians generally agree that by the early nineteenth century, particularly after the Great Awakenings and the Great Revival of 1801, Christianity was firmly established within African American communities. However, African Americans did retain African supernatural practices from the pre-colonial era, including witchcraft and healing traditions, and they creatively incorporated Christian teachings into new syncretic forms of worship (Chireau 42). This creolism is very much resented by Ibrahim, who reclaims voodoo knowledge back to his African heritage: "It was my people that brought it to Ghana. The Ewe. E-W-E. My people, that's their gods, the gods a voodoo. Got nothing to do with Haiti. Or Christian Saints, or Jesus, or fortunes" (Hague 367).

Nora Hague further locates pre-colonial African occultism on British soil. The first encounter between Arabella and Aubrey takes place in a séance held in a crumbling lodging house in Stepney, in London's East End. As Arabella approaches the dockside areas she uneasily notes the multiculturalism which characterised littoral or riverside quarters in Victorian times. The female protagonist observes that "Orientals and people of some indistinguishable heritage loitered about the stoops, or sat upon crates in the streets" (Hague 353) and further on, as she enters the building where the séance is to be held she hears "the mutters of foreign languages behind the thin walls" and is startled to see that seven of the attendants to the séance are

black – Aubrey among them (Hague 354-355). Scholars such as Judith Bryan have pointed out the visible presence of black subjects at the turn of the nineteenth-century and throughout the Victorian age in Victorian London (Bryan 66- 68). The multicultural character of the Victorian metropolis in the first half of the Victorian age was already noted by Thomas Carlyle, a Victorian social critic infamously known for his imperialistic and racist essay "An Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question" (1853) and who fiercely opposed black liberation and abolitionism. In a letter to his brother in 1824, Carlyle refers disdainfully to the multicultural nature of Victorian London, alluding to "a thousand pigmies, and the innumerable jinglings and rollings and crashings of manycoloured labour" (qtd. in Dickerson 81). A more positive observation about Victorian London's polycultural character was provided by William Wells Brown, a runaway African-American slave who, on a visit to Victorian London wrote: "In an hour's walk through the Strand, Regent-street or Piccadilly, one may meet half a dozen coloured men, who are inmates of the various colleges in the metropolis. These are all signs of progress in the cause of the sons of Africa" (qtd in Bryan 65).

The sensationalist description of the ritual in the narration in which the lovers meet again conjures up staples in African-oriented occultism and voodoo, such as drums, dances and sacrifices of animals. The narration's rendering of an exoticised Victorian London, with the protagonists meeting each other amid voodoo rituals, non-white subjects and communions with the dead in Victorian East End (Hague 355), seals up the author's triangular mapping of African culture across the North-Atlantic hemisphere. The breach between black individuals across the Atlantic is mediated and bridged by African-oriented occult practices, which are illustrated to navigate across the ocean in increasingly syncretic forms.

In a similar fashion to the decanting and transfer of voodoo rituals around the circum-Atlantic world, the novel illustrates the transatlantic dimension of the American Civil War and Abolitionism, as Arabella Leeds and Louella Paxton, with English and French ancestry respectively, exchange letters across the Atlantic, with the former staying in Britain and the latter travelling to the States from France to rescue her household's slaves from the horrors of the war (Hague 331-44). Recent insights into the history of abolitionism, such as Audrey Fisch's *American Slaves in Victorian Britain: Abolitionist Politics in Popular Literature and Culture* (2009), reveal the abolitionist campaign as a truly intercontinental phenomenon, characterised by a transatlantic anti-slavery network (Fisch 4). The transatlantic links between antebellum America and Europe stand out as influence vectors for exiled, expatriates or fugitive individuals in the American Civil War as well as for collectives having family connections on both sides of the Atlantic and with personal or economic interests in the American conflict. Nevertheless, the novel's most powerful exponent of watery routes to reconstruct family ties is Aubrey's receipt of his grandmother's letters, which finally unveil the truth of his ancestry.

Kym Brindle, in her study *Epistolary Encounters in Neo-Victorian Fiction* (2013) brilliantly analyses the dynamics of letter exchanges and diary writing in fiction and the way neo-Victorian writers exploit and experiment with such dynamics for the sake of the genre's metacritical aims. She nevertheless consciously evades postcolonial neo-Victorian novels, highlighting the problematics of inventing fictional documents, letters and diaries in the context of postcolonial thought, which seeks to reaffirm the agency of colonised collectives and to recover lost or silenced voices (Brindle 28-29). Brindle's circumvention of postcolonial texts seems reasonable considering that postcolonial writers' employment of fictional documents and diaries far exceeds the

scope of her study, which focuses on pastiche strategies and experimentation with the epistolary form. Nevertheless, I contend that Brindle's model for analysis seems appropriate for delving into Hague's fictional reconstruction of transatlantic black connectivity. After all, Brindle claims neo-Victorianism to be "fuelled by a desire to illuminate a shadowy past that endures in documents archived or hidden in dark recesses of contemporary lives" (Brindle 173).

Such material connections with the past and "such appeal in locating a past preserved in documented traces – diaries, notebooks, or letters – . . . imitated in the fictional world, as documents spill from worn leather suitcases, tumble from dusty attics, or emerge concealed and disguised in libraries" (Brindle 8) are patently obvious in Hague's narration. This fetishisation of the document as the key to unravel secrets from the past informs the denouement of Hague's novel, in which the protagonist Aubrey gets to disentangle his traumatic and incest-tainted family past through a bunch of ink-faded letters hand-written by his grandmother back in New Orleans but brought through the Atlantic to Aix-in-Provence by Onessa, his mother. Granevangeline's letters reveal that Aubrey was conceived out of the rape of Onessa by her own father, also parent to Louis Paxton. Aubrey summarises his family past like this:

> My owner Louis Paxton was my half-brother. And also my uncle. His children were my cousins. And also my nieces and nephews. My mother was a half-sister to me. This was who I was. My family tree. A strangled, festering rot of black and white and yellow (Hague 547).

In this sense, the transatlantic routes between Victorian Britain and her (ex)colonies come to illustrate the protagonist's search for communal lineage and the quest for his ancestry. Aubrey's grandmother's letters embody the safeguard of the protagonist's parentage, potentially put in jeopardy after his transatlantic crossing.

The male protagonist's transoceanic voyage, via Victorian Britain, towards selfhood and his split ancestry across the Atlantic waters finally propel Arabella and Aubrey to abandon nationalist assignments of behaviour and culture which so much have endangered them and their relationship.[94]

By the end of the narration, just after the lovers have been reunited, they fantasise about moving to Africa. Aubrey is still weighing his African ancestry, stating that "I had never regarded the Dark Continent as the seat of my heritage, for if an eighth of me originated there, another seven of those eighths were contributed elsewhere" (Hague 646). It is Arabella who encourages his lover to abandon nation-locked notions of identity and belonging. In her view, "[Africa] is unlike all that's been known before it. And so I feel it is our place" (Hague 646). As the narration closes with the lovers dreaming of an African landscape, the novel suggests that Aubrey and Arabella will adopt a pluralising and land-free perspective on their sense of home-belonging. Again, the narration seems to replay the *trialectics* – to use Gilroy's term – of the slave trade, this time in the lovers' idea of moving on from Britain to Africa. As Susheila Nasta points out, "diaspora does not only create an unrequited desire for a lost homeland but also a 'homing desire', a desire to reinvent and rewrite home as much as a desire to come to terms with an exile from it" (Nasta 7). As the lovers fantasise about travelling to the African continent as an escape from racist and sexist inequalities in Victorian Britain, they are configuring a notion of home built upon choice rather than birth or nationality. Arabella and Aubrey's 'homing desire' is

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[94]   As Arabella's parents learn about her intimate entanglement with Aubrey, the female heroine is confined to an asylum for 'consorting with a Negro' (Hague 497). In the words of her father, 'he is *racially mixed*. It does not matter what else he is' (Hague 508; original emphasis). At the end of the novel, Aubrey and a group of abolitionists organise a rescue party and the lovers are reunited.

temporarily articulated through mobility and transition, challenging the idea of 'home' as something rooted and fixed.

In sum, Nora Hague's *Letters from an Age of Reason* replays Paul Gilroy's well-known favouring of 'routes over roots' (Gilroy, *Black* 133) by portraying the maritime avenues between Victorian Britain and the Atlantic world populated by sea migrants, asylum seekers, subaltern collectives and African-inherited religions circulating freely around the Atlantic ocean. The neo-Victorian-at-sea in general and Nora Hague's novel in particular may "fathom the ways in which Atlantic shipboard communities might transcend the ethnic boundaries of the nation-state" (DeLoughrey, "Heavy" 705). Therefore the novel decidedly contributes to construct a memory of the Atlantic as shared between Britain, Africa and the Americas. Aligned with the maritime flourishing of transnational solidarity and unorthodox sexualities, the (neo)Victorian Atlantic as illustrated in Nora Hague's *Letters from an Age of Reason* emerges as a unifying and multi-cultural medium in tune with a pan-Atlantic memory of the Victorian Empire that contributes to the postcolonial project of decoupling Englishness and Whiteness in the cultural imaginary.

4.2. Colum McCann's *TransAtlantic* (2013)

The New York-based Irish author Colum McCann earned his current recognition with the publication of *Let the Great World Spin* (2009), which garnered him the US National Book Award. This novel provides a portrait of New York City in the 1970s through the lens of over ten protagonists whose interlocked narratives revolve around Philippe Petit's high-wire walk between the Twin Towers in 1974. McCann's interest in multi-perspectival narrations is also illustrated in *TransAtlantic* (2013), a text that re-imagines transatlantic relations between Ireland, Britain and the United States in

the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I read McCann's *Transatlantic* as a neo-Victorian novel not only because it rewrites crucial events in the Victorian era – the Irish Famine and abolitionism – from a contemporary point of view but also because it evinces common staples in the genre: the use of multiple narrators, the juxtaposition of different time frames to examine past-present relations, and the re-examination of canonical nineteenth-century historical figures, such as Frederick Douglass.

The Irish Potato Famine (1845-49) and its lingering trauma are becoming recurrent in neo-Victorian narrations of the Atlantic. Joseph O'Connor's *The Star of the Sea* (2002) and Peter Behrens's *The Law of Dreams* (2006) are two neo-Victorian novels that narrate their Irish famine-stricken protagonists aboard coffin ships.[95] In his analysis of O'Connor's *The Star of the Sea*, Aidan O'Malley signals the resurgence of famine literature from the 1990s onwards as "symptomatic of cultural trauma" due in part to the fact that the Irish Famine has been traditionally underexplored in academia and rendered spectral or silent in Irish literature (O'Malley 135). McCann's *TransAtlantic* adds up to the growing shelf of neo-Victorian Atlantic novels of the Irish Famine – and it marks the genre's contribution to the Green Atlantic – but significantly situates such historical event in intersection with transatlantic abolitionism in the Victorian era, which coherently ties in with the topic of section 4.1 and the decidedly transcultural focus of this PhD thesis.

The plot of *TransAtlantic* is articulated in two volumes, the first of which fictionalises three real-life transatlantic voyages: John Alcock and Arthur Brown's

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[95] 'Coffin ship' was the name given to vessels carrying Irish immigrants across the Atlantic fleeing the Irish Famine in the mid-Victorian period. The term obeys the high rates of mortality – it is estimated that 30 per cent of Irish peasants died during the voyage – due to poor ventilation, inadequate hygiene and meagre food rations (Corporaal and Cusack 344; Hollet 42).

flight from Newfoundland to Galway in 1919, which was the first non-stop transatlantic flight; Frederick Douglass's voyage to Ireland in 1845 during his abolitionist campaign; and American Senator George Mitchell's travels to Belfast in 1998 as part of the peace process in Northern Ireland that led to the Good Friday Agreement. The second half of the novel represents the fictional lives of four generations of women whose lives intertwine with the historical male protagonists in the first volume: Lily, an Irish servant inspired by Frederick Douglass to seek a new life in America in the years leading to the Irish Famine; Lily's daughter Emily, a local reporter who covers Alcock and Brown's flight in Canada; Emily's daughter Lottie, who meets Senator George Mitchell during the Peace Process in Belfast; and Lottie's daughter Hannah, whose son was killed by an IRA terrorist and who keeps an unopened and undelivered letter written decades earlier by Emily in Newfoundland and brought over the Atlantic by Brown and Alcock in their legendary flight.

The structure of the novel has several implications to consider. Firstly, the symmetrical distribution of historical and fictional narrators in the respective volumes of the novel brings to the fore postmodern concerns about the boundaries of history and fiction. Certainly, the transatlantic crossings of Brown and Alcock, Frederick Douglass and Senator Mitchell represent key moments in Atlantic history which the novel seeks to restore to the collective consciousness. However, the fictional protagonists that make up the second part of the novel illustrate, as McCann has claimed in an interview, "smaller, more anonymous, moments" which are "the glue of history" (McCann, "Conversation" no pages). The imaginary protagonists in the second part of the novel and the way in which their stories are carefully and plausibly woven into the historical texture of the first part question the arguable gulf between the real and the fictional and turn the novel into a tapestry which illuminates shadowy

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corners in transatlantic encounters and reveal the fragmentary character of historiography.

Secondly, the fact that the historical and fictional protagonists in the novel are male and female respectively reveals McCann's feminist drive in his novel's reconstruction of Atlantic history. The author is obviously pointing here to the invisibility of women in the construction and legislation of history. McCann has claimed his novel argues against the idea that "guns and testosterone rule the world" (McCann, "Conversation" no pages) and to reclaim female perspectives of history. Nevertheless, I contend that McCann's gender agenda in bringing women back to history gets frustrated if we consider that the main purpose of the female narratives in the second section seems to be to thread the male narratives through a coherent and unified plotline to safeguard the latter's credibility. McCann's attempt to highlight the omission of women from history is commendable, but putting female fictional narratives at the service of famous male historical figures seems a flawed strategy.

A third aspect to briefly point out about the structure of the novel is the non-chronological disposal of the three main narratives in the first volume. Briefly introduced by a prologue set in 2012, the novel opens in 1919 with Alcock and Brown's journey to travel back to 1845 in Frederick Douglass's tale and later forward again to 1998 with Senator Mitchell's narration. The second half is narrated in chronological order, an artistic decision which is probably motivated by McCann's aim at narrating the female family saga in a more traditional way, and is closed by a third brief volume, in the guise of an epilogue set in 2011. This arrangement of the plot events compels readers to juxtapose several time frames in their imagination and articulates one of key aspects of the novel which I will develop in the ensuing

analysis, that is, a dynamic and poly-temporal understanding of the relation between the Victorian past and the present.

As I have already pointed out, the three journeys depicted in the first half of the novel are key moments in the history of the Atlantic Ocean, particularly in the histories of Ireland and the United States. The journeys occur in different and disconnected time frames but, as Marie Mianowski states, they are thematically linked because "all three journeys express a desire for peace" (Mianowski 2). Senator George Mitchell's involvement in the peace process which led to the Good Friday Agreement in Belfast – his job often involved flying over the Atlantic Ocean three times a week – and Frederick Douglass's tour around Ireland and Britain delivering speeches against slavery are two obvious examples of peace-seeking processes with a transatlantic dimension. In the case of the British aviators Arthur Brown and John Alcock, their non-stop flight across the Atlantic in June 1919 can be read more as a symbolic act of union between nations, "a unification of the continents" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 15) after the First World War.

McCann is signalling here the necessity of building bridges in peace-making processes and the Atlantic emerges in the narration as a conduit for those processes. The opening chapter set in 1919 already establishes an increasingly connected world across the Atlantic Ocean:

> The newspapers said anything was possible now. The world was made tiny. The League of Nations was being formed in Paris. W. E. B. Du Bois convened the Pan-African Congress with delegates from fifteen countries. Jazz records could be heard in Rome. Radio enthusiasts used vacuum tubes to transmit signals hundreds of miles. Some day soon it might be possible to read the daily edition of the San Francisco Examiner in Edinburgh or Salzburg or Sydney or Stockholm (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 8).

The previous paragraph and its depiction of the fluid circulation of people and information constructs an increasingly globalised world in the early twentieth-century, already drawing attention to Atlantic connectivity and circulation as the focus of the narration. Similarly, the very title of the novel, with its interspersed capitalised 'A', suggests the author's interest in transits and routes but, as I am about to outline, McCann does not focus so much on the actual maritime transit per se as in the in-betweenness of identity engendered by such transit.

Frederick Douglass emerges as a key figure in McCann's narration of transatlantic connections. The inclusion of the distinguished African American slave and abolitionist signals the author's brief contribution both to neo-Victorian biofiction and transatlanticism from a postcolonial point of view. Not surprisingly, Paul Gilroy reclaims Frederick Douglass as a "shining example" (Gilroy, *Black* 13) in his reconstruction of the Black Atlantic. The same impetus seems to motivate Colum McCann in his re-appropriation of Frederick Douglass as an icon in transatlantic culture. Indeed the novel constructs Douglass' 1845 trip to Ireland in his abolitionist campaign, particularly his stay in Richard D. Webb's – his Irish publisher – and subsequent tour around Dublin and Cork. Douglass noted the significance of his visit to Ireland in his autobiography *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855):

> Eleven days and a half gone and I have crossed three thousand miles of the perilous deep . . . Instead of the bright, blue sky of America, I am covered with the soft, grey fog of the Emerald Isle. I breathe, and lo! the chattel becomes a man. I gaze around in vain for one who will question my equal humanity, claim me as his slave, or offer me an insult. I employ a cab – I am seated beside white people – I reach the hotel – I enter the same door – I am shown into the same parlour – I dine at the same table – and no one is offended. No delicate nose is deformed in my presence … I find myself regarded and treated at every turn with the kindness and deference paid to white people (Douglass, *Bondage* 297).

In 1847 Douglass also toured around England and his farewell speech to Victorian England on the 30th of March 1847 reveals similar feelings to those experienced on Irish soil:

> I have now been in this country nineteen months, and I have travelled through the length and breadth of it. I came here a slave. I landed upon your shores a degraded being, lying under the load of odium heaped upon my race by the American press, pulpit, and people. I have gone through the wide extent of this country . . . Wherever I have gone, I have been treated with the utmost kindness . . . and I have every reason to love England (Douglass, "Farewell" 72).[96]

The words quoted above give an indication of what Victorian Britain and Ireland could have meant to African Americans in the aftermath of the Slave Emancipation Act of 1833. Douglass and his African American comrades' enchantment with Victorian Britain was not free from contradictions since they were appealing to a country which at the time was setting the foundations for late-Victorian scientific racism, a project which secured the British Empire's subjugation of non-white races and provided the basis for modern-day racism (Brantlinger, *Taming* 6-7).[97] These contradictions mirror in turn the complexities of the term 'Victorian' today and its different connotative evocations in different contexts which, as I discussed in section 3.1, have been the carriers of both progressive and regressive discourses in British and colonial cultures. Nevertheless, what is at stake in *TransAtlantic* is that Douglass' transoceanic crossings enabled him to decolonise his mind and prop up his discourse of liberation.

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[96]   Frederick Douglass's 'reason[s] to love England' epitomise African Americans' veneration of Victorian Britain as a land of freedom and democracy. Douglass was followed by other African Americans such as William Wells Brown, Alexander Crummell, Martin Delaney, or Ida B. Wells, who also crossed the Atlantic to bring their transatlantic testimonies on American inequality and discrimination to Victorian audiences.

[97]   This contradiction is analogous to Victorian Britain's welcome to mid-nineteenth-century European radicals such as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. While their native Germany outlawed them, Victorian Britain provided Marx and Engels with a shelter from which they could articulate their liberal ideas, including their critique of European capitalism of which, significantly, Victorian Britain was remarkable exponent (Winder 115).

The impact of transoceanic mobility on the psyche of the colonised is noted by McCann's Douglass in the novel, who claims that "he felt, for the first time ever maybe, that he could properly inhabit his skin" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 51) and claims not to have "been called a nigger on Irish soil, not once, not yet anyway" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 50) in a letter to his first wife, Anna. Douglass experiences nevertheless a sense of dislocation on his arrival in Ireland, suggesting that maritime mobility often overrides the mobilisation of identity: "On occasion I have to pause, astounded that I am not fugitive anymore. My mind unshackled. They cannot place me, or even imagine me, upon the auction block. I do not fear the clink of a chain, or crack of whip, or turn of door handle" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 45). The inherent contradictions of associating the Victorian age, the epitome of imperialism and colonial domination, with the liberation of African American slaves only reveals the complexities of the term 'Victorianism' and what it has meant to past and present overseas generations. To Douglass, and by extension to nineteenth-century African Americans, Victorianism could have represented a model democracy and modernity which enabled them to rehearse true citizenship, a possibility that was denied by the American slave system.

A second aspect which *TransAtlantic* develops in the persona of Frederick Douglass is the construction of transoceanic encounters as a catalyst for different discourses of liberation. I argued above that Nora Hague's *Letters from an Age of Reason* illustrates the Atlantic as a Pan-African conduit, in tune with Gilroy's Black Atlantic model. McCann's *TransAtlantic* adopts a more intersectional approach to illustrate the crossways of abolitionism and working-class struggle. As Marie Mianowski points out, a particularly interesting point about the novel's reconstruction of Douglass is that the character's relation and reaction to his time is "anachronous

and disjunctive" as it is illustrated by the African American's perception of Ireland (Mianowski 3). Douglass, who arrives in Ireland "to convince the people of Britain and Ireland to help crush slavery through peaceful moral persuasion" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 39) is struck to see the poverty and misery of Cork:

> The filth was staggering. Douglass had never seen anything quite like it, even in Boston. Piles of human waste slushed down the gutter. It sloshed its way into fetid puddles. Men lay collapsed by the railings of rooming houses. Women walked in rags, less than rags: as rags. Children ran barefoot . . . Rats darted in the alleyways (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 40).

McCann's contribution to neo-Victorian biofiction lies in the retrieving of the persona of Douglass beyond his role as abolitionist to also illustrate his perception of other forms of oppression. Douglass features as a lens through which McCann articulates his narration of Irish-American encounters and the presence of the African American character extends well beyond the sections set in the Victorian era, as I will point out further on. A relevant instance within those Irish-American intersections is a passage in which McCann imagines an encounter between Frederick Douglass and Daniel O'Connell. Oft-referred to as "The Great Liberator" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 58), O'Connell was an Irish politician who campaigned for Catholic rights and parliamentary rule against British oppression. He was also a fervent abolitionist, as it is attested by his attendance and participation in the World Anti-Slavery Convention held in London on June 1840 (Fenton 41).

The novel fictionalises an encounter between Douglass and O'Connell in which they share platform during a joint speech in Conciliation Hall, Dublin. In an outburst on the floor, O'Connell "thrust Douglass's hand in the air: Here, he said, the black O'Connell! Douglass watched the hats go up into the rafters" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 59). The phrase 'black O'Connell' could a priori suggest the imposition of European

models of libertarianism over the figure of Douglass. Nevertheless, cultural criticism on Douglass suggests that his stay in Ireland and Britain motivated him to expand his abolitionist struggle towards a wider discourse of universal freedom and liberation, acknowledging the figure of O'Connell as an example to follow (Fenton 89). The legacy of the Irish liberator O'Connell on Douglass's abolitionist ideas has sent reverberations down the centuries, as it is attested by President Barack Obama's words during a 2011 St Patrick's Day Reception at the White House attended by the Irish PM Enda Kenny:

> In so many ways, the Irish and their descendants have set an example for us as a people. But they've also set an example for us as a nation struggling to be more just and more free . . . Douglass drew inspiration from the Irishman's [O'Connell's] courage and intelligence, ultimately modeling his own struggle for justice on O'Connell's belief that change could be achieved peacefully through rule of law . . . the two men shared a universal desire for freedom – one that cannot be contained by language or culture or even the span of an ocean (Obama, no pages).

Barack Obama's acknowledgement of the legacy of Ireland and Daniel O'Connell on Frederick Douglass and American liberty in general epitomises the transatlantic crosspollinations of Irish-American encounters then and today that continue to inspire creators such as Colum McCann.[98] Accordingly, *TransAtlantic* retrieves a relatively unknown episode in the life of Frederick Douglass which does not often stand out either in Irish or American cultural memory.[99]

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[98] In an early review of the novel, Theo Tait criticises that McCann focuses heavily on positive Irish-American encounters whereas the novelist disregards the more problematic ones, for example the fact that Frederick Douglass believed that the Irish Famine was attributable to intemperance (Tait, no pages).

[99] In an interview, Colum McCann has affirmed the following about his artistic motivations to write about the figure of Frederick Douglass: "Not many Americans knew about his trip to Ireland and England, but not many Irish people even knew who Frederick Douglass was. He was largely omitted from the Irish history books, at least up until the 1990s (150 years after his journey), when scholars started to re-discover him when shaping up narratives that examined the history between the Irish and the Africans and the African Americans. Most people had relegated the story to the footnotes of history. But it was an incredible journey and a tremendous insight into the depth and character of Douglass" (McCann, "Conversation" no pages).

A salient aspect of the novel's construction of Frederick Douglass and his stay in nineteenth-century Ireland is the juxtaposition of transatlantic abolitionism with the Irish Famine. I have already pointed out that the novel constructs Douglass as a witness of other forms of oppression in his observations on the misery and poverty of nineteenth-century Cork. The novel equally illustrates the passivity of British authorities as the Famine starts to sweep the Irish country. As Douglass learns at the Jennings', "there was enough food in the land to feed Ireland three or four times over . . . It was being shipped across to India, China, the West Indies. The exhaustion of empire" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 80). Further on, as Douglass inquires about "the poor Irish, the Catholics" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 65) who are dying of hunger in the streets, magistrates and landlords "mostly [with] English accents" answer that "there was always a hunger in Ireland. She was a country that liked to be hurt" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 66).

As illustrated in the novel, Douglass' abrupt encounter with the poverty-stricken Irish population has a considerable impact on his psyche, pushing him to reflect on the nature of freedom and inequality. As a runaway slave who has suffered physical and psychological atrocities under American slavery, Douglass cannot understandably equate Irish poverty with the American slave system: "there was poverty everywhere, yes, but still he would take the poverty of a free man. No whips. No chains. No branding marks" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 51). Nevertheless, Douglass' logical conclusion that "the Irish were poor, but not enslaved" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 81) is challenged by a heckler during Douglass's speech in Conciliation Hall:

> A shout came up from the rear of the hall. What about England? Would he not denounce England? Wasn't England the slave master anyway? Was there not *wage slavery*? Were there not the *chains of financial oppression*? Was there not an underground railroad that every Irishman would gladly

board to get away from the tyranny of England? (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 60; my emphasis).

The above paragraph seems filtered through contemporary viewpoints on the nature of freedom and labour and how old forms of slavery have mutated into new forms of oppression in contemporary global markets.[100] What has to be stressed is the fact that Douglass's contact with Irish common folk under the *chains of financial oppression* has the potential to articulate a transatlantic discourse of freedom against manifold forms of oppression. In this sense, the novel depicts the inception of what might be called a transatlantic radicalism, exercised by black subjects both free and enslaved and on both sides of the Atlantic through their engagement with European discourses of liberation.

This transatlantic cross-fertilisation, again invoking Gilroy's model of the Black Atlantic, is corroborated by scholars such as David R. Roediger, who points out Douglass's contact with Chartist radicals in Britain (Roediger 102) or Judith Bryan, who draws attention to draws attention to the considerable degree of African-American participation in Victorian labour and civil rights movements (Bryan 68). These fertile intersections between African-American abolitionism and European radical discourses evince on a larger scale, as Fionnghuala Sweeney states, a concurrence between antebellum black resistance and other radical discourses operating in Europe and abroad such as class agitation, women's rights movement or

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[100]   In a seminar on Modern Slavery delivered by Dr Bleddyn Davies (School of Law, Liverpool John Moores University – 9th May 2018), Davies interestingly pointed out that there are more slaves today – obviously under new forms of slavery – than there were in the transatlantic age. Whereas the best estimates show that there were approximately 12 million slaves in the transatlantic age, it is estimated that there are around 21 million slaves today (1.5 million only in the European Union) under manifold forms of oppression, forced labour, trafficking or exploitation for financial profit. The Global Slavery Index (2016) rises the number of people under modern slavery to 40.3 million if we include forced marriage (*Global Slavery Index*, no pages).

colonial insubordination (Sweeney 5).[101] The Atlantic Ocean can be read in this sense as a breeding ground for the procurement of conceptual tools against oppression.

The tragic irony of Douglass's visit to Ireland lies in the fact that he is being welcomed and lauded in the country for his abolitionist campaign just when 1.5 million Irish people were bound to leave the country – plus one million who died of starvation – between 1845 and 1850, a period known as the 'Great Hunger' (Ó Gráda 32). Colum McCann represents the exodus engendered by the Irish Famine through the fictional character of Lily, an Irish servant at Richard D. Webb's, who is inspired by Douglass and his spirited journey across the Atlantic to board a 'coffin ship', "a floating boat of fever and loss" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 193) and seek a better life in America. Determined to escape the misery of her life, Lily walks from Dublin to the Jennings', Douglass's hosts in Cork, seeking to get a transatlantic passage from Cove to New York. Douglass and Lily's encounter at the Jennings' raises class issues, for Douglass fails to recognise in Lily the maid who served him during his stay at Webb's, "so very different out of her uniform" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 84).

Douglass is urged to go beyond the invisibility of Lily as a maid further on, when Lily leaves Cork, without food or clothing, in the middle of the night to get her passage to New York. The Jennings, led by the eldest sister Isabel, organise a search party to guarantee the security of Lily in her voyage. The young maid is found in Cove's Pier, starving and shivering, and as Isabel approaches her, we witness through Douglass's eyes one of the most powerful passages of the narration:

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[101] Frederick Douglass's embrace of radicalism was further developed as he later justified violent resistance against oppression; this is attested by his defence of the Indian Mutiny or the Jamaican Rebellion (Roediger 109).

Isabel had brought a few days' worth of food. Wrapped in a blue teacloth. Bundled and tied. She pressed it gently into the young girl's arms. She reached inside her coat, brought out a number of folded bills that she quickly stuffed into Lily's palm. Douglass felt a chill. He watched as Lily moved her mouth but did not seem to say anything. What words went between them? What silence? . . . Isabel leaned forward and embraced the maid, whispered something in her ear. Lily nodded and pulled the shawl tight down over her head. What thoughts trembled there? What fierceness had brought her here? (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 92-93).

This passage foregrounds Lily's tale as dovetailing with present-day stories of maritime migration and asylum-seeking in the contemporary imagination, often involving unheard words, nameless faces and vulnerable bodies engaged in perilous sea passages seeking refuge in a foreign land. As Erica Wagner cleverly notes, as Douglass is admired and worshipped in Ireland, Lily remains invisible, despite the fact she would be considered superior in Douglass's country due to her race (Wagner, no pages). Nevertheless, in the eyes of Douglass, Lily's courage compels him to perceive the young maid as his equal, as an individual inspired to cross the oceans by a vision of freedom and justice: "Douglass felt rooted to the ground. It was as if he could not even pick up his feet . . . He pulled his collar up and coughed into it. He felt his breath bounce back towards him. *Negro girl. Ran away. Goes by name Artela*" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 93; original emphasis). The fact that Douglass recalls stories of runaway African Americans back in the United States as he waves goodbye to Lily illustrates the most important point in the novel: the interlaced histories of American and Ireland in the mid-Victorian period and the fierce spirit of survival shared by African Americans escaping slavery and Irish peasants fleeing starvation, despite their experiences of oppression and racialisation were significantly different.

Accordingly, the Irish-American encounter exemplified by Douglass and Lily can be said to encapsulate the tangled histories of the Black and Green Atlantic.

McCann's neo-Victorian memory work in *TransAtlantic* seeks to contribute to a Pan-Atlantic discourse which incorporates Irish history into the non-nationalist cultural model suggested by Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*. In particular, *TransAtlantic* brings attention to "the notion that the Irish experience [just like the African-American experience] may have been defined as much by movement itself, and by processes of encounter, competition and solidarity, and the circulation of bodies and ideas" (O'Neill and Lloyd xvi). Despite instances of supportive collaboration between African Americans and Irish in the Victorian period may be scarce, the sea crossings in which both collectives engaged in the mid-nineteenth century illustrate the Atlantic as a facilitator of radical possibilities of political change, resistance and emancipation.

In their introduction to *The Black and Green Atlantic: Cross-Currents of the African and Irish Diasporas* (2009), Peter D. O'Neill and David Lloyd have pointed out that Irish immigrants in the United States became 'white' – despite being considered racially inferior by British colonial powers – whereas African Americans were still denied humanity and citizenship (O'Neill and Lloyd xvi-xvii). The vexed question of why there did not exist many instances of closer collaboration and solidarity between African Americans and Irish is illustrated in McCann's *TransAtlantic*: Lily cannot help feeling a "dislike" for African Americans on the streets because of her resentment due to the death of her son in the Union army during the American Civil War, which led to the emancipation of African Americans in the United States (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 174).

The novel's contribution to the memory of the Green Atlantic is further developed in Lily's section of the novel, which covers her journey across the Atlantic and over twenty years of her life in America, including her marriage to an ice

merchant, Jon Ehrlich, the death of a son in the American Civil War, the birth of her only daughter, Emily, and her eventual success in the ice business. Lily's story is presented as the heart of the novel, the inception of a long generation of women whose criss-crossings around the Atlantic typify two centuries of Irish-American history.

Lily's moving experiences on American soil embody the migratory experience as a dynamic and complex negotiation between home and destination. Lily seeks initially to affirm her identity as an Irishwoman: "She thought of herself, still, as Lily Duggan: if she carried anything, she carried that. The sound of Dublin in it" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 156). However, her psychic relation to her home country is troubled by the hardships that pushed her to cross the Atlantic to New York. This is illustrated when her husband Jon buys her a painting of an Irish landscape, "a riverside in Ireland. An arched bridge. A row of overhanging trees. A distant cottage" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 171). The idyllic and bucolic landscape on the painting, prototypically associated with the Emerald Isle, contrasts with Lily's memories of her miserable life back in Ireland:

> Hers had been a life of basements, of rat droppings, of inner staircases, of soup ladles. A half-day off a week. Sloshing through the wet dark streets . . . No part of Ireland had ever vaguely resembled the canvas Jon Ehrlich had brought home. The country he had brought her was unrecognizable (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 172).

The painting, as Lily notes, "seemed to say something to her that she had never understood before" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 172). The sudden return of childhood memories invoked by the painting compel Lily to face the fact that "she had been in the country now for more than thirty years. *She had become American*. At what whirling moment had she halted and turned, unbeknownst to herself, the other way?" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 172; my emphasis). Lily's feelings illustrate Stuart Hall's

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telling statement that "migration is a one way trip. There is no 'home' to go back to" (Hall, "Minimal Selves" 115). For Lily, her transatlantic migration entails a geographical as well as a psychical passage, involving deep and irreversible impacts on identity, which is always troubled by the idea of returning to an 'imaginary homeland', to use Salman Rushdie's term, and always haunted by the in-betweenness which characterises the migratory experience.

Lily's tale of migration and survival spins off a saga of individual stories through her female descendants' narratives. Her daughter, Emily, who covers Brown and Alcock's non-stop transatlantic flight and later on herself crosses the Atlantic to pay a visit to Brown ten years after his flight, becomes a journalist and writes an article on the legacy of Frederick Douglass (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 194) and Emily's daughter, Lottie, becomes a witness to the negotiations leading to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. The narratives set in the 20th and 21st centuries are saturated with events and memories from the past, featuring a polytemporal understanding of time. This is reflected in the language deployed in those sections: whereas the narratives situated in the nineteenth century illustrate a more traditional language and more conventional metaphors closer to the bildungsroman, sections set in the 20th and 21st centuries involve increasingly more complex metaphors aimed at illustrating a dynamic interplay of past and present events.

A telling example is provided in the 2011 narration of Lottie's daughter, Hannah, whose son was killed by an IRA terrorist in 1978. As Hannah thinks over the passage of time and the series of events affecting her female lineage, she reflects upon the uncanny character of past happenings which infiltrate into the present: "The tunnels of our lives connect, coming to daylight at the oddest moments, and then plunge us

into the dark again. We return to the lives of those who have gone before us, a perplexing Möbius strip until we come home" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 248).[102] In his narrative, Senator George Mitchell provides a similar meditation when the Belfast negotiations culminating in the Good Friday Agreement gather momentum. As Mitchell is surrounded by representatives from the Irish government, British authorities or diplomats from the EU and common people, "shopkeepers. Plumbers. Musicians. Butchers. Tinsmiths. Professors" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 138) wait at the gates of the building for the peace resolutions, Mitchell meditates upon the nature of time:

> A sea-wind. All those ships out there. All those generations that left. Seven hundred years of history. We prefigure our futures by imagining our pasts. To go back and forth. Across the waters. The past, the present, the elusive future. A nation. Everything constantly shifted by the present. The taut elastic of time (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 140).

George Mitchell's recalling of the mass maritime migration which followed the Irish Famine just at the culmination of the Good Friday accords typifies the infiltration of the (Victorian) past in landmark contemporary events. The sections of the narrative set in the 20th and 21st centuries illustrate a polytemporal conception of time in which present events encapsulate both the weight and heritage of the past and the political possibilities of the future. McCann seems to be drawing here on the phenomenological conception of time, in which living time is circumscribed through retention from the past and protention towards the future (Bourgeois 188-89).

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[102]   A Möbius strip, or Möbius band, is a surface with one uninterrupted side. It was developed by the German mathematician August Ferdinand Möbius and it can be made by taking a rectangular strip of paper, twisting one end 180º and attaching both ends. The result is that both sides of the strip of paper can be traversed non-stop (Todres 23-24). The inclusion of this scientific reference in the novel illustrates the interconnectedness of past and present events, a point which is underscored in the last lines of the novel: "There isn't a story in the world that isn't in part, at least, addressed to the past" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 295).

Theodore R. Schatzki puts it in the following way: "any present experience retains what was just experienced and intends what is about to be experienced" (Schatzki 195). Accordingly, when considering either historical past or individual memory, time is inaccessible unless it is interceded by fictional or historical narrative (Andrew 44), or in other words, "narrative . . . appears as a mediation between the time that passes and slips away, and the form that lasts and remains" (Watkin 79). Henceforth, the lived present is said to encapsulate "retentive and protentive aspects" (Pellauer 53) because it is endowed with a temporal stretchiness and fluidity, a "within-time-ness . . . not reducible to the representation of linear time, a neutral series of abstract instants" (Ricoeur 173). In sum, "the present as thickened by retention and protentions "intends" the future in light of the past" (Bourgeois 194) and hence "History is the double movement first of understanding that heritage by interrogating its traces and second of moving forward from this particular stance to a future that affects a world made up of one's contemporaries and successors (Andrew 64).

The phenomenological conception of time which seems to inform McCann's narration hones in upon allegorical readings of the passing of time in oceanic terms. Hannah's narration in the last section of the novel allows for such reading, particularly her dwelling place and the metaphorical reading of time and place that it suggests. Hannah's abode is a cottage by a lough set in the south of Dublin. This maritime chronotope actually frames the whole narration since both the prologue and the epilogue are set in Hannah's 2011 narrative. As Hannah listens to the blasts of ship horns in the nearby Dún Laoghaire harbour, the oceanic landscape surrounding Hannah's cottage materialises past events reaching a century back in time:

> From a distance I could hear the ship horns, boats moving through Dún Laoghaire. Everyone rushing to get somewhere. The desire for elsewhere. The same port that Frederick Douglass came through all those years ago. The water lapping around me. Travelling the widening splash. Tomas. They shot him for a bird gun. George Mitchell's peace. The Queen had bowed her head at the Garden of Remembrance (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 285).

Marie Mianowski, following Henri Lefebvre's theories of space, has read the cottage by the lough as "place as a *lived space* . . . somehow present throughout the entire narrative, linking all the characters in the novel whether real or fictional from the 19th to the 21st century" (Mianowski 4; my emphasis). Space is not, Doreen Massey argues, "a flat, abstract, two-dimensional surface deprived of temporality, but it is a cut-through of myriads of stories, and time and space are therefore intimately connected" (Massey 3). The cottage as a space is saturated with the lifelines of Hannah's past generations, encapsulating her ancestors' *lived spaces*, "Newfoundland, Holland, Norway, Belfast, London, St Louis, Dublin. A zigzag line all the way back to Lily Duggan" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 256).

As Hannah reflects upon "her whole life defined by water" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 264), she reads her dwelling in oceanic terms: "the edges of the lough are never watertight, either to land or the sea. The tides flow in and out. Boats and memory, too" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 253). The events configuring Hannah's ancestry, metaphorically brought into her memory and the present by the waves surrounding the cottage, evoke an oceanic conception of time as cyclical and iterative. In historical terms, just like Hannah makes sense of her time and place in terms of her transatlantic lineage, the history of Ireland and the Irish and their present and future relations to Britain, cannot be understood without incorporating the countries' maritime connections with the globe.

Throughout the narration, the most outstanding element which connects times, places and people across the Atlantic is an unopened letter, written by Emily and handed to Brown and Alcock on the eve of their transatlantic flight. Nevertheless, the letter never reaches its recipient, "a family in Cork, to Brown Street" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 16), and is instead passed on from generation to generation, from daughter to daughter, up to Hannah, who recognises the value of the letter as an element connecting her transatlantic lineage: "It was my grandmother Emily Ehrlich who wrote the letter, my own mother who brokered its passage, but it began with her mother, my great-grandmother, Lily Duggan, if anything truly begins at all" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 248). Hannah, the last daughter in the matrilineal succession, has received the letter unopened, what opens the way for the fetishisation of the document as an unraveller of secrets.

The letter serves as a literary device deployed by McCann to touch upon another topic which contextualises Hannah's narration: the Great Recession which afflicted world markets in the late 2000s and early 2010s. Hannah is in financial constraints and her creditors are threatening to take her lough and lands. Facing the prospect of being evicted, Hannah sees in the letter and its potential connections with Frederick Douglass a commercial outlet, "for its preservation of possibility, the slight chance that it contains a startling fact, or an insight into some forgotten beauty" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 248).

Nevertheless, the philatelist to whom Hannah takes the letter in the hope of getting a sum of money acknowledges the transatlantic origin of the letter but is indifferent to the names Jennings or Frederick Douglass. Only Hannah's friend Jack Craddogh, a history professor, recognises the potential historical value of the letter,

aware as he is of the "number of scholars who were studying Douglass's time in Britain and Ireland" (McCann, *TransAtlantic* 271). Eventually, the letter proves to be an empty narrative device for, failing to satisfy the readers' growing expectations over the disclosing of characters' revelations, its content consists of little more than a thankful note to the Jennings from Emily on behalf of her mother Lily and this finding compels Hannah to put her property up for auction.

Notwithstanding its hollow function in the actual plot of the novel, the letter fulfils an important symbolic function in the narration, which is illustrating the intersection of geographical and genealogical vectors among the characters. Standing "at the cross-roads of fiction and non-fiction" (Mianowsky 5), the letter epitomises the spatial and temporal displacements narrated throughout the novel, joining the characters across space and time. As a circulating material object, the letter reifies transatlantic patterns of connection and movement, linking both places and people across the Atlantic Ocean.

TransAtlantic constructs a memory of the Atlantic Ocean as a medium connecting the stories of the United States, Ireland and Britain. As a neo-Victorian novel, McCann's narration builds the Victorian past as pervasive in present-day concerns, with nineteenth-century historical and fictional events seeping through the contemporary level of the novel. Hence, the transatlantic routes narrated throughout the novel help to visualise the transhistorical and symbolic connections between past and present events; hence, the Irish Famine – as well as the ensuing migration flow to the United States and the way in which the crisis was poorly dealt with by Victorian Britain – is juxtaposed to the Troubles, the peace negotiations between Britain and Ireland and the fall of the Celtic Tiger under the recent global economic recession.

5. The Neo-Victorian Indian Ocean: Lascars, Coolies and the Opium Trade in Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis* Trilogy

In her preface to *Worlds Within: National Narratives and Global Connections in Postcolonial Writing* (2009), Vilashini Cooppan has described Amitav Ghosh as a writer characterised by a "postcolonial national-cosmopolitanism" (Cooppan xvii). Cooppan situates Ghosh within a bunch of writers, among whom she includes Joseph Conrad, V.S. Naipaul, W.E.B. Du Bois, Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Salman Rushdie or J.M Coetzee, who

> betray a certain distance from the place into which they were born and a powerful pull toward other places, be they imperial centers, emergent new nations, or regional alignments. The majority of these writers are exiles, border-crossers, migrants, cosmopolitans, and global citizens, while a few stay put and write their nations from within their borders (Cooppan xvii).

The diasporic consciousness of these writers illustrates diaspora as a privileged position to analyse the shortcomings of both imperial centre and colonial peripheries. Similarly, Cooppan argues, these authors' works generally dismiss nations and nationalisms as "residual forms in the era of globalization" (Cooppan xvi) and illustrate the 'global' as "a kind of inside, an imaginary of cross-cultural connection and movement that has been mobilized to express various national identifications and disidentifications" (Cooppan xvii). Following this, I want to situate Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy as a contribution to the neo-Victorian genre that seeks to deconstruct the legacy of Victorian imperialism in its transoceanic colonies, particularly in the Indian Ocean and situates the neo-Victorian-at-sea at the crux of critical debates on cosmopolitanism and globalisation. Among other statements, I argue that Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy and the author's 'postcolonial national-cosmopolitanism' retrieve Victorian imperialism in the Indian Ocean as an era presaging today's capitalist globalisation. Additionally, the manifold transnational and intercultural voyages – both

geographical and metaphorical, as well as free and coerced – engendered by Victorian economic exploits in the Indian Ocean contribute to construct subalterns' perspectives in that oceanic region as typifying vernacular modernities and alternative cosmopolitanisms that challenge Victorian historiography and western-based world narrations, creatively bridging the gap between Victorians' colonising drives and current neo-colonial globalism.

Amitav Ghosh already exhibited his interest in the Indian Ocean in his influential travelogue *In an Antique Land* (1992). This ethnographic text, which is at the same time autobiographical and historiographical, records its author's travel around Egypt while researching for his PhD thesis in the 1980s and also gives a historical account of an Egyptian Jewish merchant and his Indian slave and the trade relations they engaged in between Egypt and India in the twelfth century. *In an Antique Land* is considered today a foundational work for scholars engaged in reconceptualising the Indian Ocean waterworlds (Machado 1547), and has garnered Ghosh the consideration of "one of the most dedicated chroniclers of the Indian Ocean" (Desai 1531) or a torch-bearer "ahead of the historiographical curve" whose gap-filling research work on the Indian Ocean "pre-empted the 'transnational turn' in contemporary history-writing, which only really took off in the late 1990s" (Frost 1539).

Significantly Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* and its recuperation of transnational oceanic connections around the pre-colonial Indian Ocean have been positioned on a par with Paul Gilroy's mapping of black identity as a counterculture of Euro-American modernity in Atlantic culture in *The Black Atlantic* (Desai 1531; Grewal 184), with both works being considered as engaged in similar methodologies of

mapping routes, circulation and migration. Nevertheless, as Inderpal Grewal suggests, *In an Antique Land* can be considered a corrective "to the ways in which Gilroy's work delinked the Atlantic from the Indian Ocean" (Grewal 184).

A deficiency that can be imputed to Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* is its arguable provincialism and Eurocentricity because of its exclusive focus on the Atlantic. Neil Lazarus has pointed out that the weakness inherent in Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* lies in its "loss of a specifically *global* perspective" (Lazarus, *Nationalism* 62; original emphasis). In Lazarus's view, "*The Black Atlantic* clearly obliges us to revise our assumptions as to the racial provenance of modernity, [but] it leaves assumptions as to the Western provenance of the modern potentially undisturbed . . . modernity [being] still a Western and not a global phenomenon" (Lazarus, *Nationalism* 63). The challenge of Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* to Gilroy's work lies in the former moving away "from the contest between a 'West' and the 'non-West'" by creating "a world in which the West was either nonexistent or irrelevant and where the focus was the relationship between two 'non-Western' regions" (Grewal 184). As I will argue, Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy takes up such challenge to narrations of the Atlantic in two directions: firstly, the trilogy seeks to establish synergies and continuities between the histories of the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, illustrating both oceanic regions as providing counter-cultures of modernity and vernacular models of cosmopolitanism. Secondly, the trilogy's re-imagining of a thriving pre-colonial trading culture is not only oriented towards a challenging construction of the East 'without Europe' but it also delineates the author's views on future political orientations in the contemporary globalising world.

Accordingly, Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy, comprising *Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011), and *Flood of Fire* (2015) should be equally considered a landmark in the transnational turn that seeks to incorporate the history of peoples and nations around the Indian Ocean in world narrations. As I already pointed out in chapter 2, the Indian Ocean is gaining prominence in cultural and historiographical analyses of the globe, not only because historical insights into the pre-colonial Indian Ocean are revealing an alternative modernity that may complement – and often challenge – narrations of Western Enlightenment, but also because historians see the surpassing of the Atlanto-centrism in the history of globalisation as capital to develop a wider view of world narrations (McKeown 57; Connery 687). The analysis of Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy provided in this chapter is motivated by such historical insights that aim at incorporating the histories of the Indian Ocean into the debates on globalisation and world history.

5.1. Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008)

Amitav Ghosh inaugurated his *Ibis* trilogy with the publication of *Sea of Poppies* in 2008, becoming an instant bestseller and being shortlisted for the 2008 Man Booker Prize.[103] The significance of *Sea of Poppies* in neo-Victorian criticism was established after Heilmann and Llewellyn included the novel in their analysis of postcolonial neo-Victorianism in their seminal work *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009*. Nevertheless, after Heilmann and

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[103]   Elizabeth Ho argues that some postcolonial neo-Victorian novels 'write back' against the British Empire while they simultaneously evoke the nineteenth century in a celebratory and non-critical way. Thus, she argues, "postcolonial neo-Victorian texts can appear mainstream in the hands of writers like Peter Carey and Margaret Atwood who subtly attend the subaltern experiences of empire and are supported by the apparatus of the Booker Prize, which maintains Britain as the imperial (literary) centre" (Ho 11). In light of Ho's assertion, it would have been interesting to know Ghosh's reaction had he been awarded the Man Booker Prize. In fact, in 2001 he tellingly withdrew his novel *The Glass Palace* (2000) from the Commonwealth Writers' Prize out of his discontent with the term 'Commonwealth', which in the author's view is a "euphemism for some incredible violence that was done to the world that is now seeking to whitewash itself" (Ghosh, "Diasporic" 4).

Llewellyn's volume, and despite Ghosh's deep engagement with British imperialism, the novel – and the *Ibis* trilogy in general – has received little sustained critical appraisal within neo-Victorian criticism, apart from Elizabeth Ho's brief analysis in the last chapter of *Neo-Victorianism and the Memory of the Empire* and Eddy Kent's 2015 article in *Neo-Victorian Studies*. *Sea of Poppies* – and to a lesser extent the next two instalments in the *Ibis* trilogy – has been considerably analysed, though, by postcolonial criticism, paying heed to varied aspects of the narration such as migrancy and diaspora (Rai and Pinkney; Gangopadhyay; Anderson), maritime perspectives (Crane; Machado; Lauret), engagements with historiography (Frost; Desai, "Novelist"), language (Han; Guilhamon) or even carnivalesque (Thiara).

The novel, set in 1838 in the context of the looming First Opium Wars (1839-1842), presents a motley crew of individuals whose fates are joined by the *Ibis*, a vessel sailing from Calcutta to Mauritius: Deeti, a North-Indian uppercaste peasant escaping her abusive in-laws who is saved from her funeral pyre by Kalua, an Indian lowcaste; Neel Rattan Halder, a bankrupt Indian *zemindar* (landowner) convicted falsely of forgery who befriends Ah Fatt, a Parsi-Chinese fellow convict and opium addict; Zachary Reid, a mixed-race African American sailor who manages to be promoted to second mate in the *Ibis* on its arrival in Calcutta; Jodu, a Muslim boatman with personal ambitions to join a ship's crew; Paulette, a French orphan and daughter to a French botanist who grew up as an adoptive daughter to Jodu's family and is now trying to escape her English benefactors, the Burnhams; and Baboo Nob Kissin, a Bengali *gomusta* (clerk) to Mr Burnham, the *Ibis*'s owner, who has religious delusions about him sustaining a reincarnation to merge his soul and body to that of his deceased aunt and spiritual leader Ma Taramony. This wide array of characters

and their individual perspectives shape the narrative tapestry which conforms the novel.

Despite the novel's foregrounding of the sea voyage in its title and book cover, Ghosh delays his cast of characters boarding the *Ibis* until the third part of the novel. The narration, subdivided into three parts, namely *Land*, *River* and *Sea*, adopts a microhistorical perspective, with the first two parts providing minute descriptions of the lives of North-Indian peasantry, river life and littoral Calcutta and the third section recording the voyage of the characters on the *Ibis* from Calcutta to the sugar plantation and penal colony of Mauritius. There are four contexts that I want to discuss in relation to the narration: the production and traffic of opium; indentureship and its relation to historical debates on slavery; the impact of sea travel on identity and changing notions of cosmopolitanism; and language diversity around the Indian Ocean. All of these contexts shed light on *Sea of Poppies* as a neo-Victorian maritime novel.

The plot of the *Ibis* trilogy is dominated by two trades: the opium trade and the trade in indentured labourers. Whereas the latter is the main focus of *Sea of Poppies*, the first part in the narration pays heed to the cultivation and manufacture of opium and how it eventually pushed Indian peasants to become indentured labourers in overseas British colonies such as Mauritius, South Africa or the West Indies. Indeed, Amitav Ghosh has been credited to be "one of the few writers to examine the interwoven history of the imperial opium and indentured labor trades, whereas most scholars who specialize in these fields have tended to discuss them separately" (Frost 1541).

The abolition of slavery in the British Empire in 1833 put an end to the providing of cheap labour in the sugar plantations. At the same time, the profitable monopoly enjoyed by the East India Company over the opium trade, in which the drug was produced and manufactured in India to be shipped to China, came under threat after the Chinese government repeatedly tried to suppress the influx of the drug into its coasts at the turn of the nineteenth century. These two factors coalesced to turn the recruitment and transportation of indentured labourers into a profitable trade (Rai and Pinkney 66).[104] Chinese restrictive policy on the inflow of opium into China is the concern of the free trader Mr Burnham, owner of the trading firm Burnham Bros and the *Ibis*: "there is nothing they [Chinese] want from us – they've got it into their heads that they have no use for our products and manufactures. But we, on the other hand, can't do without their tea and their silks" (Ghosh, *Sea* 117). This imbalance in trade in Anglo-Chinese commercial relations exposes the massive importance of opium for the British Empire at the time. Ghosh has pointed out in an interview the tendency of imperial historiography to gloss over the dependency of the British Empire on opium: "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." (Ghosh, "Networks" 35).

Although the passage from the novel quoted above illustrates Sino-British trade relations as a whole – a point I further develop in section 5.3 –, the narration's main concern with the opium trade deals with how the drug eventually pushes the

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[104]   The Apprenticeship system, that worked from the abolition to slavery until 1838, is usually seen as a transition from slavery to indentureship that replayed systems of domination under similar relations of production (Shepherd 344). In the West Indies in particular, after the passing of the 1833 Act, ex-slaves were required to serve an apprenticeship period of four or six years, depending on whether they were domestic slaves or field slaves respectively (Oldfield 45).

subaltern characters to board the *Ibis* for Mauritius and how the cultivation of opium played havoc with Indian peasant life. The opening of the novel illustrates the extent to which the poisonous drug has taken over Deeti's household. The opening of *Sea of Poppies*, that shows how the production of opium has invaded the traditional Indian lifestyle under the British occupation, "produces a metaphor for Western imperialism on a par with Rudyard Kipling's bridge in *The Bridge Builders* and Joseph Conrad's river steamboat in *Heart of Darkness* . . . this is an imperialism, both colorful and menacing, that invades the Indian heartland" (Frost 1540).

As her husband has left for work in the Ghazipur's Opium Factory, Deeti and her daughter Kabutri exhibit how they have necessarily adapted their lifestyle to the enforced introduction of opium in India. As she cooks potatoes in poppy-seed paste and combs Kabutri's hair in poppy-seed oil (Ghosh, *Sea* 7), Deeti reflects upon the time-consuming process of growing opium:

> Fifteen ploughings of the land and every remaining clod to be broken by hand, with a dantoli; fences and bunds to be built; purchases of manure and constant watering; and after all that, the frenzy of the harvest, each bulb having to be individually nicked, drained and scraped. Such punishment was bearable when you had a patch or two of poppies (Ghosh, *Sea* 30).

In the face of this painstaking process, Deeti wonders "what sane person would want to multiply these labours when there were better, more useful crops to grow, like wheat, dal, vegetables?" (Ghosh, *Sea* 30-31). As Ghosh's narrator further comments on the deceitful and coercive means by which *sahibs* (polite address for 'man') compelled North-Indian peasants to grow opium – forcing cash advances, forging the peasants' thumbprint, bribing white magistrates (Ghosh, *Sea* 31), we perceive Victorian free-trade imperialism at its most merciless, upholding a Victorian global economy – under the banner of the East India Company – while simultaneously altering the Indian landscape into a sea of poppies, destroying the

traditional Indian lifestyle and compelling the increasingly impoverished peasants to face starvation or become indentured labourers overseas. In Eddy Kent's view,

> this description of the open collusion between State and Capital – made easy in the colonial sphere where the East India Company operated both as sovereign and merchant – shows the forcible ejection of colonial subjects out of their traditional livelihoods and *their placement within a cash economy . . . in short, they have entered modernity and become proletarian* (Kent 121; my emphasis).

Modernity in the Indian Ocean and the traffic of opium acquires conterminous signifiers to those in the Atlantic. If, as I have argued earlier, for African Americans crossing the Atlantic in the nineteenth century North-Atlantic modernity entailed a negotiation between the unacknowledged memory of slavery and access to citizenship, for Indian subjects implicated in indentureship access to modernity implied getting involved in a vast network of global capital and markets as their only way out of misery and towards upward mobility.

To further confirm the opium trade as the main engine of Victorian industrial capitalism, Ghosh provides a memorable passage narrating Deeti's visit to Ghazipur's Opium Factory. Although, as the narrator observes, "there was nothing about [the factory's] exterior to suggest to an onlooker that it was among the most precious jewels in Queen Victoria's crown" (Ghosh, *Sea* 95), the industrial, quasi-Gothic, undertones of the interior of the factory highlight the connection between the opium traffic and Victorian imperialism. With the opium fumes intoxicating the air and Indian factory workers "sunk waist-deep in tanks of opium," like an "enslaved tribe of demons" with "the look of ghouls," (Ghosh, *Sea* 99), this passage reveals the industrial scale of the opium production and the transference of the logic of industrial capitalism from Victorian Britain to the Indian subcontinent. This transaction between the imperial centre and the colonial periphery is underlined when the narrator

explains that, for the production of opium, "every ingredient was precisely laid down by the Company's directors in faraway London" (Ghosh, *Sea* 101).

For his description of the opium factory, Ghosh has claimed in an interview to have relied on a rare book published in 1865 in Calcutta, J. W. S. MacArthur's "Notes on an Opium Factory," which he came across with in the British Library (Ghosh, "Opium" no pages). In the interview Ghosh states

> how amazing it was to learn about how the opium was processed: the directors of the East India Company, sitting in London, would send directions about how every ball of opium had to have so many chittacks [ounces], how there had to be just so many leaves...it was a completely industrialised process. We talk about Henry Ford rationalising the industrial process, but these guys were doing it much earlier" (Ghosh, "Opium" no pages).

In his commentary on this interview, Eddie Kent claims that "in positioning 'these guys' as the forerunners of Henry Ford . . . Ghosh situates the East India Company at the origins of rationalised industrialism, an argument that discloses the diachronic intention of his novel" (Kent 112). This diachronic intention is articulated, Kent cleverly argues, by establishing in the reader's imagination the production and global circulation of opium in the Victorian era as "the precursor for manufacturing under the direction of the multinational corporation, where an executive working at corporate headquarters in a global city designs a process that takes place in the global periphery, where regulations are few, taxes and wages are low, and lives are cheap" (Kent 120).

This diachronic parallelism is further cemented by invoking contemporary capitalist globalisation and the Western neo-liberal consumption of cheaply manufactured products – at the expense of maintaining the asymmetrical position of underdeveloped economies – in the growing appetite and dependence of opium not only in the increasingly intoxicated Chinese subjects, but in Victorian subjects as well

– including, Mr Burnham points out, "our beloved Queen herself" (Ghosh, *Sea* 121) –

who are described as heavily dependent on morphine, narcotine and laudanum

(Ghosh, *Sea* 121). The manufacture of opium is presented then as a centripetal

industry with the Indian subcontinent and Indian subalterns as its core and Britain

and China as its transoceanic outposts.

If the manufacture of opium features prominently in the first chapters of *Sea of*

Poppies, it is the trade in South-Asian indentured labourers that dominates the rest of

the narration. The abolition of slavery in 1833 endangered the economies of sugar

plantations, which had been relying until now on free labour. With the end of the

Apprenticeship system, the machinery of the British Empire turned now to induce

Indians to travel to British colonies in Africa or the Caribbean, including Mauritius,

Trinidad, Natal, or British Guiana, under indenture contracts. Indentured migrants,

pejoratively known then as 'coolies', were tied to work for a specific master for a

particular number of years. After that period, they could arguably choose between

staying in the overseas colony or being offered a free passage back to India.

Between 1838 and 1917, it is estimated that around 1.5 million Indian – and to a

lesser extent Chinese – emigrants left the Indian subcontinent (Brown 123), a

seemingly insignificant number which nevertheless gave rise, together with other

Indians who travelled freely, to contemporary diaspora populations in Africa and the

Caribbean with South-Asian ancestry.

Indenture is deemed today a minor vector of Asian mobility in the nineteenth

century, indentured workers being highly outnumbered by millions of Asian migrants

who travelled un-indentured for trade or in the service of the British Empire.[105] Nevertheless, the statistically insignificant number of indentured labourers within global networks of migration in the Victorian era has not prevented the indenture system from being widely discussed in historiography. The shadows of coercion and violence which surrounded the indenture system in the Victorian era have attracted wide scholarly attention, which has often polarised into progressive views which considered indentureship as an avenue for improvement and possibilities for labourers, and critical views which emphasised the exploitation and quasi-slavery conditions under which labourers were recruited, transported and put to work in the overseas colonies.

One of the earliest critical and documented accounts of indentureship was that provided by Joseph Beaumont in 1871, *The New Slavery: An Account of the Indian and Chinese Immigrants in British Guiana*. As the title unambiguously indicates, early critical views on indenture signalled the affinities between the system and the abolished chattel slavery. Among other claims, Beaumont points out the discrepancy between the terms in the indenture contract and the actual conditions in the destination (in terms of pay, security and health), the harsh discipline in the plantations, the impossibility for labourers to move beyond two miles from their estate, the poor conditions in medical assistance and housing and the difficulties for labourers to effectively get a passage back to Asia (Beaumont, *New Slavery* 32-33). After outlining all these grievances out of first-person accounts, Beaumont emphatically states:

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[105]   John McKeown points out that "less than 10 percent of Indians and 4 percent of Chinese emigrants were ever directly indentured to Europeans. Most migration was organized along lines broadly similar to the transatlantic migrations" (McKeown 58).

> This is not a question of more or less, of this or that safeguard, or an occasional defect here, or excess there. But it is that of a monstrous, rotten system, rooted upon slavery, grown in its stale soil, emulating its worst abuses, and only the more dangerous because it presents itself under false colours, whereas slavery bore the brand of infamy upon its forehead (Beaumount, *New Slavery* 35).

The rhetoric of constructing indenture labour as a new slavery reaches the twentieth century, with works such as Hugh Tinker's *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas* (1974) and the more recent Ron Ramdin's edition and publication of *The Other Middle Passage: Journal of a Voyage from Calcutta to Trinidad, 1858* (1994), that retrieves the voyage of the ship *Salsette* as recounted by its captain E. Swinton (along with comments by his wife Jane, who was also on board).[106] In twenty-first century criticism, scholars have kept discussing South-Asian labour migration around the debate 'new slavery' vs. 'free labour' or foregrounding further analogies with other systems of oppression or labour regimes such as the system of convict transportation.[107]

Among the scholars who have argued against the neo-slavery theory is Verene A. Shepherd. On the one hand Shepherd acknowledges many of the grievances of the indenture system outlined above, pointing out additionally the coercive means by which labourers were recruited (occasionally recruitment involved kidnappings) and signalling recorded cases of sexploitation in female Indians by the recruiters and the crew on board (Shepherd 344). Nevertheless, she seems to demonstrate that indentureship, for all its violence and coercion, was short of the brutality of chattel slavery and she does so by pointing out abysmal differences between both systems: slaves were deemed chattel (i.e. as their master's property they could be sold,

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[106]   As Verene A. Shepherd states, following Ron Ramdin, the *Salsette* "set sail from India bound for the island of Trinidad in the Southern Caribbean with 324 Indian contract workers on board. The voyage lasted 108 days and at the end of it, 124 of the emigrants had died" (Shepherd 343).

[107]   See Amit Kumar Mishra (2009), Clare Anderson (2009) and Anita Rupprecht (2014).

exchanged, etc.); slavery was for life whereas indenture was temporal and under contract; and, in opposition to indenture, slaves' children inherited the condition of slavery after their progenitors (Shepherd 346).

Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* adopts a somewhat in-between position in the debate on indenture. The narration certainly points out the coercive aspects of indenture and presents the system as the natural inheritor of slavery in the nineteenth century. However, for Deeti, indenture seems her only way out of the tyranny of her in-laws after the death of her husband. As Deeti realises that her husband, Hukam Singh, is impotent due to his opium addiction, she learns that she was impregnated on her wedding night by her brother-in-law Chandan Singh, with her mother-in-law's consent. When her opium-addicted husband dies and Deeti rejects Chandan's sexual advances, she faces being burned in her husband's funeral pyre. However, in a reversal of Gayatri C. Spivak's catchphrase 'white men saving brown women from brown men,' (Spivak, "Subaltern" 93), it is a brown man, the low-caste Kalua, who saves Deeti from her sati (Ghosh, *Sea* 184-186). After sending Kabutri to her brother's village to avoid her becoming a servant to her husband's family, Deeti and Kalua have no option but becoming *girmitiyas* (indentured labourers) on the *Ibis* to escape Deeti's in-laws. Just like Deeti, Paulette is also victim of gendered violence and abuse from her benefactors, the Burnhams. Paulette must confront both Mrs Burnham's insistence on her marrying the stern judge Mr Kendalbushe against her will, and Mr Burnham's morbid requests to spank his buttocks. Dressing herself as an Indian woman, Paulette stocks away in the *Ibis* as a coolie. For Deeti and Paulette, indenture, for all its shortcomings, represents the prospect of a break-away with the past and a new life overseas.

Nevertheless, Ghosh's narration is keen to establish continuities between the abolished chattel slavery and the new system of indenture. As virtually every scholar on the novel has signalled, the *Ibis* is an old slaving ship which has been refitted for new purposes: the transportation of opium and, as the latter has been interrupted due to Chinese pressure, coolies. When Jodu first inspects the *dabusa* (hold) of the ship where coolies are to be located during the voyage to Mauritius, he experiences first-hand the past of the ship:

> Falling to his knees, he discovered that there were several such chains in the pen, nailed into the far beam: they ended in bracelet-like clasps, each fitted with eyeholes, for locks. The weight and heft of the chains made Jodu wonder what sort of cargo they were intended to restrain . . . the stench that permeated the hold was not that of cows, horses or goats; it was more a human odour, compounded of sweat, urine, excrement and vomit; the smell had leached so deep into the timbers as to have become ineradicable (Ghosh, *Sea* 150).

Similarly, later on Deeti fixes her attention on nail marks on the timber of the beam under which she sleeps, developing a sort of physical intimacy with the marks left by the slaves who crossed the Atlantic crammed in the hold of the vessel:

> Never was Deeti more grateful for the beam's proximity than during the first days of the voyage, when she was still unaccustomed to the vessel's motion: it gave her something to hold on to, and she found that she could lessen the whirling sensation in her head by focusing her eyes on the wood. In this way, despite the half-light of the dabusa, she became intimately familiar with that length of timber, learning to recognize its grain, its whorls and even the little scratches that had been carved into its surface by the nails of others who had lain where she lay (Ghosh, *Sea* 411).

This physical, almost organic connection with the former slaves in the infamous Middle Passage allows for a palimpsestic reading of the ship. The physical traces left by former slaves on the hold not only connect the histories of the Atlantic to those of the Indian Ocean but also they highlight a continuity between analogous systems of oppression. I would argue that Ghosh does not conflate slavery with indentureship but he rather makes both regimes participants in the same system of power –

western global capitalism. The experiences of slavery and indentureship, even if they may not be equated, might be seen as conterminous with the propelling of power and capital of western capitalism.

The chronotope of the *Ibis* therefore signals the ship not only as a geographical location but also as a trope for *presence/absence* of ongoing and shifting forms of colonial oppression, which ties in with neo-Victorianism's preoccupation with the past and its material effects in the present. The shipspace, as portrayed in *Sea of Poppies*, transcends its spatial dimension and becomes a powerful trope of historical continuity which illustrates the neo-Victorian genre's emphasis on presentness and preservation (Arias, "Traces" 113; Wolfreys, "Notes" 164) and the increasing abandonment of postmodern discourses on the irretrievability of the past more broadly.

Slavery and indentureship are therefore both participant of the same system of capitalist exploitation. This is suggested by the *Ibis*' owner Mr Burnham, who argues that "a hold that was designed to carry slaves will serve just as well to carry coolies and convicts . . . We'll put in a couple of heads and piss-dales, so the darkies needn't always be fouling themselves. That should keep the inspectors happy" (Ghosh, *Sea* 83). Motivated by dubious notions of *freedom*, Mr Burnham reads indentureship as the obvious inheritor of slavery in the face of the growing abolitionist movement: "Have you not heard it said that when God closes one door he opens another? When the doors of freedom were closed to the African, the Lord opened them to a tribe that was yet more needful of it – the Asiatick" (Ghosh, *Sea* 83). In this sense, the significance of *Sea of Poppies* as a maritime neo-Victorian novel consists of

implicating the Victorian Age in the history of slavery, arguably finished and abolished by the time of Queen Victoria's accession to the throne.

Together with the chronotope of the *Ibis*, the most powerful link between Atlantic slavery and South-Asian indenture is Zachary Reid, the light-skinned African American who is promoted to Second Mate on the *Ibis*. Ghosh underscores Reid's links to the Atlantic tradition in the character's recollection of an episode involving Frederick Douglass:

> For the first time in many months, [Zachary's] vision turned inwards, travelling back across the oceans to his last day at Gardiner's shipyard in Baltimore. He saw again a face with a burst eyeball, the scalp torn open where a handspike had landed, the dark skin slick with blood. He remembered, as if it were happening again, the encirclement of Freddy Douglass, set upon by four white carpenters . . . That was when Zachary had decided to quit the shipyard and seek a berth on a ship's crew (Ghosh, *Sea* 53-54).

Zachary remembers his encounter with Frederick Douglass as the episode which drove him towards the sea. In this, Ghosh is making Reid participant in the liberatory potential of the Atlantic for African Americans that I outlined in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, his transatlantic passage proves to be far from liberating for Zachary for he sees a reimposition of landed epistemologies of race upon his persona: as the *Ibis* sails away from Baltimore, Reid is listed as 'Black' in the crew record (Ghosh, *Sea* 13), compromising his performance of 'white' seamanship and reinscribing the archival violence of the Middle Passage.

However, as Jacob Crane cleverly observes, the *Ibis*'s voyage reaches a turning point at the very border of the Atlantic, Cape Town, where the *Ibis* is joined by lascars (Crane 8). As the vessel is berthed in South Africa, most of the sailors desert her, which enables Zachary to eventually become first mate. Cape Town emerges as

the limit between the conceptual boundaries of the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans. In Crane's view,

> it is Zachary's ability to cross this arbitrary line-in-the-water that reaffirms a homology between Western and Eastern counter-narratives of modernity. Only beyond the borders of Gilroy's . . . black Atlantic system . . . do the monolithic discursive structures of race in modernity start to break down (Crane 9).

Atlantic epistemologies of race collapse in the first encounter between Zachary Reid and Baboo Nob Kissin. A vehement devotee of Krishna – whose name means *black* – Nob Kissin looks for signs of the arrival of the 'Dark Lord' on earth. As he listens to Reid playing his old penny-whistle, Nob Kissin considers Reid can be the emissary of Krishna on earth – the Hindu deity is usually portrayed with a flute in Indian iconography – which prompts Nob Kissin to detect traces of *darkness* in the American sailor (Ghosh, *Sea* 152-153). As Nob Kissin further notices the notation 'Black' besides Zachary's name in the logbook, he sees the inscription not as an indication that Reid is an African American passing for white, but as a proof that the sailor is actually an emissary from the Dark Lord Krishna on earth (Ghosh, *Sea* 174).

Baboo Nob Kissin's misreading of Zachary's racial identity not only indicates Nob Kissin's religious delusions but it also attests for blackness to adopt alternative signifiers in the Indian Ocean, beyond the memory of the Black Atlantic and the racialised violence of the Atlantic archive. Zachary's position in the *Ibis* is compromised at the end of the novel when Mr Crowle, "wielding the coercive power of the archive" (Crane 11), finds the logbook page recording the African American's racial identity and blackmails him into hijacking the *Ibis*.

Zachary Reid illustrates, in Rudrani Gangopadhyay's words, "a surrogate for black Atlantic memory, harking back to another history of sea crossing and locating

the novel within another discourse of diaspora and migration" (Gangopadhyay 60).
The African American sailor illustrates, then, Ghosh's attempt to relocate the memory
of the black Atlantic *beyond* the borders of the Atlantic and to render visible the
interconnections between Atlantic and Indian Oceans (and their respective systems
of oppression, slavery and indentureship) by pushing the boundaries of Gilroy's Black
Atlantic model towards the East.

Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* seems fuelled by a drive to retrieve the persona and
psyche of the coolie among the quantitative records of nineteenth-century world
migration. The absence of first-person accounts of coolie experiences has triggered
the figure of the South-Asian indentured labourer to be constructed either by external
viewpoints, or occasionally by the labourers' contemporary descendants.[108] This
cultural invisibility becomes even more accentuated if the coolie is placed against
slaves in the Atlantic tradition, who set about initiating projects of memory and
healing in their slave narratives and whose cultural legacy is underpinned by the neo-
slave narrative genre. In this sense, Isabel Hofmeyr argues, "the Indian Ocean has
been home to failed diasporas, notably people who move but do not embark on
projects of cultural memory and constructing homelands" (Hofmeyr 18).

Shantini Pillai, out of her exploration of accounts of indentured labourers such
as the colonial official H. L. Stevenson's *Burma Legislative Council* or George
Orwell's *Burmese Days* (1934), points out that representations of the coolie often
highlight his/her misery, docility and outcast status (Pillai 48). *Sea of Poppies* springs

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[108]   Agnes Sam's collection of short stories *Jesus is Indian* (1994) is a case in point. Agnes Sam,
who was raised in Port Elizabeth, is a descendant of nineteenth-century Indian labourers who were
brought into indenture in South Africa. Her stories capture the struggle of Indians and their
descendants to renegotiate their Indian identities in an African context "as a buffer between whites and
Africans" (Sam 9).

from similar attempts to resignify the figure of the South-Asian indentured labourer that forgo the representations alluded by Pillai. The word 'coolie' itself, at the time used derogatorily, has been re-appropriated by Indo-Caribbean scholars and writers to challenge traditional representations of indenture. Rajkumari Singh for instance, asserts that the word "coolie" "conjures up poignancy, tears, defeats, achievements" but he argues that "the word must not be left to die out, buried and forgotten in the past. It must be given a new lease of life" (Singh 353).

In this vein the Mauritian poet Khal Torabully coined the term *coolitude* (echoing Aimé Césaire's concept of *négritude*) to make sense of the shared history of displacement of Asian and Chinese indentured labourers and their cultural impact in Africa and the Caribbean. Coolitude, Khal Torabully and Martina Carter claim, "explores the concept of the ocean as a nodal moment of migration, a space for destruction of identity, yet also one of regeneration, when an aesthetics of migration was created" (Carter and Torabully 17). At the same time, coolitude, in opposition to essentialist notions of culture which refer to one particular race, ethnicity or religion, "symbolizes, in its broader definition, the possibility of building a composite identity to ease the pain and enrich culturally the lands in which [the coolie] settled" (Torabully 144). Coolitude in Ghosh's novel features as a category which defies boundaries of race, language and caste, and at the same time it retrieves the humanity of the coolie as an agent in charge of creatively reconceptualising his identity in the face of adversity, dislocation and uprootedness.

That said, the most salient aspect of coolitude in *Sea of Poppies* is the impact of sea travel on the coolie's identity. The oceanic voyage through the Indian Ocean is particularly dramatic for Hindu characters in the narration since in Hindu mythology

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and especially for high caste Hindus the crossing of the *Kala Pani*, or Black Water was associated with impurity and the loss of caste.[109] The most extreme exponent of the stern caste system in India, as represented in the novel, is Neel Rattan Halder, the fallen *zemindar* and Bengali aristocrat fraudulently convicted to transportation to Mauritius. The strict standards of caste and purity are illustrated in Neel's behavior and habits before his conviction: he avoids shaking hands with foreigners – unless he carries out a bath and change of clothes afterwards –, he cannot sit to eat with foreigners, his food is prepared according to strict rules, and he cannot eat anything prepared by a foreigner or an individual from an unknown caste. This firm system of caste boundaries and orthodox rules of purity is blown up when Neel is taken to Alipore Jail and he is compelled to clean up the faeces and vomit of his cell mate, the Parsi-Chinese and opium addict Ah Fatt – in Neel's words, "the incarnate embodiment of his loathings" (Ghosh, *Sea* 336) – who suffers from incontinence because of withdrawal symptoms. The moment in which Neel takes the *jharu* (broom) and scoop is illustrated as a moment of transformation for his self, for "he knew that he would cease to be the man he had been a short while before" (Ghosh, *Sea* 337). This carnivalesque fixation on scatological images, Nicole Thiara argues, "lends itself to a critique of caste . . . but it also opens up a space for the denigration of colonialism and its civilizing mission" (Thiara 664).

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[109] The iconic Mahatma Gandhi records the Hindu taboo with sea travelling in his autobiography. In 1888, as he was preparing to leave Bombay for England to pursue law studies, Gandhi recalls his family's misgivings upon him crossing the seas (Ghandi 73-74), despite Gandhi's own confidence in his decision and the fact that the taboo was gradually disappearing in the second half of the nineteenth century. Conversely, and as I have argued before, Kenneth McPherson points out certain coastal communities in the Indian subcontinent, such as the Chettiars, the Gujaratis, the Paravas or the Mappilas, who engaged in transoceanic trade around the Indian Ocean in the pre-colonial period and had no concerns for Hindu taboos on sea travel (McPherson 34-36).

If bodily taboos in the Indian caste system are articulated around the character of Neel, the Hindu taboo with the sea voyage is nevertheless voiced through the character of Deeti. Her religious background, just like Neel's, is closely attached to India as a sacred land and is strictly articulated around the rigid caste system. Indeed, as Rai and Pinkney point out, Indians of particular high castes could face exclusion, ostracism and loss of caste on their return from overseas lands (Rai and Pinkney 69). As the coolies are about to get on board and Deeti expresses her anxiety over crossing the *Kala Pani* in the presumably polluting company of people from all walks of life, it is the feisty and clever Paulette who manages to soothe Deeti's fears:

> 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 – *jaházbhais* and *jaházbahens* – to each other. There'll be no differences between us (Ghosh, *Sea* 372).

The fluidity of the sea crossing enables the flattening of caste and class differences among radically diverse cultural groups out of a shared collectivity and traumatic dislocation. As victims of Victorian imperialism, the ship-siblings on board turn the *Ibis* into the Third Space of diaspora, as it is suggested by Deeti's reaction to Paulette's comforting words: "her new self, her new life, had been gestating all this while in *the belly of this creature, this vessel that was the Mother-Father of her new family*, a great wooden *mái-báp*, an adoptive ancestor and parent of dynasties yet to come: here she was, the *Ibis*" (Ghosh, *Sea* 372-373; my emphasis). The womb imagery exhibited in this fragment illustrates the ship as heterotopia, a space inserted in structures of Western imperial domination but prone to provide possibilities of transgression and generation of new hybrid identities. In this sense, the vessel as womb further suggests the conterminous boundaries of the ship constructed as Third Space and heterotopia, that is, as a locus which is spatially identified with the very

inception of resistance but whose transgressive effects suggest indeed a *temporal* subversive take on identity as a result of provisional "spaces of alternate ordering" (Hetherington viii).

The lasting communion between the ship-siblings on board the *Ibis* is recorded in Deeti's shrine in Mauritius, the heroine's memorial to the multicultural community on board the *Ibis* which is presented to the reader in several flash-forward references throughout the narration. This shrine features as a material after-image of the shape-shifting character of identities in the maritime crossing. That the subaltern individuals boarding the *Ibis* are developing new identities is underscored by the characters being renamed before and throughout the sea voyage. As Mr Doughty fails to transcribe Indian names correctly, Deeti and Kalua are re-christened Aditi and Maddow Colver, respectively. The *zemindar* Neel Rattan Halder is deprived of his nobility titles to be referred to as simply Neel. Zachary Reid is called *Malum* (Mate) Zikri by the lascars on board, including the Serang (and former pirate) Ali and Paulette is alternatively referred to as Paulette, Putli or Pugli. The multiplicity of names attests for the identity of the diasporic subject to be in permanent transformation.

The coolies on board the *Ibis* constitute an 'actually existing' form of cosmopolitanism (Robbins, "Introduction" 3): they are a group of outcast individuals who have become enmeshed in a global network of capitalist interests and therefore have become "cosmopolitan against their will" (Kent 122). The cosmopolitan character exhibited by the coolie characters on board the *Ibis* therefore records recent conceptualisations of cosmopolitanism out of coercive networks of migration and eschews "the predominant focus in contemporary postcolonial criticism on the

celebratory elements of exile and displacement, the *heroic* potential of migrancy as a metaphor for a 'new' form of aesthetic freedom" (Nasta 4, original emphasis). Ghosh's carefully woven patchwork of subaltern encounters and the fluidity of the protagonists' increasingly cosmopolitan identities under the coercion of indenture illustrate also "an attempt to reinscribe an Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism into the history of the ocean that is seen to have been eroded over time under European— particularly British—imperial rule from the later nineteenth century and through the politics of postcolonial states" (Machado 1549).

Significantly, the sea migrants on the *Ibis* strive to make sense of their newly globalised identities while trying to retain some *Indianness*. This is illustrated when Sarju, a coolie midwife dying of seasickness and exhaustion, hands in to Seeti Indian seeds in small pouches: ganja (cannabis), datura and poppy. For Deeti and Sarju the seeds represent the promise of a continuation of their Indian culture in their future land, Mauritius and a material link with their native homeland. Later on, when Deeti moves to deck and sits with Kalua, she notices that a seed of poppy is caught under her thumbnail. As Deeti dislodges the poppy seed and places on her palm, she looks in awe at "this minuscule orb – at once bountiful and all-devouring, merciful and destructive, sustaining and vengeful . . . it is the star that took us from our homes and put us on this ship. It is the planet that rules our destiny" (Ghosh, *Sea* 469). For Deeti, whose psyche has been but newly unmoored from her rural India, equating the tiny seed of opium with a planet seems the closest available metaphor to make sense of her and the coolies' position within a global cash economy.

Ghosh's rendition of the sea voyage as a catalyst for the collapse of caste, race and cultural boundaries does not prevent the narration from paying heed to the brutal

aspects of colonialism on board. The growing intimacy and connection between the *girmityas* is altered when Jodu and Munia, a Muslim and a Hindu respectively, are caught in a rendezvous and Kalua and Deeti's identities are uncovered. Violence erupts as the subedar Bhyro Singh tortures Kalua on deck. After Kalua counterattacks and kills the Subedar, Kalua, Serang Ali, Neel and Ah Fatt escape the *Ibis* on a boat. The ship as heterotopia may facilitate an alternate order of things but it is still linked to colonial structures of power.

If the sea voyage in *Sea of Poppies* pays heed to the collapse of caste boundaries, the narration is no less attentive to the ocean as a locality for gender transgression. William Hasty and Kimberly Peters have identified in recent heterotopic approaches to the sea voyage by social geographers a "notion of the ship as a site of alternative orderings and a place where the conventions of identity – figured in terms of class, gender, race, nationality, and so on – are subverted" (Hasty and Peters 664-665). More specifically Philip E. Steinberg claims that "as a space that is almost universally represented as female but that is populated overwhelmingly by males, the ocean is an arena of intense gendering processes, which impact and reflect social conceptions of gender at sea and on land" (Steinberg, *Social* 191). Ghosh accounts for these gendering processes in different episodes throughout his narration which often involve feminine metaphors or gender inversion.

Ghosh's descriptions of lascars and their lifestyle provide one of such vignettes which are exemplary of gender transgression at sea. Lascars on board the *Ibis*, which include Hindus, Muslims or Goan Christians, provide another example of the cosmopolitanism of the Indian Ocean. Coming from India, China or East Africa and having "nothing in common, except the Indian Ocean" (Ghosh, *Sea* 14), lascars as

portrayed in the novel invert Western gender conventions, exemplified by the fact that, "unlike sailors elsewhere, [they] often spoke of their ships in the masculine" (Ghosh, *Sea* 195). As the *serang* (head of the lascars) and ship mates are absent, the lascars transform the *fana* (forecastle) into a bacchanal, led by the two tindals in the lascar crew, Babloo-tindal and Mandoo-tindal.[110] Whereas Babloo-tindal's involvement in the lascar party consists of him playing the drums on metal pots, Mamdoo-tindal's participation is more transgressive:

> Mamdoo-tindal was tall and lissom and when the mood was on him he would doff his lungi and banyan and change into a sari, choli and dupatta; with kohl in his eyes and brass rings dangling from his ears, he would assume his other identity, which was that of a silver-heeled dancer who went by the name of Ghaseeti-begum. This character had a complicated life of her own, strewn with heart-breaking flirtations, sparkling exchanges of wit and many besetting sorrows – but it was for her dancing that Ghaseeti-begum was best known, and her performances in the fana were such that few among the crew ever felt the need to visit a shoreside nautchery (Ghosh, *Sea* 199).

Mamdoo-tindal's cross-dressing into an Indian female dancer is not the only instance of gender inversion in the novel. For Mr Burnham's *gomusta*, Baboo Nob Kissin, his delusive perception of his body receiving the spirit of Ma Taramoni triggers him to adopt conventionally feminine codes throughout the sea voyage by letting his hair loose in long ringlets, wearing female dresses and necklaces, and imitating Taramoni's swaying hips. In Heilmann and Llewellyn's view, "this flamboyant character's spiritual and bodily hybridity expresses itself in a progressively subversive rejection of imperial codes of gender purity through the public cultivation of femininity" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 73), much to the distress of the Victorian imperialist Mr Burnham, who scornfully claims when observing Baboo Nob Kissin's 'womanish' appearance: "Man and woman? God made them both as they were, Baboon, and

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[110]   Within the hierarchy of the lascar crew, the *tindal* (bosun's mate) is placed in an intermediate position below the *serang* (bosun or seniormost) and above the *seacunny* (helmsman) (Ghosh, *Ibis Chrestomathy* 27).

there's nothing illusory about either, nor is there anything in between" (Ghosh, *Sea* 224). Mando-tindal's and Baboo Nob Kissin's acts of gender crossing therefore challenge imperial gender codes and subvert land-locked gendered constructs of behaviour.

Sea of Poppies also exhibits a zealous determination to undermine the nineteenth-century maritime experience as exclusively male. For this purpose, Ghosh not only foregrounds Deeti and Paulette, and their respective perspectives on sea travel, as key generators in the narration, but he also uses feminine metaphors to shed light on the indenture experience or uses female characters to channel recent historiographic perspectives which challenge the sea as an all-male domain. For example, as Rai and Pinkney observe, Deeti's arrival in the hold of the *Ibis* just before weighing anchor, as she feels observed by the other female coolies, is compared to "the examination of a new bride by her husband's neighbours" (Ghosh, *Sea* 244). For Rai and Pinkney, this metaphor is noteworthy since

> it neatly underscores the notion of exile that is at the core of the diasporic condition. Nuptial alliances in the vast majority of South Asian communities are patrilocal, meaning that, upon the occasion of marriage, the bride leaves her natal place and shifts to her husband's family's place of residence . . . in seeking to capture the girmitiyas' sense of banishment, Ghosh consciously employs a feminine metaphor in evoking the trope of a bride's exile (Rai and Pinkney 71)

Nevertheless, Ghosh's most decisive drive to counterbalance the traditional all-male construction of the sea is channelled through Paulette. The French orphan, in her attempt to escape the Burnhams, is determined to stock away in the *Ibis* by disguising herself as a lascar. Her plan is eschewed by Baboo Nob Kissin, who manages instead to infiltrate her on board with the rest of female *girmitiyas*, but Paulette's motives for cross-dressing as a male mariner are revealing: she claims to

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be the grand-niece of Jeanne Baret, also known as Madame Commerson (Ghosh, *Sea* 267).

A true historical figure, the Frenchwoman and scientist Jeanne Baret (1740-1816) is credited today to have been the first woman to circumnavigate the earth. Disguised as a man, Baret served as botanical assistant to Philibert Commerson, a French naturalist and botanist who joined Louis Antoine de Bougainville in a French scientific expedition around the globe between 1766 and 1769 (Schiebinger 22-25).[111] In reclaiming her ancestry to the remarkable Jean Baret, Paulette seeks to discredit Zachary's claim – and the readers' expectations – that "there sure aren't any woman marines" (Ghosh, *Sea* 267). Additionally, Paulette's reclamation seems informed by recent historiography which unveils maritime culture in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a remarkable arena for "forging modern gender identities" (Steinberg, *Social* 192). This line of research on maritime gender transgression, which often focuses on female pirates (Creighton and Norling; Klausman, Meinzerin and Kuhn), seems to be recording a continuum in the appropriation of the sea to challenge and subvert landed gendered norms.[112]

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[111] In neo-Victorian criticism, a better-known case of cross-dressing at sea is that of James Miranda Barry, a surgeon who joined the British army as a medical officer and military surgeon and whose female sex was only discovered after her death. Her remarkable life and voyages around the globe were fictionalised in Patricia Duncker's historical novel *James Miranda Barry* (1999).

[112] A remarkable account of maritime female transgression is that of the American suffragist campaigners Margaret Foley and Florence Luscomb. In 1911 Foley and Luscomb went aboard the steamship SS *Bohemian* on behalf of the Boston Suffrage Association to attend an international suffrage convention in Stockholm. While on board, Foley and Luscomb engaged into activities such as lending books to passengers and organising public debates on board to spread feminist and suffragist ideas across the Atlantic (Cresswell 203-207). A recent but no less remarkable instance is the non-profit organisation *Women on the Waves*, which carries out safe abortion services in international waters to women residing in countries with strict abortion laws. The organisation was founded by the Dutch physician and women's rights activist Rebecca Gomperts in 1999 and is fully operational today (Hasty and Peters 664).

To close this section, a context of the novel that is crucial to understand the polyculturalism exhibited in the narration is language. The heteroglossic character of Ghosh's narration reveals a strikingly hybrid perspective of the (neo)Victorian Indian Ocean and its watery routes.[113] Ghosh's literary strategies when dealing with language are varied and complex. To begin with, the author blows away any stable category of standard English by breaking the language into multiple varieties of English which co-exist and are in friction with each other. To the American English articulated by Zachary Reid, Ghosh juxtaposes the Anglo-Indian language spoken by long-time British residents in India (Mr Doughty, Mrs Burnham), the Baboo English of Bengali clerks (Baboo Nob Kissin) or Pidgin Chinese-inflected English (Ah Fatt). On the other hand, Ghosh tries to resurrect Laskari, the nautical jargon used by lascars which was composed by a vast array of linguistic influences including English, Arabic, Portuguese and Hindi. To further complicate this polyphonic narration, Ghosh infuses the text with words from other languages, including Bengali, Urdu, Bhojpuri, Hindi, French or Chinese.

This medley of languages exhibited by Ghosh's characters is the author's most vivid strategy to reveal the polyculturalism of the (neo)Victorian Indian Ocean and underscore the characters' personalities and emotional sinews. The reader may be bewildered in the first pages by the polyphonic character of the text but as the narration progresses, these motley voices are perceived as flowing naturally from the characters and they stand out as Ghosh's main strategy of revealing the characters' conflicts. In *The Dialogic Imagination* (1982) Mikhail Bakhtin argues that "language,

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113   I use the adjective 'heteroglossic' in the Bakhtinian sense. In R. Brandon Kershner's words, "Bakhtin uses the term 'heteroglossia' to refer to the fact that speech, insofar as it is always embodied in a particular situation, is always multiple, always a mixture of languages which themselves can be further reduced . . . thus language is always double-voiced, embodying both the language of the speaker . . . and any immediate or anticipated addressee" (Kershner 22).

for the individual consciousness, lies on the border between oneself and the other"
(Bakhtin 293). Following this, I argue that Ghosh constructs a notion of language as
another *contact zone*, in Mary Louise Pratt's terms, in which language friction is a
basic axiom articulating self-other relations and the diasporic experience.

Ghosh's creative use of the cohabitation of different languages in his narration
represents the hybridity and multiplicity of his identity as a writer. Ghosh has
expressed the reciprocated influence between English and eastern languages. On
the one hand he has noted the influence of English on Bengali syntax and literature
(Ghosh, "Diasporic" 7). On the other hand he has emphatically pointed out about
Indian words used by English characters in novel that "80 per cent of them are in the
complete Oxford English Dictionary, they are English words" (Ghosh, "Opium" no
pages). In light of the Asian influence on English in the nineteenth century, Ghosh
states that "if we [Asian writers] are going to write in this language at all, then we
must reclaim for it what it historically had" (Ghosh, "Opium" no pages). In opposition
to postcolonial calls for decolonisation which I referred to in section 2.1, this "mutual
interconnection" between English and Indian forms of expression must be
recognised, in Ghosh's view, "as a source of strength and richness as opposed to
something else" (Ghosh, "Diasporic" 7), an idea that, I argue, should be productively
extended to postcolonial states and diasporic cultures in general to signal their
privileged interstitial stance to comment on the shortcomings of both colonising and
colonised cultures. In the same fashion, Ghosh's portrayal of the linguistic cross-
fertilisation between English and Indian languages in the nineteenth century
contributes to set Victorianism within a larger "Victorian geopolitical aesthetic"
(Goodlad, "Cosmopolitanism" 399) which re-situates Victorian culture as permeable

in relation with the manifold colonial cultures with which it came into contact in global cosmopolitan networks in the nineteenth century.

One of the idioms that Ghosh seeks to retrieve in *Sea of Poppies* is the Anglo-Indian variety of English used by British residents in India during the British Raj. Rudyard Kipling's work already illustrated Anglo-Indian life from a linguistic point of view, his texts being peppered with words from Indian vernacular languages. Nevertheless, as Lise Guilhamon cleverly observes, the Indian words used by the characters in Ghosh's novel do not reproduce the Indian pronunciation but rather the manifold ways in which British living in India mis-pronounced and mis-spelled those words (Guilhamon 71). In contradistinction to earlier Indian English novels, *Sea of Poppies* does not provide a glossary at the end of the text nor are the warped words translated or clarified – excepting for Deeti's interventions in Bhojpuri. The results of this strategy are jarring dialogues which lead to linguistic friction and misunderstanding – and to the reader's linguistic defamiliarisation.

Mr Doughty, who has been living in India for over twenty-five years, is a telling example of this linguistic intermixture; he uses words such as *cuzzanah* (money), *tumasher* (show, spectacle) or *gudda* (donkey, fool) much to the bafflement of Zachary Reid (Ghosh, *Sea* 51). Exchanges between Mrs Burnham and Paulette present scenes of further linguistic confusion – given the French background of the latter – and feature among the few moments of comic relief in the narration. For instance, when Mrs Burnham wrongfully thinks Paulette is pregnant, she inquires on the matter by using an Anglo-Indian equivalent of a common English expression – "there isn't a rootie [bun] in the choola [oven], is there?" (Ghosh, *Sea* 288) –, which Paulette misunderstands as having an upset stomach.

English language is not the exclusive domain of British characters though. The Raja Neel Rattan Halder exhibits an excellent mastery of English language and culture, and this gains him the mistrust of the British characters in general and the disdain of Mr Doughty in particular. This linguistic dexterity has allowed him to keep a privileged position among the Indian elite because of his long-established business relations with English merchants. As his trade relations with Mr Burnham put him unjustly in prison, Neel starts to reconceptualise English as a tool of resistance against the colonisers. He finds out so when he unsettles the colonial *serjeant* in Alipore Jail, "simply by virtue of addressing him in his own [English] tongue – a thing that was evidently counted as an act of intolerable insolence in an Indian convict, a defilement of the language" (Ghosh, *Sea* 302). Finding out the subversive potential for an Indian native to speak perfect English, Need decides that "in the rest of his life as a convict, he would speak English whenever possible" (Ghosh, *Sea* 302).

Neel equally appropriates the English language as a medium to become the *Ibis* community's chronicler and lexicographer and as a tool of communication with Ah Fatt, his fellow convict in Alipore Jail and in the *chokey* of the *Ibis*.[114] Joined by their misery and their victimhood under the tyranny of colonial justice, Neel and Ah Fatt, Bhojpuri- and Chinese-speaker respectively, use pidgin English as an in-between medium that becomes "a gateway to humanity and understanding, the language of

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[114]   Amitav Ghosh published an electronic glossary – the *Ibis Chrestomathy* –, available on his webpage, explaining the etymologies and meanings of the multiple Hindi-, Bengali-, or Urdu-influenced words in the English language which feature in the *Ibis* trilogy. Fictively composed by Neel Rattan Halder and his grand- and great-grandchildren since 1880s, the introduction to the glossary plays on a migrant metaphor to underscore the diasporic condition of words: "words, no less than people, are endowed with lives and destinies of their own . . . [they are] among the many migrants who have sailed from eastern waters towards the chilly shores of the English language" (Ghosh, *Ibis Chrestomathy* 1).

intimacy and connection" (Han 299). The inquisitive Paulette witnesses the increasingly close connection between the two convicts:

> After yet another stolen glance, [Paulette] saw that the two men were now speaking to each other, and this further excited her curiosity . . . What language might they share, this skeletal Easterner and this tattooed criminal? . . . when she put her ear to a seam in the wood, she found, to her astonishment, that she could not only hear what was being said, but understand it too – for, amazingly, the two convicts were conversing in English (Ghosh, *Sea* 379).

As Ah Fatt starts to unravel and narrate his memories to Neel, both come to develop a shared envisioning of their outcast status and to get over race and nationality boundaries. Ah Fatt's descriptions of his birth town Guangzhou (Canton) and his half-Chinese half-Parsi ancestry play a particularly evocative effect on Neel, who starts to displace his admiration for British cultural heritage towards cultures and heritages geographically more accessible, including his own repressed Bhojpuri language and culture. As Neel listens to Ah Fatt's cherished childhood memories from his Chinese mother in Canton and Deeti and the other women's Bhojpuri songs through the air duct in the chokey, his memories starts to retrieve the 'rustic' Bhojpuri language of his childhood which his father compelled him to unlearn in favour of Hindushtani, English, and Persian to "communicate with those who held the reins of power" (Ghosh, *Sea* 416). Neel's recuperation of the Bhojpuri of his childhood illustrates the almost transcendental character that *local* colonial cultures, effaced by imperial violence, acquire when situated in the waters of transoceanic diaspora, again highlighting the fluid interplay between the global and the local in oceanic interactions.

What truly transpires out of Ah Fatt's boyhood memories from Canton is that he represents an alternative model of hybridity beyond English culture and language. In his recollections, Ah Fatt describes how Bahram Moddie, his Parsi father, has

ambitions for him to learn English, play cricket and travel someday to the West. Ironically, for the Chinese-raised Ah Fatt, "the West in question was somewhat nearer at hand; in fact it was intended to be none other than Mr Moddie's very own homeland – Hindushtan, or Jambudvipa as it was called in the old books" (Ghosh, *Sea* 438). In contradistinction to his father's colonised mind, who states that the real West is "France or America or England, some play where people are civilized" (Ghosh, *Sea* 439), Ah Fatt aspires to a non-European modernity and civilisation which lies outside English language and culture. Ah Fatt's hybridity challenges and remaps the binaries West/East and coloniser/colonised and his use of Pidgin English ironically features as an instrument to express and disseminate his own English-free cultural heritage.

Paulette's, Neel's, and Ah Fatt's uses of the English language illustrate what Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch'ien has called *weird English*. In her analysis of authors who use unorthodox forms of English, such as Vladimir Nabokov or Maxine Hong Kingston, Ch'ien argues that non-native eccentric uses of English, through their *weirding*, deprive "English of its dominance and allows other languages to enjoy the same status" since "the rhythms and structure of orthodox English alone are not enough to express the diasporic cultures that speak it" (Ch'ien 11). Following Ch'ien, Stephanie Han considers that the *Ibis* subalterns make use of the language of their colonisers in the guise of "liberating forms of English" (Han 299) to articulate their new identities. The weirding of the language of the coloniser therefore articulates the core of the diasporic experience, revealing the empowering potential of the characters' multilingual and intercultural dexterity.

Besides the manifold deterritorialised varieties of English which Ghosh reproduces, the author also seeks to resurrect Laskari, the pidgin shared between lascars across the Indian Ocean,

> that motley tongue, *spoken nowhere but on the water*, whose words were as varied as the port's traffic, an anarchic medley of *Portuguese* calaluzes and Kerala pattimars, *Arab* booms and Bengal paunch-ways, Malay proas and Tamil catamarans, *Hindusthani* pulwars and *English* snows – yet beneath the surface of this farrago of sound, meaning flowed as freely as the currents beneath the crowded press of boats (Ghosh, *Sea* 108; my emphasis).

This rendering of Laskari as an idiom sedimented with several languages and 'spoken nowhere but on the water' illustrates the Indian Ocean and their waterways as a map of travelling words, the lascars beings vectors for the trajectories of a multilingual lingo shared by a transoceanic and global workforce. Ghosh has significantly argued that lascars were "possibly the first Asians and Africans to participate freely, and in substantial numbers, in a globalized workspace" (Ghosh, "Of Fanas" 58). The decks of lascar-crewed vessels emerge as multilingual and multicultural contact zones in which Laskari features as the obvious result of a multiplicity of actors and situations in which imperial monolingualism is no longer operative. Laskari and its rendition in *Sea of Poppies* as the "epitome of a diasporic tongue . . . in a proto-globalized world" (Guilhamon 73) ironically prefigures the rise of English as global lingua franca today. Laskari, as a harbinger of contemporary global English, is illustrated as a deterritorialised idiom, unmoored from the logic of the nation and left to drift the waves of the ocean, readily available to be appropriated and transformed by its seaborne actors.

Sea of Poppies ends in a cliffhanger, with Deeti impregnated and Reid observing impassively how Ah Fatt, Neel, Kalua and Serang Ali are escaping the *Ibis* on a boat in a storm-tossed sea, raising the problematic question of whether Reid,

the son of an African American slave, is complicit in perpetuating a system of oppression borne out of the very roots of Atlantic slavery that is taking *girmitiyas* to Mauritius to satisfy sugar planters' demand for cheap labour. The open-ended denouement in the middle of the sea, however, coalesces with the scope often adopted by the experience of maritime diaspora and the neo-Victorian-at-sea, that is, the foregrounding of the sea voyage over the points of departure and destination.

5.2. Amitav Ghosh's *River of Smoke* (2011)

River of Smoke, Ghosh's second volume in the *Ibis* trilogy, resumes the first instalment's excavation of nineteenth-century globalisation and maritime trade. Whereas *Sea of Poppies* focuses on the production of opium in the Indian subcontinent and the ensuing scattering of impoverished peasants through indenture across the Indian Ocean, *River of Smoke* portrays the actual trade and traffic of the drug in early nineteenth-century Canton (today's Guangzhou) and the Pearl River. The narration's move to China therefore extends the maritime mapping of the geography of free trade and the opium traffic – as well as the usual territories of the neo-Victorian imaginary –, triangulated between London, Calcutta and Canton. Set in 1839, Ghosh's novel again casts a variety of characters into the waterways of Victorian imperial exploits, right in the prelude to the First Opium War (1839-1842). To the already familiar characters Deeti, Paulette, Ah Fatt and Neel, who have a varying presence throughout the narration, Ghosh introduces three new characters whose perspectives further enlarge Ghosh's neo-Victorian Indian Ocean world: Bahram Moddie, a Parsi merchant – and Ah Fatt's father – who takes Neel as *linkister* (translator) and *munshi* (finance manager) and whose interests in China are split between his imperilled trade in opium and his illicit Chinese lover Chi-Mei; Fitcher Penrose, a Cornish botanist and plant-hunter who takes Paulette as an

assistant in his mercantilist quest for a Chinese mythical flower, the Golden Camellia; and Robin Chinnery, an Anglo-Chinese homosexual painter, bastard son to the Canton-based English painter George Chinnery and Paulette's childhood friend, whose letters to Paulette vividly describe life in Canton.

If the *Ibis* was the reference ship-chronotope in *Sea of Poppies*, *River of Smoke* extends the trilogy's geography of ships into two additional vessels: the *Anahita*, Bahram's opium-loaded ship sailing from Calcutta to Canton, and the *Redruth*, Fitcher's vessel fitted for transporting plant specimens. As Catherine Delmas points out, the journeys of the *Ibis*, *Anahita* and *Redruth*, transporting coolies, opium and plants respectively, illustrate the collusion of power, science and trade in Victorian maritime imperialism (Delmas 26). As if to underscore the links between the three vessels, and between their characters on board, Ghosh appropriates the elemental forces of the Indian Ocean; for the same storm that closes *Sea of Poppies* and which enables Neel, Ah Fatt, Serang Ali and Kalua to escape the *Ibis* on a boat, also strikes the *Anahita* and the *Redruth*, the former having its opium cargo ruined near Singapore and the latter arriving in Port Louis, Mauritius, two days after the *Ibis*.

Before *River of Smoke* moves the focus to nineteenth-century Canton, the first two chapters in the narration give an account of the outcome of *Sea of Poppies* and its characters: the fugitives from the *Ibis* survive the storm and arrive in Great Nicobar island, where they knock two planks out of the boat and throw it back to the sea so that they are taken for dead and "written off" (Ghosh, *River* 23). In the meantime, Zachary has been arrested as responsible for the fugitives' escape whereas Paulette heads for Pamplemousses Botanical Garden in Mauritius where she runs into Fitcher

Penrose. Regarding Deeti, the opening's flash-forward decades after the arrival of the *Ibis* in Mauritius illustrates her as the matriarch of a family clan, "La Fami Colver" (Ghosh, *River* 3), made up of Deeti's children and grand-children.

The most remarkable maritime topography at the opening of the novel is Deeti's shrine or "Deetiji's Memory-Temple" (Ghosh, *River* 8), a pictorial memorial already referred to in the first instalment of the trilogy recording the life and times of the trilogy's protagonists and providing a symbolical and artistic reconstruction of severed links. The shrine is located on a cliff in a secluded area of Mauritius and is regularly visited by the aged Deeti and her offspring, as well as other coolies's descendants, who perform communal rituals to keep their sense of fellowship. These sections in the novel are Ghosh's brief contribution to narrations about plantation geographies populated by former African slaves and newly arrived coolies which, as Nandini Dhar points out, are the domain of diasporic authors such as David Dabydeen (Dhar 8-9). Ghosh's account of the creolisation of Deeti and her coolie fellows under their French master, a former soldier in the Napoleonic wars, in Mauritius is in tune with more familiar plantation geographies such as the Caribbean or South Africa and fruitfully positions "plantation creolization . . . in a tidalectic engagement with transoceanic diaspora" (DeLoughrey, *Routes* 65).

Deeti and the rest of the coolies live in the remotest part of the island, Baie du Morne. The description of the cliffy Morne (colonial French for 'hill') juxtaposes, just like the first instalment's account of the *Ibis*, the histories of slavery and indenture:

> The mountain was a place of sinister reputation, where hundreds, perhaps thousands of people were known to have died. Back in the days of slavery the Morne's inaccessibility had made it an attractive place of refuge for escaped slaves, who had settled there in considerable numbers. This community of fugitives – or marrons as they were known in Kreol – had lasted until shortly after 1834, when slavery was outlawed in Mauritius . . . In

the coolie lines, when the wind was heard to howl upon the mountains, the sound was to be the keening of the dead, and such was the fear it evoked that no one would willingly set foot upon those slopes (Ghosh, *River* 10-11).

The representation of this maritime enclave enables a reading of the landscape as archive, the cliffs beings saturated with the memories and experiences of former slaves. It is no wonder that Deeti selects exactly this spot to build her shrine, just where the Morne is topped by a flat ledge sheltered by a rocky ceiling which is referred to as the "Chowkey" by the Calver family. In affinity with the *Ibis* in *Sea of Poppies*, Deeti's 'Memory Temple' can be read as a palimpsest, its pictorial representations of the coolie's predicaments being re-inscribed upon the spectral traces of the former slaves inhabiting the hill.

The painting which conforms the shrine, containing pictorial representations of all the protagonists, is dominated by a portrayal of the typhoon under which the *Ibis* fugitives escaped: "stretching all the way across the frame . . . it was represented as a gigantic serpent, coiling inwards from the outside, going around and around in circles of diminishing size, and ending in a single enormous eye" (Ghosh, *River* 20). According to Deeti's account, during the storm she was

> picked up and whirled away into the sky, by a force that was none other than the storm itself . . . It was as if the tufaan [typhoon] had chosen her to be its confidant, freezing the passage of time, and lending her the vision of its own eye; for the duration of that moment, she had been able to see everything that fell within that whirling circle of wind (Ghosh, *River* 17).

It is Neel who later confirms Deeti's magical vision, stating that "1838, the year of that storm, was when a scientist first suggested that hurricanes might be composed of winds rotating around a still centre – an eye, in other words" (Ghosh, *River* 21). Ghosh's singular narration of the pictorial description of the shrine in general and the storm in particular has an important implication for the novel's postcolonial agenda: Deeti's creation of the shrine, itself a by-product of her rural

Inndustan and her wall decorations and paintings – "being unlettered, it was the only way she could keep track of her memories" (Ghosh, *River* 10) – signals the novel's recovery of illiterate memorial practices as alternative modes of remembrance to the Western archive.

Similarly, Deeti's fabulous account of the storm exemplifies a postcolonial reclaiming of myth against Western rationalism, Neel's thereafter scientific reference artfully reconciling the diasporic subject's mythology with science. According to Véronique Bragard, postcolonial writers' "return to myth and not history is probably the result of a skepticism towards historical discourses and a wish to revive a tradition of oral tales" (Bragard 92).[115] In this sense, "memory and art are called for to fill a gap and attempt to express not facts and events, but visions and sufferings" (Bragard 97).

Ghosh's account of the storm and its representation in the shrine can be considered then as an originating myth for the dispossessed protagonists who are enmeshed in the sea whirlpool of Victorian imperialism. Neel's enthrallment with the idea of storms revolving around an eye captures the alternatively destructive and regenerative forces of the sea:

> He had read about it in a journal and had been astonished and captivated by the image it conjured up - of a gigantic oculus, at the far end of a great, spinning telescope, examining everything it passed over, upending some things, and leaving others unscathed; looking for new possibilities, creating fresh beginnings, rewriting destinies and throwing together people who would never have met (Ghosh, *River* 21).

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[115]   An explanatory case is that of African literature which, as Vivanco argues, has witnessed a transference of traditional oral forms to its posterior written literature, although the author points out that modern African literatures are to a large extent the product of the European irruption into the African continent (Vivanco 21).

This sublime-inflected description of the elemental forces of the sea is transferred into the legends around the typhoon and its storm-casted protagonists, joining the diasporic subjects in their shared predicaments and their negotiation between "Back There" (Ghosh, *River* 9) and here. To underline the watery inception of the coolies' collectivity, Ghosh records how years later another cyclone crumbles the 'Chowkey' and the shrine is symbolically swept by an avalanche into the sea, back to the womb which generated the communion between the migrants (Ghosh, *River* 8).

After providing a glimpse of Mauritian plantation geography in the initial chapters, Ghosh moves the focus back to Asia for the rest of the narration. Ghosh's minute historical reconstruction of nineteenth-century South China coast and the criss-crossing of European and Asian merchants around its waters has garnered the author the consideration of "superb microhistorian" (Frost 1539). The narration provides scenes alternatively set in a variety of islands and littoral topographies around the South China Sea and the Pearl River, including Paulette's botanical explorations of the by then sparsely populated island of Hong Kong and European opium merchants' anchoring in Lintin Island to smuggle the illegal drug into the Pearl River.

Significantly, Ghosh's narration is keen to point out the fluid multiculturalism of this maritime region before the irruption and consolidation of British imperial monoculture. Recalling his trade journeys to China in the old days, Bahram states that Malacca (today's Malaysia) was one of his favourite calling ports, highlighting "the severe Dutch buildings, the Chinese temples, the whitewashed Portuguese church, the Arab souq [marketplace], and the galis [alleys] where the long-settled

Gujarati families lived" (Ghosh, *River* 65). The importance of this port where "Malays,

Chinese, Gujaratis and Arabs had lived elbow to elbow with the descendants of the

old Portuguese and Dutch families" (Ghosh, *River* 67) is overtaken by the newly set

trading town of Singapore by the British, "designed as to set the 'white town' carefully

apart from the rest of the settlement, with the Chinese, Malays and Indians each

being assigned their own neighbourhoods" (Ghosh, *River* 67). This ghettoization of

Singapore trading port illustrates both the disruptive and homogenising effects of

British imperialism – and the fraud of its civilising mission and its Orientalist discourse

– and a reclamation of the multiculturalism of the Indian Ocean geography prior to

the consolidation of British hegemony in the area.

If the first part of the novel, entitled "Islands," vividly portrays the maritime world

of trade and migration around the South China Sea, the second volume, "Canton,"

transports the action further into the interior of the Pearl River towards the epicentre

of nineteenth-century foreign trade with China, the foreign enclave (or Fanqui-Town)

in Canton. Ghosh provides a masterly and immersive description of the Thirteen

Factories of Fanqui-Town[116] as well as its docks, alleys, boats and consulates.

Ghosh's rendition of Fanqui-Town provides an example of what Mark R. Frost has

called "'thick' historical description, which provides a total picture of a place and its

time, the landscape, the clothes, the languages" (Frost 1538), or as Amitav Ghosh

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[116]   In the early nineteenth century, access to the walled city of Canton was totally forbidden to foreigners. The Foreign quarter, or Fanqui-Town, in Canton – 'Fanqui' was the Chinese for 'foreigner' – was an enclave annexed to Canton where foreign merchants conducted their trading operations. The well-known Thirteen Factories (or Hongs) in Fanqui-Town provided lodging and offices to foreign merchants trading with the Chinese. As Zadig Bey, Bahram's close friend, explains, the word 'factory' is not related to manufacturing in this context but "comes from a word that was first used by the Venetians and then by the Portuguese, in Goa. The word is *feitoria* and it refers merely to a place where agents and factors reside and do business" (Ghosh, *River* 184). See Plate 3 in the Appendix.

wonders, "what was it like to be present in that place, in that week, on that day?" (Ghosh, "Interview" no pages).

Additionally Ghosh exhibits a capacity to reconstruct the voices and personalities from every social stratum in Canton, including European and Asian merchants, Chinese authorities, local boat-people, compradors, smugglers, painters and botanists. Ghosh's wide narrative purview is certainly reminiscent of Victorian realism. In Sneha Kar Chaudhuri's words, *River of Smoke* "resembles a typical Victorian canonical novel in terms of its broadness of scope, which attempts to encompass a complete social and intellectual reality" (Chaudhuri 132).[117]

The multicultural social life in Canton's foreign enclave is narrated through the eyes of Neel, in his frequent walks around the factories and the *maidan* (main square) as well as through the painter Robin Chinnery's letters to his childhood friend Paulette. Robin, George Chinnery's illegitimate Anglo-Chinese son, has promised to assist Paulette and Fitcher in their quest for the *golden camellia* by locating the Cantonese painter who created the only existing reproduction of the mythical flower. As Robin forwards his research advances in his epistles, he provides detailed impressions of the enclave's social life, channelling Ghosh's all-encompassing knowledge about nineteenth-century Canton.[118] Not surprisingly Robin uses maritime imagery to convey the cosmopolitan character of the foreign enclave: "In a way

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[117]   As Mark R. Frost notes, "reviewers have frequently noted that in the Ibis Trilogy the author becomes a Victorian novelist. Whether consciously or subconsciously, Ghosh appropriates the genre of the Victorian novel [and its omniscient perspective] to write against the greedy empire that produced it" (Frost 1542).

[118]   An early review of the novel criticised negatively the abundance of contextual information about Canton included in Robin's epistolary encounters with Paulette: "Robin's unfiltered monologues allow Ghosh to indulge his encyclopedic tendencies while blaming it on his character; his long-winded missives to Paulette spare no detail, let no back-story slip away untold. Ghosh often appears uncertain of how much of the Indian context he needs to explain to Western readers" ("Review" 30).

Fanqui-town is like a ship at sea, with hundreds - no, thousands - of men living crammed together in a little sliver of a space. I do believe there is no place like it on earth, so small and yet so varied, where people from the far corners of the earth must live, elbow to elbow, for six months of the year" (Ghosh, *River* 197; my emphasis).

The singularity of Fanqui-Town, emphatically expressed by Ghosh elsewhere,[119] is equally indicated by both foreign and Chinese traders' reactions to artworks and reproductions of the enclave by Cantonese artists. As Robin recounts in his letters, Mr Chinnery's scorn for Canton painters is shared by Chinese connoisseurs. Contrary to great Chinese painters, Canton painters come from humble families and their reproductions of Fanqui-Town and the Thirteen Factories are sold as souvenirs both to European and Chinese merchants and visitors. Robin describes the artworks of one of those Cantonese painters, Mr Guan – or Lamqua – as follows:

> In glass-fronted cases lay dozens of paintings, all made in the studio: pictures of everything that might interest visitors, both Chinese and foreign – for just as foreigners want pictures of Fanqui-town because it looks to them so indescribably Celestial, so too do the Chinese covet them because the same sight is in their eyes utterly Alien (Ghosh, *River* 264).

As suggested by Robin, the artworks and representations of Fanqui-Town produced by Cantonese artists arise the curiosity of both foreigners and Chinese merchants who populate the foreign enclave. To use Mary Louise Pratt's term again, Fanqui-Town is therefore constructed in *River of Smoke* as a 'contact zone' which dissolves national and ethnic parameters, rendering the categories of *foreignness* and *nativeness* ultimately ambivalent and fluid.

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[119] "The settings of the Ibis Trilogy are unfamiliar to most of us, their material background even more so. This is particularly true of the foreign enclave in Canton, which was visually and otherwise an admixture of an extraordinary range of influences, styles, and tastes. Even experienced travelers were astonished by its uniqueness, its unfamiliarity" (Ghosh, "Storytelling" 1557).

A particularly remarkable aspect of Fanqui-Town is that many of its inhabitants are from India, coming from disparate places in the Indian subcontinent such as Sindh, Goa, Bombay, Malabar, Madras, Coringa, Calcutta or Sylhet (Ghosh, *River* 197). Interestingly, Chinese locals in Canton refer to this miscellaneous group of Hindusthanis having different castes, languages, religions and customs as "Achhas" and their factory is accordingly termed the 'Achha Hong.' Robin refers sardonically to this misperception:

> no matter whether a man is from Karachi or Chittagong, the lads will swarm after him, with their hands outstretched, shouting: 'Achha! Achha! Gimme cumshaw [tip]!' They seem to be persuaded that the Achhas are all from one country – is it not the most diverting notion? There is even a factory that is spoken of as the 'Achha Hong' - of course it has no flag of its own (Ghosh, *River* 197).

Neel is similarly struck by the notion that Indians from all over the subcontinent share roof, routines and meals within the Achha Hong, "as if the inmates were the inhabitants of a new country, a yet unmade Achhashtan" (Ghosh, *River* 204). For, as Neel observes, the Achhas were

> a motley gathering of men from distant parts of the Indian subcontinent and they spoke between them more than a dozen different languages; some were from areas under British or Portuguese rule, and others hailed from states governed by Nawabs or Nizams, Rajas or Rawals; amongst them there were Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Parsis and also a few who, back at home, would have been excluded by all. Had they not left the subcontinent their paths would never have crossed and few of them would ever have met or spoken with each other, far less thought of eating a meal together (Ghosh, *River* 204-205).

As Neel keenly observes, the paradox regarding the bonds established between the Achhas lies in the fact that those bonds were not produced out of self-respect but rather out of a "sense of shared shame" (Ghosh, *River* 205) because of their involvement in the opium traffic. Ghosh is clearly pointing out here India and Indian merchants' complicity in the opium industry, making nineteenth-century Indian elites

implicated in the effects of the 'black mud' trade on India and its subaltern inhabitants.

Nevertheless, I also read Ghosh's account of the Achha merchants in Canton as a community forerunning the Indian independence movement in the second half of the Victorian era and the final unification of India under a country in 1947. Judith M. Brown has pointed out the significance of the English language for the unity and flourishing of India after 1947, attributing such flourishing to "socially privileged Indians who studied in England . . . – particularly in the expanding civil service, the legal system and the educational system – [becoming] an elite who had already participated in the running of a modern state (Brown 117-118). The Achha community in Canton can be read therefore as a proto-Indian nation in which its individuals share bonds, ambitions and agendas prior the rise of a unified Indian identity and the Indian independence movement led by English-educated Indian elites.

The most remarkable of the Achha merchants is Bahram Moddie, a Parsi opium merchant who has been deemed as Ghosh's finest character in the whole trilogy (Frost 1543), "an enthralling hero, of Dickensian vitality and pathos" (Grande 38). Bahram illustrates a particularly underrepresented figure within nineteenth-century South-Asian politics that embodies the ethical entanglements of empire, opium and overseas trade as well as India's role in the opium trade. Born in a humble family with no fortune or prospects, Bahram gets engaged to Shireenbai, the daughter of a powerful Bombay family who owns a successful shipyard firm, Mistrie & Sons. Inverting the patrilocal character of nineteenth-century Indian marriage relations, Bahram moves to live with Shireenbai and enters the business of his in-

laws. Determined to prove his worth, Bahram persuades the Mistries to get involved in the opium trade, exhibiting a discourse which predates the contours of contemporary capitalism and the law of supply and demand:

> Look at the world around us; look at how it is changing. Today the biggest profits don't come from selling useful things: quite the opposite. The profits come from selling things that are not of any real use . . . Opium is just like that. It is completely useless unless you're sick, but still people want it (Ghosh, *River* 53-54).

Bahram's embracing of capitalist thinking proves economically successful and he manages to find a place within the British-dominated opium industry, gaining the respect of his British peers and amassing a substantial fortune for Mistries & Sons. It is not only Bahram's economic ambitions that drive him to Canton but also his illicit love affair to Chi-Mei, a Chinese boat-woman and mother of their son Ah Fatt. Their intercultural liaison, seemingly motivated by Bahram's loneliness in Canton as well as by Shireenbai's "shy, retiring," widow-like and melancholic behaviour (Ghosh, *River* 51) challenges the boundaries of language, nationality and ethnicity and provide a significant crux in Bahram's torn character between his legal family in Bombay and his Canton-based progeny, between his unstable impersonation of the Victorian capitalist merchant and the ravages of the opium industry both in India and China.

As Bahram's opium cargo is significantly ruined after the storm strikes the *Anahita* and the Chinese authorities step in to put an end to the illegal opium trade, Bahram faces ruin and desperately tries to smuggle his opium, becoming himself an addict and dying a broken man by accidentally drowning next to his ship out of opium-induced hallucinations. Bahram's complex position within the trade and power relations of the novel illustrates what Mark R. Frost, following Sugata Bose, terms the "intermediary capital" (Frost 1543). Indeed, Bahram may enjoy a privileged status among Parsi merchants in India but in Canton-based British-dominated opium trade

his colonial origins place him inevitably in a helpless middle position between British and Chinese imperial powers as the war between the two seems imminent. As Zadig Bey tellingly points out to his friend, "Bahram-bhai, you are not an American or an Englishman. You don't have any warships behind you. If the Chamber had to surrender you or Dent [an English merchant], who do you think they would pick?" (Ghosh, *River* 519). The irony of Bahram's uncomfortable position in Fanqui-Town lies in the fact that he is both a profiteer and a victim of the opium trade. The complexity of Bahram's (and India's) involvement in the opium trade also problematises Victorian imperial and transoceanic relations as based simply around the dichotomies centre/periphery and coloniser/colonised.

Opium is by far the most remarkable commodity articulating the characters' personal and commercial relations in the novel – and in the trilogy as a whole. However, Ghosh complements his portrayal of the workings of free trade under another travelling good: plant specimens. Fitcher Penrose is a Cornish botanist and plant-hunter in charge of a nursery, Penrose & Sons, based in Falmouth. An expert in Chinese botanical exportations, Penrose has fitted his vessel, the *Redruth*, for transporting plants across the oceans. The description of the *Redruth* reveals a vessel perfectly designed for its purposes: its decks are packed with Wardian cases, or "miniature greenhouses" (Ghosh, *River* 81) safely tied down with cables and food leftovers are dumped in a huge barrel hanging over the stern to grow compost.

However honourable may seem the scientific and aesthetic pursual of plants in the name of science – particularly in comparison with the destructive opium trade – Ghosh quickly demonstrates that botany is similarly implicated in the mercantilist texture of free trade. As Catherine Delmas points out, the transoceanic transportation

of plant specimens in the novel reveals "a single geography of free trade linking London, Calcutta, and Canton" (Delmas 26), specifically Kew Gardens, Calcutta Royal Botanical garden and the Chinese botanical gardens in Canton. This maritime mapping of the geography of Victorian botanical trade evidently parallels the pattern of the opium trade illustrated in *Sea of Poppies* that I outlined in the previous section. Robin underlines this collusion between opium and flowers in his last letter to Paulette, where he claims "Flowers and opium, opium and flowers! It is odd to think that this city [Canton], which has absorbed so much of the world's evil, has given, in return, so much beauty" (Ghosh, *River* 564). The beauty alluded to by Robin, that is, the aesthetic patina of the botany trade under the cloak of science serves to shroud its implication within Victorian cash economy and capitalist asymmetrical exchange.

Following the previous line of reasoning, Fitcher Penrose represents just another agent of Victorian imperialism. His quest for plant specimens is solely motivated by a mercantilist drive and his naturalist activities consist basically of plundering Chinese botanical treasures for their western consumption, revealing just another strand of Victorian imperial trade. As Paulette observes, Penrose is "someone who looked upon Nature as an assortment of puzzles, many of which, if properly resolved, could provide rich sources of profit" (Ghosh, *River* 83). Penrose's exploitation of Asian nature resources is illustrated in the *Redruth*, in which "every element of her functioning was determined by the twin motives of thrift and profit" (Ghosh, *River* 82). Additionally, as Kanika Batra observes, Penrose's Asian plant specimens have not been collected from Chinese natural spots but just acquired from nurseries in Canton and Macau to be brought to Britain and make a profit out of them (Batra 326).

Penrose's vision on nature contrasts sharply with Paulette and her father's, for whom "the love of Nature had been a kind of religion, a form of spiritual striving" (Ghosh, *River* 83). Since foreign women are not allowed in Canton, Paulette cannot accompany Penrose in their quest for the golden Camellia and she must content herself with developing her botanical interests by exploring Hong Kong, following her father's call to "apprehend the vital energies that constitute the Spirit of the Earth" (Ghosh, *River* 84). As Chaudhuri aptly summarises, "Paulette and Penrose are polar opposites in terms of their attitude to Nature: the former represents nineteenth-century French naturalistic idealism, the latter conventional bourgeois practicality and utilitarianism" (Chaudhuri 137).

Paulette's position and role within *River of Smoke* also brings to light another aspect of the novel from a neo-Victorian point of view, which is a marked drive to retrieve repressed gender perspectives. Chaudhuri claims that the novel illustrates "Ghosh's particular neo-Victorian emphasis on the lost and suppressed narratives of women like Dheeti and Paulette, whose micro-histories have been previously overlooked by a male-oriented history of the opium trade" (Chaudhuri 138). In the case of Paulette, her spirited personality and determination to follow her scientific ambitions lead her frequently to engage in gender inversion. On the *Ibis* arrival in Mauritius, she manages to get out the vessel disguised as a sailor, wearing Zachary Reid's clothes (Ghosh, *River* 62) and on her first encounter with Fitcher she is also dressed as a boy, curating Mauritian Pamplemousses Botanical gardens undetected.

Similarly, during her botanical activities and explorations in Hong Kong, Paulette uses male shirts and trousers to ride a horse comfortably on a Chinese saddle around the island's hilly and wild terrains, much to the dismay of Fitcher (Ghosh,

River 290). It is only Robin Chinnery, whose homosexual relationship to Jacqua also represents a challenge to nineteenth-century heteronormative culture, who finds appealing Paulette's cross-dressing behaviour, "entranced by the vision . . . of you [Paulette] galloping across Hong Kong dressed in your beau's clothes" (Ghosh, *River* 299-300). Paulette represents a mode of unorthodox nineteenth-century femininity which defies Victorian gender conventions.

It seems no surprise that Paulette feels captivated by the sight of Chinese *shach'uans* (sand-ships) around Hong Kong and Lintin Islands; as Paulette is struck to see, and in contrast to the *Ibis* and the *Redruth*, these vessels are anything but "'manned' – for her crew included several women whose duties were no different from those of the men. And no matter whether male or female, none of the crew would put up with barked orders and peremptory hookums [commands]" (Ghosh, *River* 498). Similarly, Bahram's illicit lover Chi-Mei is one of the local boat-women who sail the waters around Canton. According to the novel, "the boat-women of Canton were utterly unlike their land-bound sisters: their feet were unbound and often bare . . .they rowed boats, hawked goods, and went about their work with just as much gusto, if not more, than their menfolk" (Ghosh, *River* 72). Ghosh populates then his maritime narration with different minor and major female characters to illustrate their modes of living on the water as alternative models of womanhood to those of conventional nineteenth-century femininity.

A further parallel between *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke* is their shared engagement in revealing the linguistic cross-fertilisation which characterised maritime life around the Indian Ocean. In *River of Smoke*, the first instance of cross-language interaction that we encounter in the novel is provided in the novel's brief account of

Deeti and her life in Mauritius. Deeti speaks a variety of Mauritian Kreole sedimented with traces from her rural Bhojpuri. Her mode of expression is an engaging and unprecedentedly hybrid idiom, as it shows the following excerpt in which Deeti narrates the *Ibis* fugitives' escape during the storm:

> Bon-dye! she would cry; are you a fol dogla or what? Don't be ridikil: the whole thing, from start to fini took just a few minits, and all that time, it was nothing but jaldi-jaldi, a hopeless golmal, tus in dezord. It was a mirak, believe me, that the five managed to get away (Ghosh, *River* 16).

Deeti's Kreole idiom, besides being another shining example of the productive interplay between the *local* and the *global* in diasporic subjects, illustrates the linguistic aftereffects of the uprootedness of overseas indenture. The transmigration of Deeti's Indian background and language towards increasingly hybrid systems influenced by Mauritian culture signals the inception of the diasporic condition out of change, transition and movement.

Nevertheless, Ghosh's linguistic commentary on the cosmopolitanism of the Indian Ocean is actually focused on the friction between English and Chinese. Opium traders in Canton communicate in a mixture of English, Portuguese and Hindustani which conforms the Cantonese pidgin sounding throughout the narration. Neel notices so in his job as *linkister* and *munshi* for Bahram. Neel's employer uses an idiom "which often came pouring out in braided torrents of speech, each rushing stream being silted with the sediment of many tongues – Gujarati, Hindusthani, English, pidgin, Cantonese" (Ghosh, *River* 235).

In a significant passage, Ghosh uses Zadig Bey and Baharam's voices to illustrate the supremacy of Cantonese Pidgin for Indian and Chinese traders and the markedly South-Asian aspect of Cantonese trading relations. When asked about their knowledge of Chinese, Bahram and Zadig Bey answer:

> 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. Even though many Chinese spoke English with ease and fluency, they would not negotiate in it, believing that it put them at a disadvantage in relation to Europeans. In pidgin they reposed far greater trust, for the grammar was the same as that of Cantonese, while the words were mainly English, Portuguese and Hindusthani (Ghosh, *River* 183).

The integration of European, Chinese and Indian languages within Cantonese pidgin again highlights Ghosh's narrative strategy to illustrate the cosmopolitanism of Indian Ocean waterworlds. However, the preference of Cantonese pidgin as a reliable idiom for Chinese and Indian traders challenges the hegemony of European culture in nineteenth-century South-Asian trade relations, specifically Anglocentric ideas of English as a privileged means of communication.

Vedita Cowaloosur has interestingly read this challenge to Anglocentricity in the nineteenth century as Ghosh staking

> a claim regarding the increasing roles of China and India (then as well as now?) in an equation where Europe had previously dominated . . . suggesting that the collaboration of south–south powers is perhaps more reassuring than a system in which European and American Anglocentric hegemons prevail (Cowaloosur 9).

Cowaloosur then goes on to argue that Ghosh's resurrection of Cantonese pidgin as an idiom consciously chosen by nineteenth-century Indian and Chinese traders comments "on the desirability for stronger alliances between Indian and Chinese power structures, especially in the current climate in which India and China are perceived as being cut-throat competitors for ascending to the status of global super-power" (Cowaloosur 9). These transoceanic alliances between non-European peoples and places are underscored by Indo-Chinese love relations narrated throughout *River of Smoke*, in particular those between Bahram and Chi-Mei and between the Anglo-Indian Robin Chinnery and the Chinese artist Jacqua. That

Ghosh has chosen the neo-Victorian mode to narrate Indo-Chinese trade and love relations constitute a creative challenge to the Anglocentric hegemony in global relations, illustrating, in Shao-Pin Luo's words, "an effort to 'provincialize Europe'" (Luo 378). In this sense, *River of Smoke* reconstructs a nineteenth-century Pan-Asian perspective on Indian Ocean relations by illustrating idioms, relations and spaces which escaped the control and hegemony of Victorian imperialism.

In relation to the previous line of reasoning, a final aspect of *River of Smoke* which is worth perusing is the narration's engagement with globalisation and world history. I have already argued that *River of Smoke* records the watery trajectories of subjects, ideas and commodities around the Indian Ocean and beyond. Just like the first instalment in the trilogy, the novel exhibits indeed a drive to unearth an era of proto-globalisation in the Victorian period, illustrating Victorian maritime routes as navigated by opium and plants as well as by Europeans and Asians. Nevertheless, a particularly interesting contribution to accounts of world history and globalisation in the novel is the narration's portrayal of interconnections between Africa and Asia in the pre-colonial period.

The novel achieves this through the character of Zadig Bey, Bahram's colleague and close friend. Zadig is an Armenian watchmaker and trader but his family has been settled in Egypt for centuries. Settled in the Jewish and Christian quarters of Old Cairo, Zadig's ancestors were trading for centuries with different locations in Africa, Asia and the Far East. This heritage has turned Zadig into a cosmopolitan subject, fluent in several languages, with deep affinities for South-Asian culture but usually dressed in European clothes and professing the Christian religion. His African ancestry situates him however within an 'Afrasian imagination', to use

Gaurav Desai's term. Desai uses the term 'Afrasian' "as a form of protest against the ethnocentrisms that would label a shared ocean as only Indian" (Desai, *Commerce* 8). He follows the wake of recent scholarship which seeks to situate African studies not only in relation to the West but also to the East, focusing particularly on the African diaspora in India. Desai intends to ask how "African ideas and cultural practices [have] traveled to the East not only through the travels of Indian and European traders and sailors but perhaps more importantly through the African diaspora itself" (Desai, *Commerce* 7).

The character of Zadig Bey seems modelled after Ghosh's path-breaking travelogue *In an Antique Land* (1993). Zadig and his long ancestry of Egyptian traders around the Indian Ocean seems Ghosh's fictional contribution to the main thesis of his influential travelogue and that I already suggested above: there certainly existed a fertile and global maritime trading network between Africa and India in the pre-modern period which did not necessitate from European empires' maritime lanes or technology.

The Egyptian character also channels the novel's portrayal of connections between Atlantic and Indian Ocean cultures. In one of the most imaginative sections of the novel, Ghosh narrates a fictional encounter between Bahram, Zadig Bey and Napoleon Bonaparte. Bahram and Zadig are on their way to London on board the *HCS Cuffnells* in 1816 when they learn, sailing past Cape Town, that the French Emperor has been exiled to the Atlantic island of St Helena, their next calling port. This news stirs Zadig's memories, which recalls the invasion of Egypt by Bonaparte when he was a young boy of fifteen living in Old Cairo and the consequences of such invasion, among them his knowledge of French (Ghosh, *River* 162). As the Emperor

learns of a Parsee and an Armenian on board the *HCS Cuffnells*, he requests to have an interview with them.

The rendezvous between Bonaparte, Bahram and Zadig represents a truly intercultural encounter between distant watery domains. Since Napoleon and Bahram only speak French and Hindusthani respectively, Zadig acts as a translator, triangulating the Emperor's and Bahram's voices, and by extension the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean waterworlds. The interview between Bahram, Napoleon and Zadig soon turns into a discussion of the moral implications of the opium trade, the Chinese government's reaction to the violation of its anti-drug legislation and west-east relations in general. In what seems an obvious contemporary reference to the growing power of China, Napoleon claims that "it is better that China remains asleep, for the world is sure to tremble when she awakes" (Ghosh, *River* 169), to add later with sarcasm that "what an irony it would be if it were opium that stirred China from her sleep" (Ghosh, *River* 186).

Napoleon's prophetic commentary on the confrontation between Western and Eastern powers serves as an overture to the final chapters of the novel, which record the confrontation in the first months of 1839 between Canton-based British merchants and Commissioner Lin, appointed by the Chinese authorities to put an end to the smuggling of opium, and which would eventually led to the First Opium War. In these chapters, Ghosh provides a postcolonial revision of the prelude to the Opium War and Anglo-Chinese relations, portraying the intrigues and tensions between Canton's foreign merchants and Chinese authorities, and reproducing the voices of true historical traders and Chinese authorities. Ghosh has interestingly claimed that the dense documentation regarding the happenings in Canton during

these months reveals a picture of the situation "powered to a great degree by interpersonal relationships and conflicts" (Ghosh, "Storytelling" 1556).

Whereas the Manchu Empire attacks the opium trade out of the defence of its laws and its foreign policy, merchants in the East India Company pursue their greedy personal interests under the banner of Free Trade, the principles of which serve to cloak the unlawfulness and destruction of the opium trade. Ghosh shows the hypocrisy of the principles of Free Trade when Bahram talks about his in-laws' involvement in the successful ship-building business in Bombay, responsible at the time for vessels that exceeded in quality to ships built in Portsmouth or Liverpool: "they [British] talk of Free Trade when it suits them – but they made sure that the rules were changed so that the Company and the Royal Navy could no longer order ships from us [Mistries]. Then they created new laws which made it much more expensive to use India-built ships in the overseas trade" (Ghosh, *River* 476). This ambivalence between Free Trade and stark state protectionism reveals the strikingly unequal and duplicitous character of Sino-British relations in the early Victorian period.

As Chaudhuri suggests, *River of Smoke* presages "twentieth- and twenty-first-century diaspora, globalisation, multiculturalism and their attendant dangers, such as drug-trafficking, continuing economic exploitation, and armed conflict over resources" (Chaudhuri 142). Indeed the neo-Victorian character of the novel is marked by the obvious parallels between its narration of the prelude to the First Opium War as a crux in the history of nineteenth-century global trade and current political conflicts arising out of neo-liberal policies and globalisation, including Western military interventions under gunboat diplomacy. The novel therefore reveals the continuities

of the rhetoric of Free Trade and Victorian imperialism in the ideology of neo-liberalism and globalisation today, revealing the impending Opium Wars – that I will analyse in the next section – as a conflict which determined to a great extent current West-East relations.

5.3. Amitav Ghosh's *Flood of Fire* (2015)

The culmination to the *Ibis* trilogy came out in 2015 with the publication of *Flood of Fire*. The novel records the escalation of violence between Britain and China which led to the First Opium War. The narration opens exactly right after the denouement of *River of Smoke*: After Commissioner Lin forces Canton foreign traders to surrender and destroy their opium cargoes, merchants from the East India Company persuade the British government to send an expeditionary force to China to compel the Eastern country to lift the trade bans on opium, open its ports to foreign trade and pay reparations to the opium smugglers for the destroyed cargoes. W. Travis Hanes and Frank Sanello establish a scathing contemporary analogy to illustrate Victorian Britain's coerced and military introduction of opium into China:

> Imagine this scenario: the Medellin cocaine cartel of Colombia mounts a successful military offensive against the United States, then forces the U.S. to legalize cocaine and allow the cartel to import the drug into five major American cities, unsupervised and untaxed by the U.S. The American government also agrees to let the drug lords govern all Colombian citizens who operate in these cities, plus the U.S. has to pay war reparations of $100 billion – the Colombians' cost of waging the war to import cocaine into America (Hanes and Sanello xi).

That is analogously what happened between Britain and China during the First Opium War, an event that rarely surfaces in the contemporary British imagination. To China, however, the First Opium War, together with the Second Opium War (1856-1860) and the ensuing unequal trade treaties imposed on the Eastern country make up what the Chinese today call the 'century of humiliation' (Chan 878).

As in the first two instalments in the *Ibis* trilogy, *Flood of Fire* presents a series of characters, some of them already familiar to the reader, who are ensnared in powerful historical circumstances, and whose individual narratives gently intersect and converge: Kesri Singh, Deeti's brother, is a sepoy in the Bengal Native Infantry who agrees to join the overseas campaign against the Chinese after his white superior and friend Captain Mee; Shireen Modi, Bahram's wife, is now a widow who defies her Parsi family by travelling to China to demand reparations for her late husband's investments in opium. To these new – or previously referred to – characters, Ghosh adds the narrations of familiar characters, specifically Neel, who is still fleeing English justice and is now servicing the Chinese authorities against their war against Britain, and Zachary Reid, who gets engaged both in a passionate relationship with Mrs Burnham and in the opium trade and capitalism.

Ghosh demonstrates again his skills as 'microhistorian' in his minute descriptions of nineteenth-century India and China. Besides the author's already familiar renditions of maritime spots such as islands, ships and littoral areas, according to Mark R. Frost "the outstanding descriptive set piece in *Flood of Fire* (2015) . . . is [Ghosh's] reconstruction of a mobile city: an East India Company army and its camp followers on the march" (Frost 1539). The novel's account of the mobility of the Sepoy army and its ambulant encampment through the Indian subcontinent and across the South China Sea illustrates Ghosh's description and observation skills. These sections in the novel are narrated through Kesri Singh, Deeti's brother and an East India Company sepoy whose superior is the brother of Deeti's late husband. When news of Deeti's escape from her sati with Kalua reach the Sepoy *paltan* (platoon), Kesri faces ostracism and decides to join a voluntary overseas campaign in China, that leading to the First Opium War.

Kesri's perspective as an Indian soldier in the sepoy army is instrumentalised by Ghosh to rail against the unequal treatment undergone by the sepoys in the British army. As the narration evinces, sepoys are paid less than British soldiers, live in separate barracks, are never risen to positions of authority (Ghosh, *Flood* 46, 226), are sent to overseas campaigns with inferior weapons (Ghosh, *Flood* 279-80) and are compelled to travel to China in badly-fitted vessels (Ghosh, *Flood* 406). This colonial institutional racism suffered by Indian soldiers, which would reach its apex in the mid-Victorian period with the *Indian Mutiny* (1857), facilitates, significantly, a challenge to the strict Indian caste system, particularly while at sea. As Kesri points out prior to the sea journey from Calcutta to China

> He himself was now sharing a room with four naiks, and within a week he felt he knew them better than he had ever known his subordinates. They were from different places – Awadh, Mithila, Bhojpur and the mountains – and of different castes as well: Brahmin, Rajput, Aheer, Kurmi and a few others. At the start some of them grumbled about eating together, but Kesri was quick to dhamkao [rebuke] the complaints out of them. Didn't they know that they would have to travel on transport ships? Didn't they understand that on ships it was impossible to carry on as if they were back in a village? (Ghosh, *Flood* 229).

Ghosh again constructs Victorian maritime mobility, for all its insertion within colonial structures of power, as a catalyst for transcultural solidarities. The strict hierarchies of the colonial army and the inequalities established between white soldiers and sepoys do not prevent the latter from developing close connections with their 'butchas' (children). As the novel illustrates in the relation between Kesri and Captain Mee, sepoys were in charge of raising' young white soldiers in the battalion, training them in the ways of the Indian army or nursing them when ill, despite the sepoys' services were forgotten when white soldiers were promoted (Ghosh, *Flood* 25-26). Sepoys and their butchas are illustrated then to develop strong affinities for each other despite the racist hierarchies that encircle them. As Gaurav Desai points

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out, the bonds between sepoys and butchas (and between Kesri and Captain Mee particularly) "reflect the ways in which individuals negotiate the sometimes constraining and at other times enabling societal structures in which they find themselves" (Desai, "Novelist" 1532).

Shireen Modi is one of the most memorable characters in *Flood of Fire* and signals Ghosh's commitment to reconstruct subaltern female perspectives on sea travel in the nineteenth century. Shireen, Bahram's wife, is the daughter of a powerful Parsi family in Bombay and as it was already indicated in *River of Smoke*, she represents a usually invisible figure in classical maritime literature: the merchant's or seaman's wife left behind at home. In contradistinction to the other widow in the trilogy, the Hindu Deeti, who has to escape her immolation, Shireen's Parsi background and well-off family makes her widowhood radically different. The death of Bahram in Hong Kong has left her in an uncomfortable position though: the embargo on the opium enacted by Commissioner Lin entails that Bahram has left huge debts behind and the *Anahita* has been purchased by Benjamin Burnham. As rumours of the British expedition to China reach Bombay, other Parsi merchants, Shireen's brothers claim, are willing to travel to China in support of Britain to demand reparations. Shireen understands the implications of this: "that things would have been different if she and Bahram had had a son to represent their interests" (Ghosh, *Flood* 43). To complicate things, Shireen learns from Zadig Bey about Ah Fatt (Freddie), Bahram's illegitimate son in China.

Ghosh elaborates Shireen's narration as a tale of female liberation. Against her family's wishes and risking her reputation and position within Bombay's Parsi society, Shireen decides to travel to China to visit her husband's grave and his illegitimate

son Ah Fatt and to represent Bahram's interests in the event of China being compelled to pay compensation for the destroyed opium cargoes. Challenging the scandal for a Parsi widow to travel alone, Shireen defies her family's opposition, much encouraged by Zadig Bey: "'Bibiji! European women travel in ships all the time. You are educated, you speak English, you are the daughter of Seth Rustamjee Mistrie who built some of the finest ships to sail the ocean. Why should it be difficult for you to go?'" (Ghosh, *Flood* 187). Shireen's determination and Zadig Bey's assistance lead her to embark on an overseas journey to China, which reveals, again, the liberating force of maritime mobility for women:

> the mere fact of having a purpose to work towards energized her as nothing had done in many years. The very textures and colours of the world around her seemed to change and things that had been of little concern to her before – like business, finance and politics – suddenly seemed to be of absorbing interest. It was as if a gale had parted the purdahs that curtained her world, blowing away many decades' worth of dust and cobwebs (Ghosh, *Flood* 216-217).

Further on Shireen's empowerment is sardonically illustrated when she teases her brothers about her having better 'sea legs' and never suffering from sea-sickness when they used to go on sailing trips as children (Ghosh, *Flood* 238). Ghosh's portrayal of Shireen is a stimulating fictional contribution to female perspectives on the sea and rivals the author's depiction of the other two relevant female characters in the trilogy, Deeti and Paulette.

Early in the novel Shireen is presented as a dutiful widow with a strict moral sense. However, as Shireen gets on board towards China, the narration soon gives account of the transformative potential of sea travel on identity. When she is suggested by Rosa, her travelling companion, to wear a dress instead of a sari due to the bitterly cold winters in the south China coast and the fact that "at sea dresses are easier to manage than saris" (Ghosh, *Flood* 267), Shireen gets dismayed at the

prospect of breaking Parsi rules for widowhood, which demanded widows to wear only white saris: ""in trying to envision herself in a dress, Shireen realised that the journey ahead would entail much more than just a change of location: in order to arrive at her destination she would have to become a different person" (Ghosh, *Flood* 267). The impact of maritime mobility on Shireen's self is equally perceived by Zadig Bey, who claims that "I didn't expect to find you looking so much at home here – walking around without a veil, dressed like a memsahib and smiling at everyone.'" (Ghosh, *Flood* 301). Shireen's cosmopolitan conversion is further cemented by her gradual engagement and eventual marriage to Zadig Bey.

Shireen's transformation features a form of privileged cosmopolitanism which seems at odds with Ghosh's emphasis in forms of *coerced* cosmopolitanism illustrated by Paulette and Deeti in the trilogy. Her privileged status within Parsi society and her financial stability despite Bahram's debts are marked facilitators for her embarking on an overseas journey to claim Bahram's lost profits in the opium trade – profits, let us recall, built upon the growing impoverishment of Indian peasants and the increasing addiction of Chinese population to opium. We could point out, however, a commendable outcome of Shireen's cosmopolitan transcendence of her strict Parsi background: the acceptance of Freddie (Ah Fatt) as Bahram's legitimate son. Her moving encounter with Freddie in Hong Kong and their joint visit to Bahram's grave on the island (Ghosh, *Flood* 323-324, 362) constitutes an act of transoceanic solidarity and acknowledges, in Mihir Bose's views, "the rights of half-Chinese illegitimate children as a result of overseas trade routes" (Bose, no pages).

Mrs Burnham reappears in *Flood of Fire* as the other outstanding female character in the narration due to her illicit, sexual and passionate relation with Zachary Reid and the revelation that Captain Mee and she were lovers in their youth. After Zachary Reid has been acquitted of the charges of mutiny aboard the *Ibis*, he is employed by the Burhams as a *mystery* (carpenter) to refurbish a boathouse. Mrs Burnham's liaison with Reid starts with her attempts at instructing him in the perils of masturbation after she furtively observes him shirtless while working on the boathouse. Their posterior sexual encounters soon turn into a hilarious attack on Victorian sexual repression in which nineteenth-century ideas of prudery and morality are displaced to Victorian India. The manifold sexual euphemisms and dysphemisms used by Mrs Burnham in the name of propriety during her sexual encounters with Zachary – and her insistence on them addressing each other as Mr Reid and Mrs Burnham even in bed – are read with comic distance by the reader (Ghosh, *Flood* 208-210). However, the repressive character inherent in the surreptitious nature of Mrs Burnham and Reid's sexual relations and her rampant crusade against Reid's onanist 'condition' serve as a counterpoint to Reid's reminiscences of mariners' sexual behaviour at sea:

> Certainly no one who had ever slept in a fo'c'sle could fail to notice the fusillades that shook every hammock from time to time. More than once had he been bumped in the nose because of an overly energetic bout of musketry in the hammock above. Just as he himself was sometimes shouted at, he'd learnt to shout: 'Will you stop polishing your pistol up there? Take your shot and be done with it.' (Ghosh, *Flood* 63).

Up to this point in the *Ibis* trilogy, Ghosh has articulated the novels around a constructive, albeit ambivalently, notion of the oceanic space. I have argued that the (neo)Victorian waterworlds envisaged by Ghosh, although they are an extension of Victorian land-based imperialism, facilitate nevertheless the fluidity of racial, cultural and sexual hierarchies. *Flood of Fire*, because of its significant focus on Britain's

military expedition against China in 1839, involves a significant departure in the literary-historical construction of the ocean developed up to now in the trilogy; this third instalment sets up the ocean as a locus for the projection of military power.

As soon as the British expedition reaches past the South China Sea, the novel maps the Pearl River estuary through the gradual military advancement of British and Indian soldiers upriver. At this point, the narration turns into an escalating succession of battle close-ups involving carnage of soldiers, destruction of land fortifications and warships engaged in cannonball exchanges. The naval and military superiority of the British army begets an unbalanced human and material cost on the Chinese side, as it is witnessed by Neel and Jodu in the British attack on Chuenpee. As they observe in horror the mass of burnt bodies washed ashore into the channel, they notice that "not one of the British ships, so far as they could see, had suffered the slightest damage. The speed with which it happened was as astounding as the one-sidedness of the destruction" (Ghosh, *Flood* 476).

An embodiment of Britain's superior technology in naval war is the novel's introduction of the *Nemesis*, an ironclad steam warship that was determinant in the British victory over the Chinese.[120] The 660-ton *Nemesis* set sail from Liverpool to China in 1839 and was the first steam-powered ship to reach the Indian Ocean (Hanes and Sanello 115). The novel's description of the vessel deserves being quoted:

> The *Nemesis* was made almost entirely of metal; there was so much iron on her that a special device had to be fitted on her compass to correct the deflection. Her two massive paddle-wheels were powered by engines of one hundred and twenty horsepower which daily devoured eleven tons of coal . . . Her armaments too were such as to induce awe: she carried two thirty-twopound pivot guns, capable of shooting shell or canister, five brass six-

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[120]   See Plate 4 in the Appendix.

pounders, and ten iron swivels; in addition there was a tube on the bridge between her paddle-wheels, for the launching of Congreve rockets.[121] It was thought by many . . . that the *Nemesis* would forever change the nature of naval warfare: she was expected to serve as a secret weapon, striking terror into the Chinese (Ghosh, *Flood* 403).

The *Nemesis* embodies the transference of British land-based iron industry and steam power onto the sea. The insatiable appetite for coal demanded by the engines of this terror-inducing vessel, which can be said to evoke the excesses of consumption engendered by global capitalism, constructs a vision of the seascape increasingly mechanised and militarised. Monstrous and ominous in its undertones, the description of the *Nemesis*, slightly reminiscent of the description of the steam tug at the opening of Conrad's "The Nigger of the Narcissus", illustrates the Indian Ocean as invaded by Western naval technology, signalling the transition from the age of sail to the age of steam as well as an irruption into the peaceful and multicultural Indian Ocean waterworlds of boats, sampans and junks illustrated throughout the trilogy.

The novel's account of the First Opium War is articulated around subtle insights into Sino-Indian and Sino-British relations in the Victorian era. Indeed, one of the strong points of the novel, Alice Albinia has argued, is the balanced juxtaposition of Western, Indian and Chinese perspectives on the Opium Wars (Albinia 11). The relationships between China and the Indian subcontinent in the nineteenth century have long been overshadowed by far wider debates regarding West-East relations.

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[121]   In the novel, Neel claims Congreve rockets to be "a refinement of a weapon that was invented in India", particularly by Sultan Haider Ali of Mysore and his heir Tipu during their wars against the East India Company in the late eighteenth century (Ghosh, *Flood* 334). Later on, Neel claims, the London-based inventor Mr William Congreve appropriated and improved the weapon and it was used in the War of 1812 and in the Napoleonic Wars (Ghosh, *Flood* 334). There has been much debate on the actual origin of Congreve rockets in which scholars have discussed the rockets' debatable English or Indian origins, the use of rockets in English and Indian warfare before the eighteenth century or the circumstances surrounding William Congreve's development of his eponymous invention (Werret 601-602).

Flood of Fire plunges into discussions on the nature of Indo-Chinese understanding during the Victorian Age, unearthing the experiences of Indian sepoys in overseas campaigns in China as well as India's role in the First Opium War.

The character of Kesri Singh epitomises Indian's uncomfortable position of India in the confrontation between Britain and China and within the dynamics of Victorian imperialism. The opening chapters in the novel narrate in retrospect a young Kesri joining the East India Company army against his father's wishes (Ghosh, *Flood* 93-95). Deluded by spurious notions of honour and equality, Kesri joins the Bengal Native Infantry and gets engaged throughout his military career in instructing other sepoys. When the first British offensives against the Chinese start, Kesri observes proudly his unit of sepoys overcoming Chinese forces: "As he watched them, sulkily falling back into line, a great pride filled Kesri's heart: he realized that he would never know a love as deep as that which bound him to this unit, which was largely his own creation, the culmination of his life's work" (Ghosh, *Flood* 386-387).

Nevertheless it does not take long for Kesri to realise that he, and the rest of sepoys, are merely a tool of the British Empire to secure its metropolitan interests. As the conflict escalates into a virulent attack against Chinese locals defending their villages, Kesri recognises the futility of his involvement in the conflict. After killing a Chinese soldier in battle, not only does he discern that the Chinese "fight for their land, their homes, their families, their customs, everything they hold dear" (Ghosh, *Flood* 472) but also that "he had never known what it was to fight in that way . . . for something that war your own; something that tied to your fathers and mothers and those who had gone before them" (Ghosh, *Flood* 472).

Facing that uncomfortable truth, the young sepoy realises that the Chinese's defence of their villages matches exactly what he would have done in India; this prompts him to develop a growing sympathy for the enemy, which points again to Ghosh's call for Indo-Chinese cooperation and collaboration in the past as well as today. Kesri's gradual realisation that sepoys in British overseas military campaigns are little more than "hired murderers" implicated in "actions [that] would have to be answered for in many lives yet to come" (Ghosh, *Flood* 505) can be read additionally as reflecting the dilemma of Western soldiers involved in military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan today.[122]

Neel is another character who encapsulates India's complex position in Victorian transoceanic imperialism. As Commissioner Lin forces an embargo on British and Indian merchants' opium cargoes, Neel finds that Hong Kong is being gradually occupied by British forces. Still fleeing English justice for the crime of forgery wrongfully charged on him, Neel "can never be comfortable around the British flag" so he escapes Hong Kong and comes back to Canton, "deeper into China . . . safe from Britannia's all-seeing eye and all-grasping hand" (Ghosh, *Flood* 18). Neel's friendship to Compton, a Chinese owning a print-shop in Canton, leads the English-speaking runaway Raja to collaborate with Commissioner Lin and Chinese authorities to compile information about British-ruled India. Ghosh's portrayal of Chinese court officials, in collaboration with Neel, learning about the 'foreign enemy' to dominate him constitutes an instance of reverse Orientalism and appropriation of knowledge as power. This is corroborated by Travis W. Hanes and Frank Sanello, who claim that Commissioner Lin and his court officials engaged in reading Emer de

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[122]   For a contemporary personal account about the troubled feelings experienced by soldiers sent to overseas wars - i.e. Iraq, Afghanistan or Syrian – that they perceive as unjust, see Glenton (no pages).

Vattel's *The Law of Nations* (1758), Algernon Thelwall's *The Iniquities of the Opium Trade with China* (1839) or the English-language journal *The Canton Press* in the months before the impending Opium War (Hanes and Sanello 85-86).

Nevertheless, what Ghosh intends to illustrate in his portrayal of Neel collaborating with Chinese forces against the British Empire is that loyalty, just like identity, can be in a constant state of flux, particularly for Indian subjects enmeshed in the convoluted Victorian imperial operations. Neel in particular feels wronged both by English justice and his Indian caste-fellows who did not stand for him when he was jailed and now consider him a pariah. This leads him to develop a dismal and deterritorialised view on language when he nostalgically thinks of his English education in Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift and William Shakespeare:

> It is madness to think that knowing a language and reading a few books can create allegiances between people. Thoughts, books, ideas, words – if anything, they make you more alone, because they destroy whatever instinctive loyalties you may once have possessed" (Ghosh, *Flood* 83).

Just like Kesri's service to the East India Company army, Neel's position as an agent on the Chinese side is not free from constrictions. Facing the growing British offensive assisted by Indian forces in the Pearl River, Chinese authorities start distributing notices to encourage the capture of 'enemy aliens.' Nevertheless, as Chinese officials claim, "not all foreigners fell under this head: Portuguese, Americans and some others were exempted. The notices were targeted solely at British subjects, which included Parsi merchants as well as Indian soldiers and sepoys" (Ghosh, *Flood* 378). That Parsis and Indians are included within the category of "British subjects" for the Chinese demonstrates the fluctuating character of the label 'alien.' The articulations between sameness and difference from a Chinese point of view produce alternative categories which overlap the persona of

Neel. When Compton rants against the 'black-alien soldiers' for their effective service to the British army in sea battles, Neel's loyalty again fluctuates between his commitment to his service to China and his fellow Indians' military prowess:

> Neel took a perverse satisfaction in Compton's words for he had tried often, always unavailingly, to alter his friend's low opinion of the fighting qualities of Indian troops. Committed though Neel was to the Chinese cause, he was aware now of a keen sense of pride in his compatriots' performance that day (Ghosh, *Flood* 387).

However, Compton's grief-stricken statement to Neel, "why are your countrymen killing our people when there is no enmity between us?" (Ghosh, *Flood* 478), seems more indicatory of Ghosh's construction of Sino-Indian relations in the period. Not only are Kesri's and Neel's wavering allegiances to the British and Chinese sides meant to illustrate the complex position of India in the Opium Wars, but also Victorian imperialism is illustrated as hindering Indo-Chinese understanding.

As late as 1902, after the 'century of humiliation' in which Indian soldiers assisted several Western expeditions against China, there exist reports of Indian subalterns pointing out kinships and affinities between India and China, as well as of the latter's plight in dealing with Western powers throughout the nineteenth century.[123] Thakur Gadhadhar Singh's memoir *Thirteen Months in China: The China War* (1902), for example, records a first-person account of the Boxer Uprising (1899-1901) and the international expedition sent to supress the rebellion.[124] Gadhadhar Singh was an Indian soldier who participated in such international incursion under a

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[123]   For an overview of Indian subalterns' perspectives on China, see Anand 2006, 2007 and 2015.

[124]   The Boxer Uprising (1899-1901) was a violent rebellion against Western imperialism and Christian missionary activity in China. The uprising was led by the Yihequan (known in the West as 'Boxers'), a group of rural men skilled in martial arts. Usually overshadowed by the contemporaneous Second Boer War (1899-1902) in contemporary historical discussions, the Boxer Uprising had a dramatic effect from a global point of view: it triggered an Eight-Nation allied intervention in 1900 that has been considered "the first multinational intervention in the name of 'civilization'" (Bickers xii).

Euro-American-Japanese coalition and a telling point he raises in his memoir is the commonality between India and China as two countries facing the colonial aggression from Western powers.[125] Following the previous line of reasoning, Ghosh's construction of the characters of Kesri and Neel as contradictorily implicated in the Opium Wars seems to point again to a Pan-Asian collaboration between India and China.

In parallel to nineteenth-century India and its citizens being narrated as embroiled amid the confrontation between two great empires, Ghosh constructs Western and Eastern characters and their intercultural relations in terms of their enmeshment in the maritime battles surrounding them: the British Captain Mee – who is revealed to be half Indian – develops a strong and sincere connection with Kesri; Mrs. Burnham and Shireen, despite their cultural differences, establish an earnest female-female friendship amid the patriarchal structures of Victorian imperialism; and Zachary and Serang Ali develop tender bonds for Raju, Neel's son, who reappears in a subplot involving a reunion between father and son after Neel's transportation. The intercultural bonds developed between Western and Eastern characters illustrate the ways in which individuals get round and subvert the oppressing sexist and racist structures of Victorian imperialism in which they find themselves implicated.

The *Ibis* trilogy, but more specifically *Flood of Fire*, takes a decisive step towards retrieving the memory of the Opium Wars in the West. In contraposition to China, where the Opium Wars, as we have argued, are associated with the nineteenth century as the 'century of humiliation' in Chinese collective memory, the

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[125]   I rely on Anand A. Yang's account of Gadhadhar Singh's memoir (Yang, "Subaltern" 50).

Opium Wars do not hold a prominent position in the European or British historical imagination. A telling indication of contemporary British ignorance – or historical amnesia – about the Opium Wars was the fact that in November 2010, David Cameron and a group of British ministers wore Remembrance Day poppy buttonholes at an official state visit to China, forgetting about the indexical associations between the poppy and opium (White, "David Cameron" no pages). Despite the erasure of the opium question in British historical imagination, the First Opium War, whose opening is recorded is *Flood of Fire*, is increasingly being read as a crux in West-East relations. As I have already argued, Ghosh has read the opium trade in the nineteenth century as the very foundation of the British Empire, free markets and capitalism (Ghosh, "Networks" 35). One of the most finely crafted ironies in *Flood of Fire* is that the British Empire's desperate and gun-driven attempt to maintain the opium trade at the beginning of the Victorian era is cloaked under a messianic discourse about the benefits of Free Trade deployed by Victorian merchants, as illustrated by a Free trader in the novel:

> If there was any country on earth . . . that stood in breach of these doctrines it was China, with its subservience to authority and its minute control of everyday matters. Only with the destruction of their present institutions, only with the abandonment of their ways and customs, could the people of this benighted realm hope to achieve harmony and happiness. This indeed was the historic destiny of Free-Traders like themselves . . . Of all the lessons the West could teach them, this was the most important. And inasmuch as traders like themselves were helping the Chinese to learn this lesson, they were their friends, not their enemies (Ghosh, *Flood* 376).

The hypocrisy lying in Victorian Free traders' defence of military intervention in China is evident: the British Empire's dependence on the opium industry and the trade imbalance between Britain and China prior to the First Opium War are disguised under a zealous undertaking to bring the liberties of Free Trade to Chinese people. In this sense, Ghosh's *Flood of Fire* explores "the spin Europeans put on

their empire-building that in acquiring other people lands, and subjugating them, they were not just motivated by profit but fulfilling a higher, selfless, moral mission to liberate and uplift these people from their wretched existence" (Bose, no pages). Additionally, as Marie-Luise Kohlke observes, the novel's portrayal of Victorian Free Traders' mercantile militarism and moralistic discourse on China's trade policy turns further ironic from a contemporary point of view, as Britain today is greatly dependent on Chinese investment and it has been largely surpassed by China as a global economic power (Kohlke, "Killing Humour" 80).

The novel's reconstruction of the First Opium War does not content itself with providing a critique of the excesses of Victorian Free Trade and looking forward to the postmodern future to cast an ironic look on Britain's dependence on Chinese markets. Ghosh also integrates *Flood of Fire* within current debates on globalisation, international relations and neo-liberalism. The novel's balanced account of British, Indian and Chinese perspectives on the opium traffic are revealing about the First Opium War as a crux in global relations but it is especially Ghosh's account of the Chinese point of view what is driven towards a more comprehensive understanding of today's West-East relations.

Traditional conceptions of imperial China have constructed the eastern country as a nation fundamentally self-isolated from other nations. As Dilip K. Basu has claimed, "the centrality of the cultural construction of 'all-under-Heaven' and the 'Middle Kingdom' and the inferior status of outsiders as 'barbarians' . . . are now accepted as 'givens' in most mainstream works on China, whether these are written by Chinese, Japanese, or Western scholars" (Basu 929). Imperial China considered itself the Middle Kingdom after the belief that civilisation and humanity had developed

around the country. Accordingly, the Emperor was deemed as the Son of Heaven and Chinese expected foreign traders arriving in China to pay tribute to the Emperor (Hanes and Sanello 14). This arguable self-conceited view on the nation, which was not dissimilar from Britain's belief in the civilising mission and the destiny of the 'superior' English race, has been determining Sino-Western relations since the beginning of the first Opium War until today. Nevertheless, I argue that *Flood of Fire*, in the wake of recent and more nuanced historiography on imperial China and its relations with the West, reconsiders that monolithic view on nineteenth-century China at least in two aspects: the unearthing of a more fluid vision of Sino-Western interactions and a linguistic reconsideration of Victorian Britain's creation of knowledge about China.

Regarding imperial China's relations with the West, the novel certainly concedes as true the notion that official circles in China were uninterested in 'overseas matters', a vision that seems to match both the traditional conception of the sea as beyond nation and society and the Orientalist discourse on Imperial China's arguable isolationism. Nevertheless, through the novel's portrayal of Commissioner Lin and Compton, Ghosh seeks to demonstrate that there certainly existed an underlying cluster of Chinese scholars who looked beyond China towards the world overseas:

> According to Compton, the principal subject of Zhong Lou-si's studies – overseas matters – has generally been regarded as unimportant and even disreputable in official circles. And the fact that he does not hesitate to seek out sailors, shipowners, merchants, emigrants and the like is considered unseemly by many of his peers: those are classes of men that officialdom has traditionally regarded as untrustworthy. For all these reasons Zhong Lou-si's work was long overlooked (Ghosh, *Flood* 191).

A disciple of Zhong Lou-Si, Compton's life has been equally determined by inflow of overseas collectives:

> Compton is not from the kind of family that generally produces scholars and officials: he is the son of a ship-chandler and has grown up on the Pearl River, in close proximity to foreign sailors and businessmen: it was they who had taught him English; it was from them too that he learnt about the world overseas; they also gave him his English name (Ghosh, *Flood* 191-192).

The novel seems to narrate these intercultural encounters between Zhong Lou-Si, Compton and foreign sailors and traders as a potential model for China and Britain to acquire mutual knowledge and accordingly contribute to a reciprocal understanding between both powers and discard monolithic notions about each other. Scholars such as Phil C. W. Chan have argued against statements on imperial China's isolation from overseas nations by affirming that "European diplomatic and religious missions had been received by China's imperial court since the sixteenth century" (Chan 863). Song-Chuan Chen more specifically claims that "before the 1830s, the British acquired their conceptual framework of China mainly through the writings of Jesuit missionaries from continental Europe, which depicted China as a peaceable country to be admired and imitated" (Chen 3). Compton's and Lou-Si's cosmopolitan visions about the world 'beyond the sea' can be read therefore as individual acts of resistance to sovereign state's official views on foreign relations.

Such individual drives towards mutual communication and understanding between Chinese and foreigners were obviously overpowered by what Song-Chuan Chen has called the "Warlike party", comprised by Canton merchants who persuaded the British government to send the expeditionary force that started the First Opium War (Chen 2-3). These merchants allied themselves with imperial discourses of civilisation to construct a distorted image of China – highlighting the country's arguable tyranny, hermeticism and Sinocentrism –, that displaced previous knowledge about the eastern country in Europe. The notion of the 'Middle Kingdom' and the tribute system in the relations between the Chinese Emperor and foreign

traders were certainly capitalised by Canton traders to justify military intervention, but in reality, as Michael Keevak has pointed out, such laws of homage and tribute were mainly symbolic, involving mere cultural practices and protocols of respect, politeness and 'kowtow' (bow down) to run foreign relations and bridge the gap between radically different cultures (Keevak 10).[126] Additionally, Matthew W. Mosca claims, the purpose of the Sinocentric system of tribute in the Chinese empire "was less to manipulate actual foreign conditions to China's economic or military advantage, than to give domestic audiences proof that foreigners acknowledged and submitted to the emperor's power" (Mosca 5).

Flood of Fire also reconsiders Sino-British relations in the Victorian era from a linguistic point of view. I have already stated that British missionaries in China produced knowledge about the Qing dynasty for the west. To these missionaries, we might add British diplomats and officials from the East India Company, such as Sir George Staunton and P.P Thoms, who were among the first British officials who learnt Chinese and tried to produce genuine knowledge about the eastern country for Victorian Britain (Basu 932-934). As I have already pointed out, Canton merchants and Free Traders displaced previous knowledge about China in the west in order to justify the military intervention in the First Opium War, and they did so by manipulating the most obvious obstacle for Sino-British understanding: language. The narration's portrayal of Neel's assistance to Compton and Chinese authorities illustrates the creation of knowledge as a crucial strategy in the clash of empires. As

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[126]   British disdain for Chinese etiquette had already been exhibited almost a century prior to the First Opium Wars when in 1793 Britain sent her first envoy to China, Lord George Macartney, and he refused to 'kowtow' to the Chinese Emperor, a Mandarin custom that was respected by all nations doing business with China at the time (Hanes and Sanello 13).

Neel observes about Compton and their shared task of translating English documents into Chinese

> it is as if language itself has become a battleground, with words serving as weapons. [Compton] sometimes explodes with indignation while reading British translations of official Chinese documents: Look, Ah Neel, look! Look how they have changed the meaning of what was said!" (Ghosh, *Flood* 190).

According to Compton, English translators' most flagrant distortion of language lies in their translation of the Chinese character *yi*, which had been translated as 'foreigner' until the years preceding the First Opium War:

> This character has always been used to refer to people who are not from the Central States: what it means, in other words, is 'foreigner'. Apparently this was not disputed until recently – Americans and Englishmen were quite content to translate *yi* as 'foreigner'. But of late some of their translators have begun to insist that *yi* means 'barbarian'. It has repeatedly been pointed out to them that the word has been applied to many revered and famous people in China (Ghosh, *Flood* 190).

The historian Dilip K. Basu has provided authoritative evidence on the (mis)translation of *yi* in Anglo-Chinese official interactions: he has analysed the records of official correspondence between Chinese authorities and British supercargoes in Canton between 1760 and 1810 – written in Chinese – and the resulting examination indicates that the term *yi* was the ordinary term to refer to Europeans in the records, whether used by Britons or Chinese, and that it was never translated as 'barbarian' in the English parallel records (Basu 930-931).

According to Basu, "the translation of the term Yi as 'barbarian' not only is problematic but also completely occludes the political context in which the word was authorized to received its currently accepted coherent form of construction and representation" (Basu 929). Such context alluded to by Basu is obviously the First Opium War and the Canton lobbyists who persuaded the British government to force opium into China at gunpoint. The mistranslation of *yi* as 'barbarian' not only served

to justify military intervention in China but it has had deep reverberations in western cultural constructions of China, especially those which repeatedly highlight Sinocentrism. Even today, there are historiographical works which denote ignorance about the translation history of the term *yi* and about nineteenth-century China's perspectives on foreigners.[127]

As a result of the previous discussion of Sino-British relations in the Victorian period, it can be argued that *Flood of Fire* constructs the First Opium War and the ensuing Treaty of Nanjing (1842)[128] as a fulcrum event that, to a significant extent, forged west-east relations and China's foreign policy today. Indeed, as Hsin-pao Chang has claimed, the First Opium War is the most obvious starting point for the study of modern China (Chang ix) and seems crucial to understand contemporary China's perspectives on international law. In this sense, Phil C.W. Chan points out that

> International law is an amalgam of the past, present, and future . . . not only because the vast majority of rules, principles, and norms of international law, including those codified in treaties, have come into being through decades, if not centuries, of deviation, crystallization and consolidation, but also because the past, and one's perspectives of the past, underlie, inform and explain a state's perspectives of a particular order or particular norms or values and its approaches to the perspectives and actions of other states (Chan 859).

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[127]   For instance, in the recent *Embassies to China: Diplomacy and Cultural Encounters before the Opium War*s (2017), Michael Keevak sweepingly asserts that "the Chinese . . . assumed [a] haughty self-conception that placed themselves at the center of the world and rendered everyone else a *barbarian outsider*" (Keevak 2; my emphasis). Keevak seems to betray here unawareness on the term *yi* and its impact on European historiography about nineteenth-century China.

[128]   The Treaty of Nanjing (Nanking) (1842) officially put an end to the First Opium War. Among other economic claims, the Treaty forced Chinese authorities to open four ports for trade in addition to the one in Canton and to pay economic compensation to the British government for the confiscated opium and the costs of the war. Additionally, this treaty sanctioned the cession of the island of Hong Kong to the British Empire. This treaty was effective until the signing of the Sino-British Joint Declaration (1984), that marked the end of British rule in China and culminated with the handing over of Hong Kong to China in 1997 (Wong 309-311).

In Jürgen Osterhammel's view, the previous line of reasoning provides a rationale for the fact that the 'century of humiliation' and the semi-colonial status to which China was reduced by European powers during the Victorian era remains a basic corollary in Chinese Communist Faith (Osterhammel 290).

The narration's commentary on Sino-British relations then and today is not the only aspect in which the novel evinces its twenty-first century relevance. *Flood of Fire* also illustrates its neo-Victorian purchase by invoking in the readers' minds the unrelenting advance of neo-liberalism and capitalism in contemporary globalisation. Ghosh's finest example of global thinking appears near the blazing conclusion of the novel, as the *Nemesis* is forcing its way up the Pearl River and the Chinese are close to capitulate. In one of the most memorable passages in the novel, Kesri and the Bengal sepoy volunteers stand in their transport vessel gaping at the British navy's bombarding of Tiger's Mouth, as Baboo Nob Kissin appears on deck, dressed in a saffron robe and surrounded in a heavenly light. Presented as a prophetic figure, Nob Kissin looks at the columns of smoke rising in the Chinese forts and addresses Kesri:

> what you are seeing is the start of the *pralaya* – the beginning of the world's end . . . Do you not know that we are in Kaliyuga, the epoch of apocalypse? You should rejoice that you are here today, fighting for the Angrez. It is the destiny of the English to bring about the world's end; they are but the instruments of the will of the gods (Ghosh, *Flood* 509).

If Baboo Nob Kissin's fatal omen and his reference to the Kaliyuga – in Sanskrit knowledge, the age of devastation and vice preceding the final destruction of the earth – is not enough to conjure up the excesses and the self-destructive character of contemporary capitalism in the readers' minds, Nob Kissin then points to the steaming *Nemesis* and states:

> See, these fires that you see today, you know what they are? They are just kindling. They have been lit in order to awaken the demons of greed that are hidden in all human beings. That is why the English have come to China and

to Hindustan: these two lands are so populous that if their greed is aroused they will consume the whole world (Ghosh, *Flood* 509).

In light of Nob Kissin's words, Victorian imperialism has ingrained capitalist greed in China and India so that they may rise someday, devour the world and bring about the destruction of the world, "for only when this world ends will a better one be born" (Ghosh, *Flood* 510). This apocalyptic notion of the Opium question entails a commentary on the emerging global economies of India and China today – which are known, together with Brazil and Russia, as the 'BRIC' group in economic circles (Goh 341) – and the rise of Victorian capitalism as a harbinger for the growing neo-liberalism both in the west and the east. Interestingly, Julia Adeney Thomas has read the passages quoted above in light of a "convergence of East and West . . . both regions [being] responsible for the world's destruction" (Thomas, "Asia" 937).

Baboo Nob Kissin's prophetic voice therefore anticipates a global landscape in which both East and West will become participants in the exploitation of world resources at the expense of the underprivileged. This collapse of the categories 'West' and 'East' is further cemented if one brings to mind the role global corporations, geopolitics and economic interests play in triggering today's warfare – as Compton points out, "this is what happens when merchants and traders begin to run wars" (Ghosh, *Flood* 479).

If Baboo Nob Kissin's apparition and prophetic speech to the sepoys presages modern-day excesses of neo-liberalism and the rise of consumer economy in Asia, so does the character of Zachary Reid and his startling evolution throughout the novel. Newly acquitted from the crime of mutiny at the opening of *Flood of Fire*, throughout the narration he moves up from ship carpenter at the Burnham residence to ship's captain and opium trader, somehow following the steps of his employer Mr

Burnham. In Marie-Luise Kohlke's words, "Zachary becomes co-opted into Victorian ideology and death-dealing perfidy, so that his imperialist adventure story rapidly degenerates into a neo-Victorian 'Rake's Progress' and far from moral *Bildungsroman*" (Kohlke, "Killing Humour" 82).

Zachary's progression from poor mixed-race sailor to Victorian pro-war businessman is propelled by a hungry pursuit of money, power and prestige, somehow mirroring Kesri's development in reverse. Out of his sexual affair with Mrs Burnham, Zachary's immersion in the Burhams' world of wealth, luxury and authority kindles the young mariner's ambition to become an opium trader:

> I'm sick of that shit – sailing, risking your life every day, never having any money in your pocket. I don't want to be one of the deserving poor any more . . . I want to be rich . . . I want to have silk sheets and soft pillows and fine food . . . I want to own ships and not work on them . . . I want to live in Mr Burnham's world (Ghosh, *Flood* 258).

The powerful lure of material pursuit experienced by Zachary, emphasised by the repetition of 'want', is instrumentalised by Baboo Nob Kissin, who, seeking to fulfil Ma Taramoni's prediction of the age of apocalypse, devises a plan to transform Zachary "from an ingenuous, good-natured boy, into a perfect embodiment of the Kali-yuga" (Ghosh, *Flood* 606). Nob Kissin's strategy is no other than "unshackling the demon of greed that lurks in every human heart" (Ghosh, *Flood* 258) by instructing Zachary in the selling of opium. The turning point in Zachary's character development occurs on his first visit to the Opium Exchange bazaar, "a place in which people traded in something unseen and unknown: the prices that opium would fetch in the future, near or distant" (Ghosh, *Flood* 271). Ghosh is obviously trying to evoke the world of speculation in contemporary stock markets and signalling the opium exchange as an obvious precedent of today's market capitalism. Advised by Baboo Nob Kissin, Zachary invests all his savings in the opium market and that night

he envisages his coins "out there in the world, forging their own destiny, making secret assignations, colliding with others of their kind – seducing, buying, spending, breeding, multiplying" (Ghosh, *Flood* 273).

Zachary's revelling in the promising circulation of his money marks not only his entry into cash economy, but also the breaking of a process of corruption fuelled by a growing appetite for benefit. This will lead him to blackmail Captain Mee into agreeing on a business contract to Burnham Bros by threatening to reveal the captain's former affair with Mrs Burnham, to betray Ah Fatt to the opium tycoon Lenny Chang, Ah Fatt's former boss, and to indirectly inducing Mrs Burnham to commit suicide after coercing her into having another sexual encounter. As Zachary bitterly claims to Mrs Burnham in their last encounter, he has become "a man of the times . . . a man who wants more and more and more; a man who does not know the meaning of "enough". Anyone who tries to thwart my desires is the enemy of my liberty and must expect to be treated as such" (Ghosh, *Flood* 582). Zachary's degeneration represents the rise of capitalism at its most extreme and provides the novel's most powerful account of the corrupting effects of material accumulation.

The prominent position of Zachary throughout the *Ibis* trilogy as well as his character development can be said to epitomise, in Gaurav Desai's words, "the linkages between vast oceanic worlds" (Desai, "Novelist" 1533). I have already discussed Zachary as illustrating the transoceanic connections between Atlantic and Indian Ocean waterworlds. Considering the geographical displacement experienced by Zachary throughout the narration, I argue that Zachary's rise from inexperienced sailor to Free trader, following Mr Burnham's steps, typifies the United States as taking over Britain's imperial role in the globe. The closing chapter of the novel

suggests so when different European, American and Indian merchants gather for the first auction of land of Hong Kong. Significantly, the largest tract of land on the island is bought by Mr Burnham and Zachary under the firm Burnham and Reid.

Their commercial collaboration under the creation of this firm suggests Zachary as the natural inheritor of Mr Burnham's Free Trade thinking, illustrating the young ex-sailor as a surrogate for US imperialism. If this is not enough for the reader to perceive Ghosh's global thinking, the narration further reveals that the firm Burnham and Reid will be collaborating closely with Leonard Chan, the Chinese tycoon responsible for Ah Fatt's death. In a gesture symbolising the consolidation of capitalism, "taking Zachary's wrist in his right hand and Mr Chan's in his left, Mr Burnham hoisted up their arms and held them aloft in triumph" (Ghosh, *Flood* 606). The triad Burnham-Reid-Chan, or rather Britain-US-China, prefigures multinational relations today, with the United States and China as obvious recipients of Victorian Britain's imperial position of power around the globe.

Ghosh's final account of transoceanic commercial relations between Burnham, Reid and Chan over the exploitation of others can be said to contravene the trilogy's construction of maritime connectivity as enabling liberation for the subaltern. However, the very last paragraphs of the novel transport us back to Mauritius and Deeti's shrine to close the trilogy on a positive note. A special chamber in the shrine tells about an event that happens in parallel to the land auction at Hong Kong and the presentation of Burnham and Reid firm. That event, known to the Colvers as 'the Escape', involves Serang Ali, Jodu, Neel, Raju, Kesri and Maddow Colver escaping on the *Ibis* while merchants are bidding for strips of land in Hong Kong. This group of subalterns' escape to the sea articulates Ghosh's literary account of the individual

acts of resistance which underlie the dominant structures of Victorian imperialism and, in passing, the author's contribution to the repertoire of liberating fantasies of maritime literature.

6. Conclusions

I introduced this PhD thesis by critiquing Theresa May's dismissal of world citizenship. Among other claims, I argued that notions of national belonging have become stale especially when appropriated by conservative policies. By this point, I hope to have demonstrated, via my analysis of the neo-Victorian maritime novel, the political possibilities of fluid boundaries and pluriorigins. At the time of finishing this PhD thesis, as far-right political parties are increasingly gathering support for policies based on the building of walls, the patrolling of borders and the hatred for the Other, and Brexit negotiations between the UK and the European Union seem to have reached a deadlock, devising models of transcultural understanding seems an urgent issue against jingoistic concerns over national identity. Coincidentally, George Mitchell – the architect of the Good Friday Agreement in Ireland and one of the characters of McCann's *TransAtlantic* – has recently referred to concerns over national borders to warn about the potential troubles lying ahead after Brexit:

> The open Border has meant people travelling back and forth, a degree of social interaction, of commerce, of people working together. If you reinstate a hard border . . . stereotyping resumes, demonisation resumes, and people turn inward as opposed to outward, and they lose the benefits that come from open borders . . . There could be serious trouble ahead. No society is immune from the regressive forces that are part of every problem. (qtd. in O'Carroll, no pages).

In light of Mitchell's words, I argue that the manifold transcultural encounters across maritime borders analysed throughout this thesis may serve as a powerful reminder of the political potential of liquid boundaries to enable transcultural collaboration and wellbeing. Hence, Nora Hague's *Letters from an Age of Reason*, adopting Gilroy's anti-anti-essentialist viewpoint on black identity, illustrates the Atlantic Ocean as a medium enabling transcultural connections between blacks from different cultures in the Victorian period and gives a brief account of the development

of unorthodox sexualities among shipboard communities; Colum McCann's *TransAtlantic* adopts instead a polytemporal approach by narrating multiple cross-genealogical transatlantic encounters and illustrates, through the figure of Frederick Douglass, the interactions between the Black Atlantic and the Green Atlantic in the nineteenth century, in particular the political cross-pollinations between black abolitionism and Irish nationalism. Similarly, Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy also evinces the transformative potential of oceanic encounters; for example, *Sea of Poppies* constructs the voyage from Calcutta to Mauritius as liquefying the strict Indian caste system, as *girmitiyas* engage in close interactions under the coercion of nineteenth-century indentureship; or the foreign enclave in littoral nineteenth-century Canton, as narrated in *River of Smoke* and *Flood of Fire*, engenders cultural and linguistic models of hybridity which escape the contamination of Victorian imperialism. The social construction of the ocean as exhibited in the neo-Victorian maritime novel features as an arena for transgression, transformation and change. The transformative effects of such oceanic encounters may be seen as temporally limited by the maritime settings in which they take place, but they surely suggest the promise of a challenge to imperial notions of language, nationality and gender once the migratory subaltern subjects leave the oceanic sphere and have to conform to land-based rules.

The interstitial character of the manifold maritime topographies examined in the novels under analysis – ships, ports, islands, littoral cities – promotes a model of literary-cultural analysis focused on the transition and the passage; this situates this PhD thesis in intersection with postcolonial concerns about diaspora, hybridity and historical specificity. Regarding the latter, the neo-Victorian-at-sea, because of its privileging of the sea crossing over imperial centre and colonial peripheries,

neutralises the contentious question of the historical specificity in postcolonial criticism, illustrating imperial sea lanes as vectors for the dissemination of local colonial cultures. The novels under analysis reveal therefore the global and oceanic dimension of postcolonial cultures around the globe in the Victorian era without reducing the literary-cultural analysis to a shared and unnuanced history of postcoloniality. In *Letters from an Age of Reason*, for instance, African religions and occultism are deterritorialised and narrated as navigating the waters of the Atlantic in syncretic forms, evoking the trade triangle of transatlantic slavery. A similar point can be made of *Sea of Poppies* and *River of Smoke*, particularly of Deeti, whose rural Bhojpuri language and culture navigate on the *Ibis* across the Indian Ocean and find their way into Kreole Mauritian culture.

Another crux in postcolonial criticism is that of the opposition between pre-colonial purity and postcolonial sincreticity as antagonistic roadmaps for the political project of decolonisation. Neo-Victorian interventions into this debate vary depending on the oceanic region. As I have argued, both *Letters from an Age of Reason* and *TransAtlantic* markedly exhibit the syncretic forms which subaltern cultures adopted around the Atlantic. These novels seem to eschew the reconstruction of a pre-colonial purity in Africa and aim instead at retrieving a pan-African counterculture of modernity which reinscribed imperial power and the horrors of transatlantic slavery in the north-Atlantic matrix. The neo-Victorian texts dealing with the Indian Ocean diverge: Amitav Ghosh convincingly manages to retrospectively reconstruct and re-imagine a pre-colonial Indian Ocean, as well as the trade and cultural flow between India, China and Africa before the irruption of Western colonialism, in tune with the historical excavation on the Indian Ocean which is being carried out in current historiography. Simultaneously, the *Ibis* trilogy orients such historical reconstruction

of the pre-colonial Indian Ocean to signal the potential possibilities of political and commercial collaborations *within* the East in the future to dismantle the hegemony of Western capitalism and construct West-East relations on a more symmetrical basis.

The reclamations of both postcolonial hybridity and pre-colonial purity can be considered as legitimate literary strategies for 'decolonising the mind', to use Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's phrase, although I argue that acknowledging the hybridity of postcolonial cultures and recuperating hybrid models of culture in the past – the Indo-Chinese Ah Fatt in the *Ibis* trilogy being a case in point – seem more powerful approaches to face the challenges currently arising in an ever-globalised and changing world. This applies particularly to Europe, which has been a multicultural territory from the very beginning of Western civilisation, despite the fact that traditionally the presence of African, Asian or Caribbean subjects has been effaced from the European imagination. Postcolonial neo-Victorianism provides therefore a more hybrid and inclusive perspective on the Victorian age and nineteenth-century Europe, invalidating the received image of the continent as a "culturally bleached" territory (Gilroy, "Foreword" xii). The maritime focalisation adopted in this project sets Victorian culture and nineteenth century Europe in a fluid tidalectic interconnection with imperial outposts in order to underscore the mutual interdependence between centre and periphery, which serves to critique nationalistic and jingoistic accounts of British and European imperial relations.

Among the manifold maritime topographies dealt with throughout the primary texts under analysis, the ship obviously stands out as a fundamental location in neo-Victorian maritime fiction, the *Artemis* in *Letters from an Age of Reason* and the *Ibis*, the *Anahita* and the *Redruth* in Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy being salient examples. I have

analysed the shipspaces narrated in the novels as mediators of lived experiences and as locations which shape and negotiate transcultural relations. Following Foucault, I have mainly pursued a reading of the ship as heterotopia – although I have occasionally deployed Bhabha's Third Space and Pratt's contact zone as alternative critical readings of the ship. The ship as heterotopia exhibits its contradictory nature: it is an object deeply embedded in the hegemony of Western capitalism – and therefore featured as an instrument for colonisation, imperial conquest and the projection of power – but it is simultaneously and potentially a hotbed of resistance and political transformation.

Accordingly, as I have illustrated in my analysis, the ship as narrated in the primary texts in this PhD thesis, emerges as the genesis of hybridity, cosmopolitanism and diasporic identity. As Peter Linebaugh has pointed out, "the ship remained perhaps the most important conduit of Pan-African communication before the appearance of the long-playing record" (Linebaugh 119). As I have argued, for African-American ex-slaves and free blacks criss-crossing the Atlantic in the Victorian era the ship represented the core of their pan-Atlantic identity and their political project of liberation. Similarly, indentured workers in the nineteenth-century south-Asian continent resignified their identities on board the ships bound for Mauritius, South Africa and the Caribbean, revealing their experiences on board as narrations of hybridity 'in the making'. In this last case, by narrating the these transoceanic voyages the neo-Victorian maritime novel contributes to illustrate the inception of Asian-oriented models of hybridity – in the personas of Caribbean, Mauritian or South-African people with Asian ancestry – that are typically effaced in literary-cultural analyses of those regions. Therefore, the ship-chronotopes analysed in this thesis illustrate instances of destruction and oppression but also regeneration

and rebirth, which coalesces with heterotopias as being embedded in hegemonic structures but featuring simultaneously as "spaces of alternate ordering" (Hetherington viii).

Throughout this PhD thesis, I have delineated which forms the neo-Victorian maritime novel may adopt in relation both to neo-Victorian fiction, postmodernism and postcolonial thought. The neo-Victorian novels analysed in this project are written in the postcolonial mode and accordingly they still illustrate postmodern concerns which are of considerable significance for the postcolonial agenda, such as the mistrust of the western historiographical archive, the deconstruction of the sovereign subject, or the subversion of grand narratives exclusively articulated around a centre/periphery axis. Moreover, the maritime standpoint adopted in my analysis metaphorically suggests postmodern concerns about the literary representation of the colonial past: the literary sea – and its tropes of circulation and permanent movement – evokes the dredging of submerged and silenced stories, the transformation of diasporic identity and the fluidity of national and cultural boundaries.

Nevertheless, as I argued in chapter 3, the postmodern paradigm as illustrated in recent neo-Victorian fiction is showing debilitating signs which suggests the incipient emergence of an arguable post-postmodernism. Certainly, the novels under analysis avoid the formal fragmentary style which typically characterise postmodern novels and return to the certainties of realism: Hague's *Letters from an Age of Reason* engages with the nineteenth-century literary tradition by adopting the epistolary mode and the dual narrative; The *Ibis* trilogy and its broad scope and careful attention to every level in the social reality of the Indian subcontinent –

particularly to Canton in *River of Smoke* – in the nineteenth century similarly places Ghosh's work in parallel with the Victorian literary canon, as some of the author's critics have suggested (Chaudhuri 132; Frost 1542). The return to traditional forms of narration and the re-engagement with the realist tradition as an authoritative strategy deployed to fill in the gaps of western historiography makes these novels representative of post-postmodernism. *TransAtlantic* is a divergent case: the fragmentary and intermittent character of McCann's narration as well as its multiple narrators sets the novel closer to postmodern aesthetics but still the circular structure of the novel, with Hannah's story framing the remaining narrations, and McCann's emphasis on the oceanic and cyclical nature of time suggests that the novel subtly aspires to the coherence of a realist narration.

Accordingly, the neo-Victorian maritime novels dealt with in this thesis fit better within the category of revisionist historical fiction. The ocean in these novels provides an alternative interstitial space from where to visualise the tidal vectors which characterised maritime migration in the Victorian era. This suggests that these novels still aspire to the objectivity and accuracy of historiography, against traditional postmodernism which typically denies the very possibility of accessing history. The novels under analysis, as revisionist historical narrations, imaginatively and creatively restore the past by foregrounding the historical referent (Arias, "Traces" 114; Mitchell and Parsons 13) – Ghosh's resurrection of South-Asian lost idioms and cultural practices occluded by Victorian historiography being the most remarkable instance.

At the same time, these novels push the boundaries of the neo-Victorian imaginary by setting the genre in transnational relation with non-Anglophone locations, and hence they participate in recent critical debates on the global position

of neo-Victorianism. In accordance with recent trends in Victorian studies that are resituating Victorian literature within nineteenth-century world literature (Goodlad, "Cosmopolitanism" 399), the neo-Victorian-at-sea, by privileging the sea crossing over origin or destination, liquefies the boundaries of race, language and culture and represents Victorian culture as permeable (and set in relation to) foreign cultures within and beyond the reach of the British Empire. In particular, postcolonial narrations of the Atlantic incorporate the horrors of slavery and its cultural after-effects in the Victorian era as an unacknowledged component of Western modernity and illustrate the Africanist presence in Victorian Britain and its transatlantic routes. In the case of the Indian Ocean, Ghosh acts as *linkister* by situating his *Ibis* trilogy in dialogue with non-Anglophone archives – particularly on the production and circulation of opium, indentureship and the First Opium War – and this way evading the biases of monolingualism which are attributable to Western and Victorian historiography.

Throughout this PhD thesis I have sustained an analysis of the neo-Victorian maritime novel in relation to broader aspects of globalisation, cosmopolitanism, modernity, and capitalism. The oceanic subjects who inhabit the novels under analysis evince the complexities of modernity in a century that witnessed the unfolding of globalisation. For African Americans crossing the Atlantic to nineteenth-century Britain, the Victorian was equated with modernity, freedom and citizenship. For Indian Ocean subalterns, however, the irruption of modernity entailed the implication of the Indian subcontinent in capitalist cash economy. Victorianism as represented in these maritime novels engenders conflicting views from this transoceanic perspective, and this mirrors the paradoxes of contemporary globalisation, which is still built upon mobility and cultural exchange but also on

inequality and exploitation. This illustrates the diachronic character of the neo-Victorian genre, which allows for a critical and creative juxtaposition of the Victorian past with the globalised present, highlighting the continuities as well as the dissimilarities between the two.

The Atlantic and Indian Ocean stories analysed throughout this thesis suggest indeed a modulation in perceptions towards cosmopolitan subjects and the globe. The cosmopolitan experiences in these stories are narrated not from privileged perspectives but by subaltern subjects who are 'all at sea' as well as coerced and exploited by Victorian imperialist machinery. In this sense, my literary-cultural analysis has been motivated by the idea that it is possible to set the experiences of these dispossessed collectives under a single umbrella and in relation to each other in the context of oceanic history. The affinities and connections among these subaltern subjects underline the markedly transoceanic perspective of this PhD thesis.

By applying the 'Oceanic turn' and maritime criticism to the analysis of neo-Victorianism and situating the analysis in debates on capitalism, globalisation and immigration, I have sought to point out that there is much to gain in considering the neo-Victorian maritime novel to make sense of the inequities of contemporary globalisation and neo-liberal policies. Above all, I hope to have demonstrated that the ocean still roars with unmapped histories of family loss, slavery, dislocated subjects, and drowning bodies whose voices, gasping in the foam, have been suffocated by the waves of colonial oppression.

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8. Appendix

Plate 1: *The Fighting Temeraire tugged to her last berth to be broken up, 1838* (1839) by J.M.W. Turner. National Gallery, London.

https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/joseph-mallord-william-turner-the-fighting-temeraire
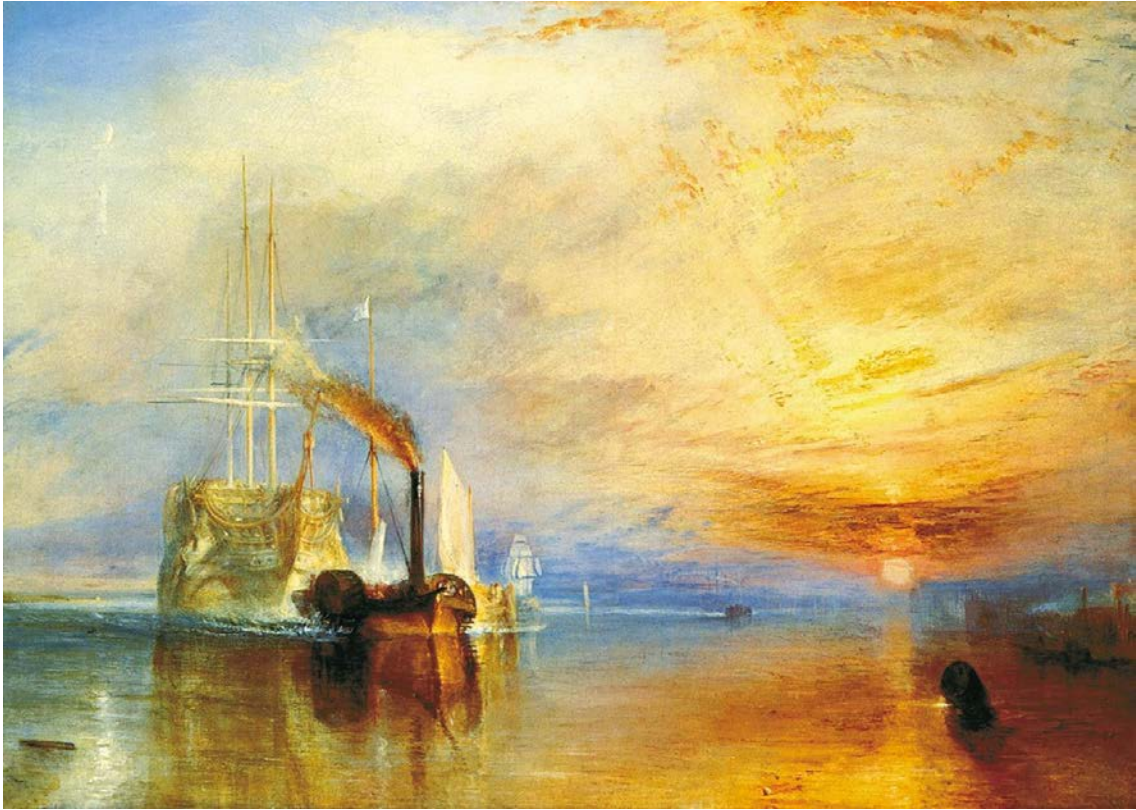
Plate 2: *Slave Ship* (*Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On* (1840) by J.M.W. Turner. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

https://www.mfa.org/collections/object/slave-ship-slavers-throwing-overboard-the-dead-and-dying-typhoon-coming-on-31102

Plate 3: *A View of the European Factories at Canton* (1805-1806) by William Daniell. Royal Museums Greenwich, London.

http://collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/207243.html

Plate 4: *The Nemesis Steamer destroying Chinese War Junks, in Canton River*
(1842). *The Illustrated London News*.

http://www.victorianweb.org/history/empire/opiumwars/nemesis.html

THE NEMESIS STEAMER DESTROYING CHINESE WAR JUNKS, IN CANTON RIVER.
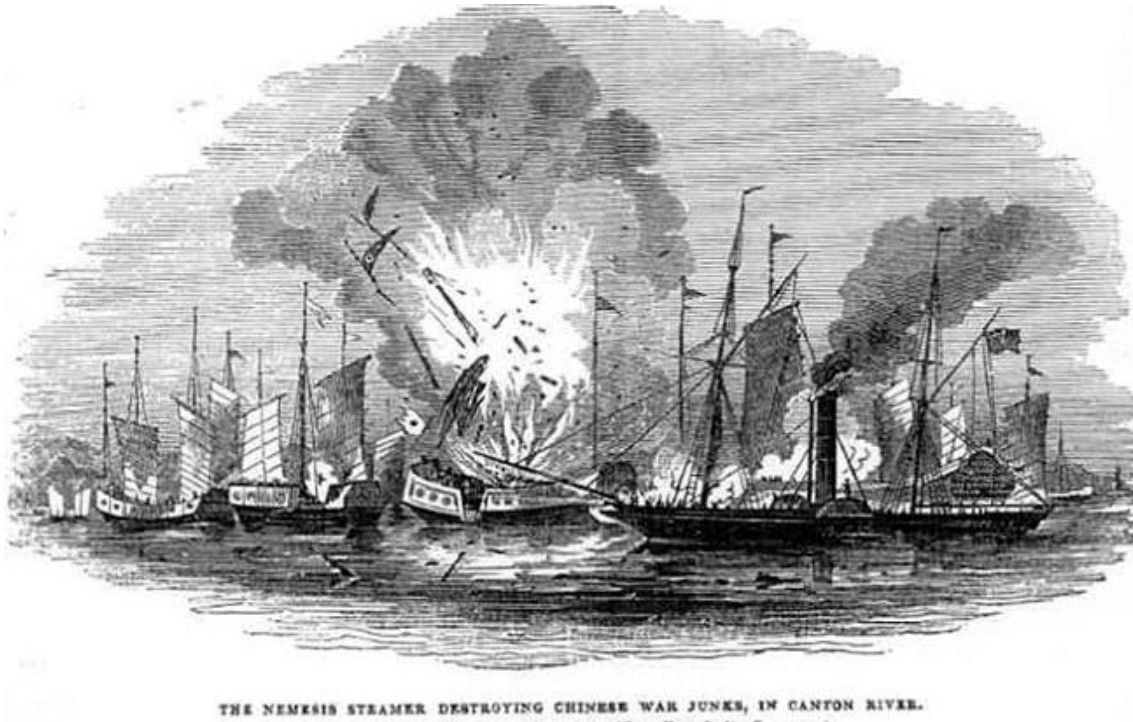
9. Conclusiones

En la introducción a esta Tesis Doctoral, comencé haciendo una crítica a Theresa May y a su rechazo al concepto de ciudadanía global. Entre otras cuestiones, argumenté que las nociones de nacionalidad se han vuelto especialmente obsoletas cuando son apropiadas por las políticas conservadoras. Al encontrarnos en este capítulo de conclusiones, espero haber demostrado, a través de mi anterior análisis de la novela neo-Victoriana marítima, las posibilidades políticas de los pluriorígenes y las fronteras fluidas. En el momento de finalizar la presente tesis los partidos políticos de extrema derecha están consiguiendo cada vez más apoyo, basando sus políticas en la construcción de muros, la vigilancia de fronteras y el odio por el Otro; por otra parte, las negociaciones del Brexit entre el Reino Unido y la Unión Europea parecen haber llegado a un punto muerto. Por estas razones, desarrollar modelos de entendimiento transcultural parece una cuestión urgente en contra de las alarmas ultranacionalistas sobre la identidad nacional. Casualmente George Mitchell – el arquitecto del acuerdo de Viernes Santo en Irlanda (1998) que puso fin al conflicto de Irlanda del Norte y uno de los personajes en *TransAtlantic* de Colum McCann – se ha referido recientemente a la preocupación acerca de las fronteras nacionales para advertir sobre problemas potenciales que se avecinan tras el Brexit:

> The open Border has meant people travelling back and forth, a degree of social interaction, of commerce, of people working together. If you reinstate a hard border . . . stereotyping resumes, demonisation resumes, and people turn inward as opposed to outward, and they lose the benefits that come from open borders . . . There could be serious trouble ahead. No society is immune from the regressive forces that are part of every problem. (qtd. in O'Carroll, no pages).

A la luz de las palabras de George Mitchell, considero que los variados encuentros transculturales a través de los océanos que he analizado en esta tesis

pueden servir como un poderoso argumento a favor de las fronteras fluidas para posibilitar el bienestar y la colaboración transculturales. Por ejemplo, *Letters from an Age of Reason* de Nora Hague adopta la posición anti-anti-esencialista de Paul Gilroy acerca de la identidad negra, e ilustra el océano Atlántico como un medio que facilitó las conexiones transculturales entre negros de diferentes culturas en el periodo Victoriano – además de aportar una breve visión sobre el desarrollo de sexualidades consideradas no ortodoxas en la época entre las comunidades marítimas; *TransAtlantic* de Colum McCann adopta un enfoque politemporal al narrar múltiples encuentros transgeneracionales y transatlánticos e ilustra, a través de la figura de Frederick Douglass, las interacciones entre *the Black Atlantic* y *the Green Atlantic* en el siglo XIX, en especial las transacciones políticas entre el abolicionismo afroamericano y el nacionalismo irlandés. Asimismo, la trilogía del *Ibis* de Amitav Ghosh también ilustra el potencial transformativo de los encuentros transoceánicos; por ejemplo, *Sea of Poppies* narra el viaje desde Calcuta a las Islas Mauricio como un tránsito que disolvía el estricto sistema de castas de la India cuando los inmigrantes se relacionaban estrechamente entre ellos bajo la opresión del sistema de *indentureship* en la época Victoriana; por otro lado, el enclave extranjero en el Cantón litoral del siglo XIX, tal y como se narra en *River of Smoke* y *Flood of Fire*, generó modelos de hibridismo cultural y lingüístico que escaparon de la contaminación del imperialismo Victoriano. La construcción social del océano tal y como se exhibe en la novela neo-Victoriana marítima se presenta como una escena propicia para la transgresión, la transformación y el cambio.

El carácter transicional de las topografías marítimas examinadas en los textos primarios de esta tesis – barcos, puertos, islas, ciudades litorales – promueve un modelo de análisis literario-cultural centrado en el tránsito y el pasaje; ésto sitúa esta

Tesis Doctoral en intersección con cuestiones poscoloniales sobre la diáspora, el hibridismo y la especificidad histórica. Con respecto a este último punto, la novela neo-Victoriana marítima, al situar el foco sobre el viaje marítimo por encima del centro imperial y las periferias coloniales, neutraliza el debate acerca de la especificidad histórica en la crítica poscolonial e ilustra las vías marítimas como vectores para la diseminación de las culturas coloniales locales. Por lo tanto, los textos primarios de esta tesis ilustran la dimensión global y oceánica de las culturas coloniales alrededor del mundo en la época Victoriana sin reducir el análisis literario-cultural a una historia poscolonial común y sin matices. Por ejemplo, en *Letters from an Age of Reason* las religiones y el ocultismo africanos son deterritorializados y navegan las aguas del Atlántico en formas sincréticas, evocando el comercio triangular de la esclavitud transatlántica. Algo similar puede argumentarse de *Sea of Poppies* y *River of Smoke*, particularmente del personaje de Deeti, cuyo lenguaje y cultura procedentes de su *Bhojpuri* rural navegan en el *Ibis* a través del océano Índico y son transferidos a la cultura criolla mauriciana.

Otro punto crucial en el crítica poscolonial es la oposición entre pureza pre-colonial y el sincretismo poscolonial como hojas de ruta antagónicas para el proyecto político de la descolonización. El papel del neo-Victorianismo en este debate varía dependiendo de la región oceánica de la que hablemos. Como he argumentado, tanto *Letters from an Age of Reason* como *TransAtlantic* inciden considerablemente en las formas sincréticas que adoptaron las culturas subalternas alrededor del Atlántico. Estas novelas evitan la reconstrucción de una pureza pre-colonial en África y se dirigen en cambio a recuperar una contracultura pan-Africana de la modernidad que reinscribió el poder imperial y los horrores de la esclavitud transatlántica en el hemisferio del Atlántico norte. En cambio, las novelas neo-Victorianas situadas en el

océano Índico presentan otra perspectiva: Amitav Ghosh reconstruye y re-imagina retrospectivamente y de forma convincente un océano Índico pre-colonial, así como el flujo comercial y cultural entre India, China y África antes de la irrupción del colonialismo occidental. Esta perspectiva está en consonancia con la reconstrucción histórica que se está acometiendo en el océano Índico en la historiografía actual. Asimismo, la trilogía del *Ibis* utiliza dicha reconstrucción histórica del océano Índico pre-colonial para señalar las futuras posibilidades inherentes a la colaboración comercial y política dentro de oriente para desmantelar la hegemonía del capitalismo occidental y así construir unas relaciones más simétricas entre oriente y occidente.

Tanto la reivindicación del hibridismo poscolonial como la recuperación de la pureza pre-colonial pueden ser consideradas como estrategias literarias legítimas para 'decolonizar la mente', usando la célebre frase de Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, aunque puede argumentarse que reconocer el hibridismo de las culturas poscoloniales y recuperar modelos híbridos de cultura en el pasado – el personaje Indo-Chino Ah Fatt en la trilogía del *Ibis* es un ejemplo destacado – parecen enfoques más poderosos para enfrentarse a los desafíos que surgen actualmente en un mundo cada vez más cambiante y globalizado. Esto se aplica especialmente a Europa, la cual debe señalarse que ha sido un territorio multicultural desde el principio de la civilización occidental, a pesar de que tradicionalmente la presencia africana, asiática o caribeña ha sido borrada de la imaginación europea. El neo-Victorianismo poscolonial proporciona por tanto una perspectiva más híbrida e inclusiva tanto de la época Victoriana como de la Europa del siglo XIX, desterrando así la imagen preconcebida del continente como un territorio "culturally bleached" (Gilroy, "Foreword" xii). La focalización marítima adoptada en esta Tesis Doctoral sitúa la cultura Victoriana y la Europa decimonónica en relación transoceánica con las

remotas colonias para subrayar la interdependencia entre el centro metropolitano y el mundo colonial, lo que proporciona una crítica a las versiones ultranacionalistas de las relaciones imperiales británicas y europeas.

Entre todas las localizaciones marítimas examinadas en los textos primarios de esta tesis, obviamente el barco destaca como una ubicación fundamental en la novela neo-Victoriana marítima; el *Artemis* de *Letters from an Age of Reason* y el *Ibis*, el *Anahita* y el *Redruth* en la trilogía de Ghosh son ejemplos destacados. He analizado los espacios de los barcos narrados en las novelas como mediadores de las experiencias vitales de los personajes y como localizaciones que transforman las relaciones transculturales. Siguiendo la filosofía de Foucault, principalmente he llevado a cabo una lectura del barco como *heterotopia* – aunque he usado ocasionalmente los conceptos de *Third Space* de Bhabha y *contact zone* de Pratt como conceptos críticos alternativos del barco. El barco como heterotopia señala su carácter contradictorio: es un objeto profundamente conectado con la hegemonía del capitalismo occidental – y por tanto frecuentemente representado como un instrumento de colonización, conquista imperial y la proyección de poder – pero al mismo tiempo representa potencialmente un caldo de cultivo para la resistencia y la transformación política.

Por lo tanto, tal y como he ilustrado en mi análisis, el barco tal y como se narra en los textos primarios de esta Tesis Doctoral, emerge como la génesis del hibridismo, el cosmopolitismo y la identidad diaspórica. Como Peter Linebaugh ha señalado, "the ship remained perhaps the most important conduit of Pan-African communication before the appearance of the long-playing record" (Linebaugh 119). Como ya he argumentado, para los ex-esclavos afroamericanos y los negros libres que cruzaron el Atlántico en la época Victoriana el barco representaba el núcleo de

su identidad pan-Atlántica y de su proyecto político de liberación. De igual forma, los inmigrantes *indentured* en el sur de Asia durante el siglo XIX rearticularon sus identidades a bordo de los barcos que zarparon hacia las Islas Mauricio, Sudáfrica o el Caribe, por lo que sus experiencias marítimas representan narraciones de hibridismo 'en proceso'. En este último caso, al narrar dichos viajes transoceánicos, la novela neo-Victoriana marítima contribuye a ilustrar la génesis de modelos de hibridismo orientados hacia Asia en las identidades de personas del Caribe, Islas Mauricio o Sudáfrica con ascendencia asiática. Estos ejemplos de hibridismo están típicamente ausentes en los análisis culturales de dichas regiones. Por lo tanto, los cronotopos marítimos analizados en esta tesis representan ejemplos de destrucción y opresión, pero también de regeneración y renovación, lo que conecta con la heterotopia como un concepto íntimamente ligado a las estructuras hegemónicas pero al mismo tiempo representadas como "spaces of alternate orderning" (Hetherington viii).

A lo largo de esta Tesis Doctoral, he señalado las formas que puede adoptar la novela neo-Victoriana marítima en relación con el género neo-Victoriano en general, el posmodernismo y el pensamiento poscolonial. Las novelas neo-Victorianas analizadas en este proyecto están narradas desde una perspectiva poscolonial y por lo tanto ilustran cuestiones posmodernas que son de vital importancia para la hoja de ruta poscolonial, tales como la deslegitimización del archivo historiográfico occidental, la deconstrucción del *sovereign subject*, o la subversión de *grand narratives* articuladas exclusivamente sobre un eje centro/periferia. Además, la perspectiva marítima adoptada en mi análisis evoca de forma metafórica cuestiones posmodernas sobre la representación literaria del pasado colonial: el mar en la literatura – y sus tropos de circulación y movimiento permanentes – evoca la

recuperación de historias sumergidas y silenciadas, la transformación de la identidad diaspórica y la fluidez de las fronteras nacionales y culturales.

Sin embargo, como argumento en el capítulo 3, el paradigma posmoderno tal y como se ilustra en la literatura neo-Victoriana reciente, muestra signos de agotamiento, lo que sugiere que está forjándose un incipiente y supuesto pos-posmodernismo. Sin duda, las novelas que se analizan en esta tesis abandonan el estilo formal fragmentario que normalmente caracteriza a las novelas posmodernas y regresan a la seguridad del realismo: *Letters from an Age of Reason* recurre a la tradición literaria del siglo XIX al adoptar el modo epistolar y la narrativa dual; la trilogía del *Ibis*, su amplia focalización narrativa y su cuidadosa atención a cada nivel de la sociedad del sur asiático – especialmente de la ciudad de Cantón en *River of Smoke* y *Flood of Fire* – en el siglo XIX también sitúan el trabajo de Ghosh como inspirado por la tradición del canon literario Victoriano, tal y como han afirmado algunos críticos (Chaudhuri 132; Frost 1542). La recuperación de formas tradicionales de narración y la apropiación de la tradición realista como una estrategia utilizada para completar los huecos de la historiografía occidental hacen que estas novelas sean representativas de un supuesto pos-posmodernismo. *TransAtlantic* parece ser un caso divergente: el carácter fragmentario e intermitente de la narración de McCann así como sus múltiples narradores sitúan la novela más en consonancia con la estética posmoderna, pero aún así la estructura circular de la novela, con la narración de Hannah como marco para las demás tramas, y el énfasis del autor en la naturaleza cíclica y oceánica del tiempo sugieren que la novela aspira a tener la coherencia de una narración realista.

Por lo tanto, las novelas neo-Victorianas marítimas que se analizan en esta tesis encajan dentro de la categoría de ficción histórica revisionista. El océano en

estas novelas proporciona un espacio alternativo *in-between* desde el cual pueden observarse los vectores oceánicos que caracterizaron la migración por mar en la era Victoriana. Esto sugiere que estas narraciones aspiran a la objetividad y la precisión que se le asigna a la historiografía, a diferencia del posmodernismo tradicional que normalmente niega la posibilidad misma de acceder a la historia. Las novelas que he analizado, como narraciones históricas revisionistas, recuperan el pasado de forma creativa e imaginativa poniendo de manifiesto el referente histórico (Arias, "Traces" 114; Mitchell and Parsons 13) – la recuperación de lenguajes y prácticas culturales del sur de Asia silenciados por la historiografía Victoriana en la trilogía de Ghosh es un ejemplo destacado.

Al mismo tiempo, estas novelas expanden los límites del imaginario neo-Victoriano al situar el género en relación transnacional con regiones no anglófonas, y por lo tanto estas narraciones participan en los debates críticos acerca de la posición global del neo-Victorianismo. En conexión con tendencias recientes dentro de los estudios Victorianos que están resituando la literatura Victoriana dentro de la literatura global decimonónica (Goodlad, "Cosmopolitanism" 399), la novela neo-Victoriana marítima, al favorecer el tránsito marítimo por encima de los puntos de origen y de destino, disuelve las fronteras de raza, lenguaje y cultura y por ende la cultura Victoriana es narrada en relación a culturas foráneas dentro y fuera del imperio británico. Específicamente, las narraciones poscoloniales del Atlántico incorporan el horror de la esclavitud y sus efectos secundarios en la era Victoriana como un componente no reconocido de la modernidad occidental, y además ilustran la presencia africana en la Inglaterra Victoriana y en sus rutas transatlánticas. En el caso del océano Índico, Ghosh actúa como un *linkister* al situar la trilogía del *Ibis* en relación con archivos no anglófonos – particularmente en cuestiones acerca de la
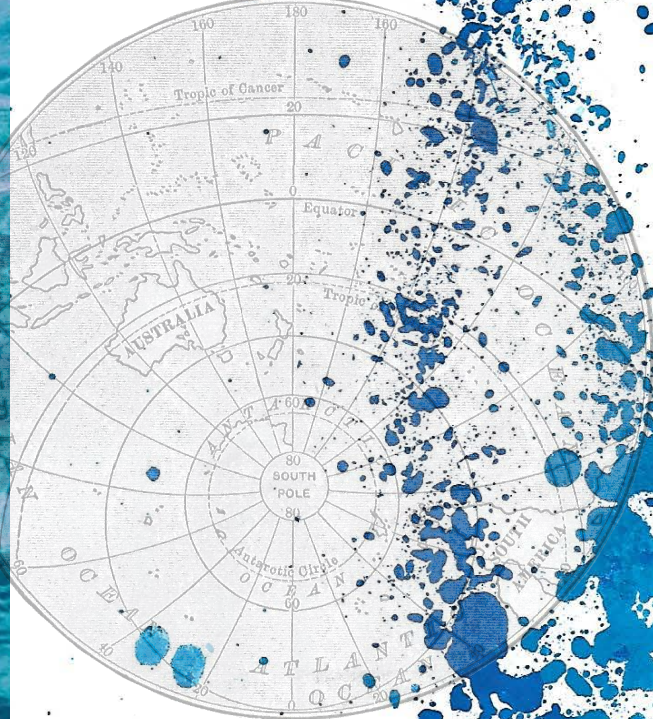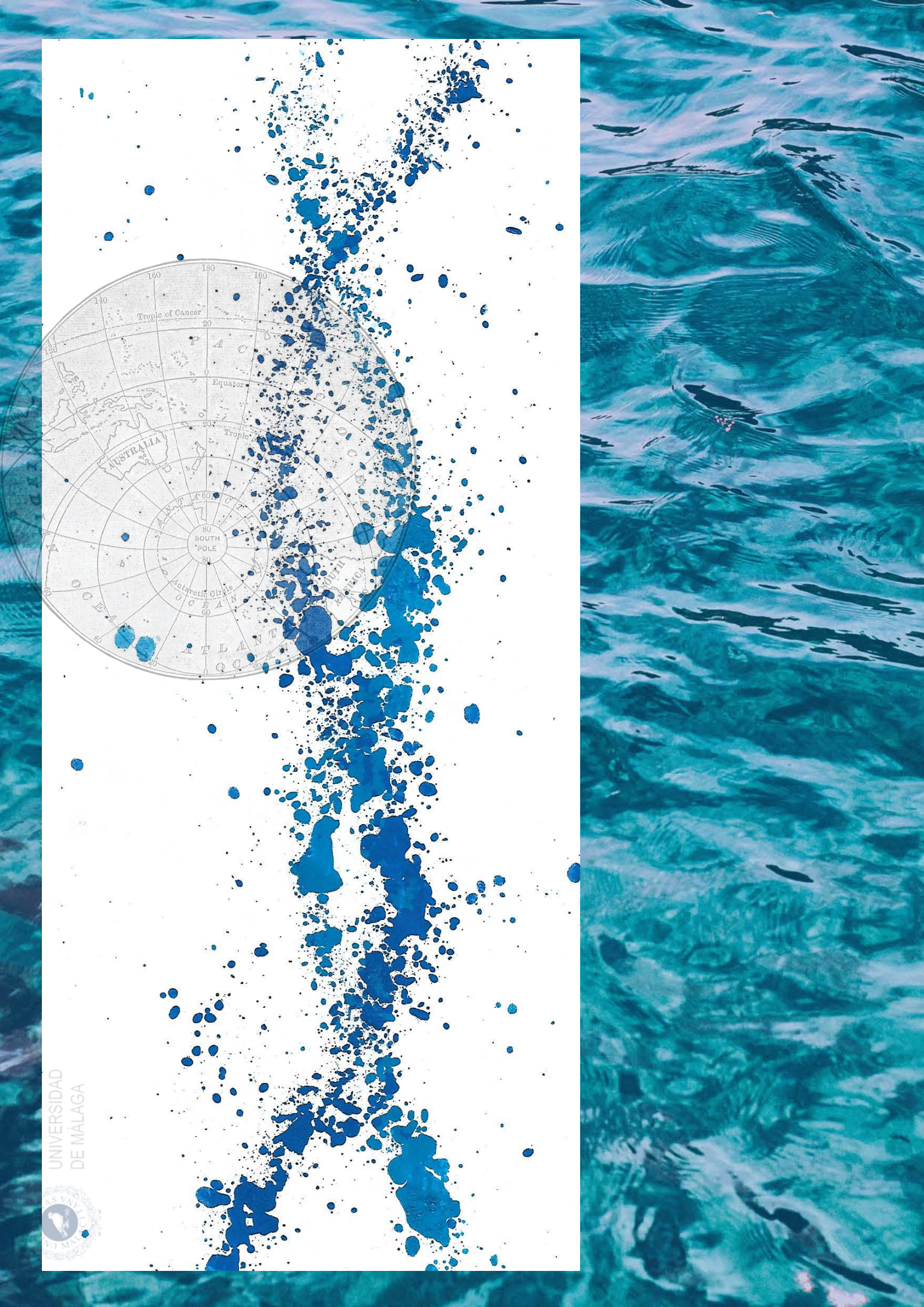
producción y el tráfico de opio, el *indentureship* y la Primera Guerra del Opio – y de esta forma se evita la parcialidad del monolingüismo que puede atribuirse a la historiografía occidental y Victoriana.

A lo largo de esta Tesis Doctoral he mantenido un análisis de la novela neo-Victoriana marítima en relación con cuestiones más amplias de globalización, cosmopolitismo, modernidad y capitalismo. Los sujetos oceánicos que habitan las novelas analizadas señalan las complejidades de la modernidad en un siglo que presenció el desarrollo de la globalización. Para los afroamericanos que cruzaron el Atlántico hacia la Inglaterra del siglo XIX, lo Victoriano significaba para ellos la modernidad, la libertad y la ciudadanía. Para los colectivos subalternos en el océano Índico, sin embargo, la irrupción de la modernidad significó la implicación del continente sudasiático en la economía de mercado capitalista. El Victorianismo tal y como se representa en estas regiones marítimas señala visiones antagónicas desde esta perspectiva transoceánica, y esto subraya las paradojas de la globalización contemporánea, que está construida sobre la movilidad y el intercambio cultural pero aún produce desigualdades y explotación. Esto ilustra el carácter diacrónico del género neo-Victoriano, que permite una yuxtaposición crítica y creativa del pasado Victoriano con la globalización del presente, señalando las continuidades y diferencias entre ambos.

Las narraciones de los océanos Atlántico e Índico analizadas en esta tesis sugieren un cambio en las percepciones acerca de los sujetos cosmopolitas alrededor del mundo. Las experiencias cosmopolitas en estas historias no están narradas desde perspectivas privilegiadas, sino desde la posición de sujetos subalternos "all at sea" y oprimidos o explotados por la maquinaria imperialista Victoriana. En este sentido, mi análisis literario-cultural ha sido motivado por la idea

de que es posible situar las experiencias de estos colectivos desfavorecidos bajo una misma categoría y en relación entre ellos dentro del contexto de la historia oceánica. Las afinidades y conexiones entre estos sujetos subalternos subrayan la perspectiva marcadamente transoceánica de esta Tesis Doctoral.

Aplicando el 'giro oceánico' y la crítica marítima al análisis del género neo-Victoriano y situando el análisis en debates acerca del capitalismo, la globalización y la inmigración, he tratado de señalar que hay mucho potencial en considerar la novela neo-Victoriana marítima para analizar las desigualdades de la globalización contemporánea y las políticas neo-liberales. Sobre todo, espero haber demostrado que el océano aún ruge con historias olvidadas de pérdida familiar, esclavitud, sujetos desplazados y cuerpos ahogándose cuyas voces, luchando por respirar en el agua, han sido silenciadas por las olas de opresión colonial.