



CHAPTER 2

Storied Waves: Maritime Connections and Subaltern Knowledge in Arctic and Mediterranean Literary Contact Zones

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Before confessing his crimes against humanity in creating, and then deserting, an artificial man, Victor Frankenstein admonishes the Arctic explorer Robert Walton to heed his story: “Unhappy man! Do you share my madness? Have you drunk also of the intoxicating draught? Hear me—let me reveal my tale, and you will dash the cup from your lips!” (Shelley 2003, 29). Yet, after having finished his tale and already close to death, Frankenstein’s hubris returns and he admonishes Walton’s mutinous sailors to continue their “glorious expedition” even at the cost of death: as “brave men” and “more than men,” they should show their masculine “courage” and “fortitude” instead of acting like “cowards” and returning with the “stigma of disgrace ... on [their] brows” (217). Frankenstein enralls the crew with his charismatic verbal art, while his cautionary remarks already seem to be forgotten. *Frankenstein* is a tale of “wasted lives” (Bauman 2004) as the consequence of an incapacity to control

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human hubris. The novel ends with Walton breaking the spell that the encounter with Frankenstein placed on him while his ship breaks free from the Arctic ice.

I begin with this glimpse of *Frankenstein* (1818) because Mary Shelley's novel condenses various aspects of the maritime texts I examine in this essay: with Peter Høeg's *Miss Smilla's Feeling of Snow* it shares the geographical desire for discovering the secrets of the Arctic, and like Merle Kröger's *Havarie* (Engl. *Collision*) it invites us to explore the human cost of the dream of global connectedness.¹ As John Bugg (2005) has shown, *Frankenstein* shares common concerns with Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*, which Mary Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, had reviewed for the *Analytical Review* in 1789. Related through the revolutionary ideas circulating in the Atlantic contact zone between the late 1780s and the early 1800s (the period between the British Parliamentary Hearings about the slave trade and the radical writings of Robert Wedderburn; see Linebaugh and Rediker 2000, esp. ch. 9), Equiano's autobiography and Shelley's novel share a concern with the psychology of inequality and irresponsibility on which the Atlantic slave-based world rests, in spite of the Atlantic Enlightenment's propagation of cosmopolitan connectivity. They likewise share an emphasis on education as a necessary precondition of overcoming social subalternity, as John Bugg shows in his comparison of both texts' use of the trope of the talking book (2005, 657–661). Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* are appropriate geographical guides for this essay because both demonstrate an Enlightenment understanding of global connectedness—especially of the concurrence between the search for knowledge and the topic of human disposability—that this essay will address, with reference to contemporary texts and events relating to the contact zones of the Arctic and the Mediterranean. They invite us to view oceanic spaces and passages in a planetary way and to combine macro-geographical considerations of oceanic contact with reflections on the micro-level of human experience as expressed in fictional and non-fictional transcultural narratives. Inspired by Edward Said's plea for investigating “overlapping geographies” and

¹The Spanish sociologist and critic of globalization César Rendueles seems to share my opinion about the political dimension of *Frankenstein*. The cover of his book *Capitalismo Canalla* (2015) shows a Leviathan-like Boris Karloff marching through a sea of workers, his grip on an imperial column. Rendueles reads the history of “scoundrel capitalism” through classic literary texts such as the classic sea tale of *Robinson Crusoe*.

“intertwined histories” (1993), as well as Kirsten Gruesz’s foregrounding of the cultural complexity of maritime geopolitical regions—her reconsideration of the Mesoamerican isthmus as an “engine” of American empire that provided “the discursive constructs that would inform later visions of the ‘natural’ shape of the national body” (2006, 472)—I argue that new understandings of the global connections between these two levels may emerge from looking at discursive conjunctions, seams, and forms of “coastality” (Ganser 2013, referring to maritime contact and conflict zones where different landed and maritime epistemes meet, converge, and compete for hermeneutic hegemony). Writing at the beginning of globalization, Shelley and Equiano and, a few decades later, Herman Melville, found ways to evoke the complexity of these geographical, social, and epistemic connections beyond histories of nations and mainlands.

With these two powerful works of the transatlantic Enlightenment as a guide, I explore the significance of maritime passages and contact zones in more recent literary texts from both a geopolitical and a humanistic perspective. In doing so, I invoke the importance of ways of knowing that are extraterritorial to the main pathways of Western science and knowledge and that represent the perspectives of people inhabiting or crossing maritime spaces. For the two maritime regions in literary focus here—the Arctic and the Mediterranean—I investigate texts that evoke local or subaltern knowledge in direct contestation of hegemonic (economic, scientific, political) epistemologies.

ARCTIC MYSTERIES AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

Like the journey of Robert Walton, Peter Høeg’s *Miss Smilla’s Feeling for Snow* (orig. *Frøken Smillas fornemmelse for sne*, 1992) alerts us to the darker side of nationalist celebrations of Arctic “discovery”—i.e., economic greed coupled with political intransparency and cover-up. Høeg’s novel shows how Indigenous people in Greenland suffer the consequences of Western corporations’ resource extraction in the Arctic North. In fact, it deserves a second look from our own geo-historical perspective of global warming and competition for Arctic resources. Kirsten Thisted has placed Høeg’s novel within a postcolonial analytical framework and argues that it shows the connection between the extension of economic and political control over the Arctic (by surveying the land, mining, and drilling) and psychological control over its Indigenous inhabitants—e.g., Smilla’s Inuit mother, who is sexually exploited by her father, and the Inuit boy Isaiah

(Smilla's neighbor), whose body is turned into an object of medical investigation (Thisted 2002, 315). Employing the theoretical grid offered by Edward Said, Thisted speaks of the novel as a manifestation and critique of Arctic Orientalism (315): "manifestation" because she considers the novel's cultural discourse as residually exoticist in spite of its political lucidity (318–319). The stereotypical representation of the uprooted Inuit woman (Isaiah's mother) may be owing to the time and place of publication (in 1992 the reach of postcolonial discourse hardly went beyond the Anglophone world) and to the conventions of the political mystery and sci-fi genres the novel utilizes. This becomes most apparent in the fact that Høeg locates the origin of all evil in a meteor that, according to the novel's invented past, came down in the Arctic in 1859. It started the secret operations the text invites us to read as an allegory of the present hunt for precious materials in the Arctic, which neglects the rights and claims of the Indigenous inhabitants of Greenland, Nunavut, and other Arctic regions.² The meteor and the secret deals surrounding it represent human scientific hubris in the fields of nuclear and genetic engineering and biological warfare (Thisted 2002, 316).

The ecological aspect is not very strong in Høeg's thriller; the criminal action centers on an accident and its successive cover-up and on the continuous scientific subjugation of the little boy, Isaiah. The poisonous worm inhabiting his body is set free by the alien agency of the meteor, not by humans (as it would probably be in contemporary ecological thrillers thriving on political and corporate conspiracy). In spite of this fantastic device, a contemporary allegorical reading could focus on the novel's potential for reflecting on the entanglements of commercial interests, biopolitics, scientific knowledge formation, and the human and ecological hazards that often result from this combination. The final section of the novel, "The Sea," carries the protagonist on an adventurous trip to the Arctic as a passenger of the discovery vessel *Kronos*. Thisted sees two historical ships behind the novel's fictional one *Titanic* and the Danish ship

² It is interesting that Høeg dates the meteor incident to 1859—a period when the oil age started and when modern technologies of extraction were beginning to be developed (e.g., dynamite). Petroleum became a major industry following the discovery of oil at Oil Creek, Pennsylvania, in 1859. Dynamite was invented by the Swedish chemist Alfred Nobel and patented in 1867. As recent research by Vienna cultural anthropologist Gertrude Saxinger and her team shows, the access conditions to Arctic wealth have somewhat changed since the publication of the novel and since Nunavut's gaining of political autonomy, making it less easy for TNCs to mine and drill in Greenland.

Hans Hedtoft, whose sinking in 1959 symbolizes the failure of Danish colonial policy in Greenland (Thisted 317–318). But the clandestine cruise of the *Kronos* resonates with the memory of earlier Arctic expeditions in search of passages and resources, inspired by the desire to lift the veil of mystery from the icy regions of the Far North and failing because of their disregard of local knowledge—whose bearers, Høeg suggests, were women more often than not.

The sci-fi dimension of *Miss Smilla's Feeling for Snow* points to the problem that the political conflict is not only about finding and controlling the passage to Asian markets but also about access to precious resources—oil, gas, rare earths, gold—and addressing the environmental hazards that may result from such uncontrolled extraction. In the figure of the postcolonial private eye Smilla, with her special knowledge of snow deriving from her childhood in Greenland, passed on to her by her Inuit mother, the novel introduces the topic of Indigenous local (geographical, meteorological) knowledge and the precariousness of cross-cultural identity formation under the conditions of colonial disavowal. This happens in contrapuntal tension with the political contestation of Arctic space. The novel combines geopolitical and human-centered strategies, emphasizing the biopolitical consequences of transnational actors' schemes.

Presenting the Arctic as a world of mystery, Høeg's novel feeds on the mythology produced by the European preoccupation with that geographical region since the earliest transatlantic forays into those icy regions. Equiano, too, was lured by it when he joined his friend Irving's expedition to the North Pole in 1773 to find "what our Creator never intended we should, a passage to India" (Equiano 1995, 172). The explorers went in two ships, the *Racehorse* and *Carcass*, and reached a latitude of almost 81 degrees north—"much farther, by all accounts, than any navigator had ever ventured before"—only to discover that the attempt to find a passage to India in that direction was impracticable because of the ice (177).³ Like Shelley's fictional figure Walton and his crew, they became stuck in ice, and were lucky to make it back at all.

Equiano's comment uses the romantic trope of divine interdiction—the Northwest Passage holding a similar position as the Pillars of Hercules during antiquity. Seventy years after their unsuccessful journey, Sir John Franklin's lost expedition in search of a Northwest Passage became the

³ See John Lodge's "Race-horse and Carcass inclosed in the ice" (1773): <https://www.rmgc.co.uk/collections/objects/rmgc-object-110115> (last accessed Oct. 22, 2021).

beginning of one of Europe's and Canada's most persistent maritime myths. With global warming and the melting of the polar caps, the Northwest Passage has now become navigable and the Arctic ice gradually reveals its treasures. In 2014, a team of researchers found the wreck of the *Erebus*, one of John Franklin's ships, which had been lost since 1845; two years later, in September 2016, the *Terror* was located as well.⁴ Not only has one of the great mysteries of maritime archaeology been solved, but the discovery of the *Erebus* also fired the national symbolic politics of Canada. As *The Guardian* and CBC report, the finding of these two ships, while of national importance, also reinforces the credibility of traditional Inuit knowledge (Hinchey); in addition, both that knowledge and the geographical location of the ships are significant for Canada's territorial claims in the Arctic region. According to *The Guardian* and CBC, the wreck was found after the exploring ship *Martin Bergmann* followed the lead of a story told by its Inuk crew member, Sammy Kogvik of Gjoa Haven, King William Island, Nunavut. Kogvik had told the crew that on a fishing trip six years before, he had noticed a large piece of wood sticking out of Terror Bay's sea ice which looked like a mast. As Paul Watson writes for the *Guardian*:

In a phone interview, Kogvik said he stopped that day to get a few snapshots of himself hugging the wooden object, only to discover when he got home that the camera had fallen out his pocket. Kogvik resolved to keep the encounter secret, fearing the missing camera was an omen of bad spirits, which generations of Inuit have believed began to wander King William Island after Franklin and his men perished. When Schimnowski [the expedition's operations director] heard Kogvik's story, he didn't dismiss it, as Inuit testimony has been so often during the long search for Franklin's ships. (2016)

The *Erebus* had also been located with the help of Inuit oral history. In that earlier case, native historian Louis Kamookak helped researchers pinpoint the location of the wreck after passing on the story that one of the ships was crushed in ice northwest of King William Island, while another—later confirmed to be the *Erebus*—drifted farther south, where it was ultimately found. “Every time there's a finding, it's kind of a sad feeling,” he said; “I think the mystery's more fun than the actual knowing” (Hinchey

⁴The following account closely follows the reconstruction of events in Ben Finney's documentary *The Hunt for the Arctic Ghost Ship* (Lion TV/PBS, 2015).

2016). A sign of the growing recognition of Indigenous knowledge is the fact that Parks Canada, the institution responsible for the salvage of the wreck, had to seek permission from Nunavut's director of heritage before divers could remove any HMS *Terror* artifacts (Hinchey 2016).

Without the Inuit oral tradition, then, the scientific expedition would not have been able to trace the wrecks. As the documentary *The Hunt for the Arctic Ghost Ship* on the finding of the *Erebus* in 2014 shows, locating the ship crucially depended on following the lead of the oral Inuit tradition. While numerous scientific teams had scanned the ocean floor in the area where the last cairn of the expedition had been found (north of King William Island), Inuit inhabitants time and again pointed much further south when asked about a sunken European ship. As so often before, the scientists did not listen to what they considered merely a folk tale. It took a new approach—unthinkable to former generations of scientists—that respected the Indigenous story as a reliable source of knowledge to finally track down the *Erebus*.

The new recognition of traditional Indigenous knowledge may be related to the fact that Ben Finney, director of the documentary, is an expert on Polynesian navigation. In 1980, he organized the voyage of the Hawai'ian outrigger canoe *Hokule'a* in order to demonstrate that Polynesian navigational knowledge was a sufficient technology for long-distance oceanic travel: critic Greg Dening knew Finney and shared his passion for furthering acceptance and recognition of Polynesian Indigenous epistemologies (2004, 27–28).⁵ In his film on the discovery of the *Erebus*, Finney, now in his eighties, similarly recognizes the importance and reliability of traditional oral knowledge, this time of the Arctic Inuit. The native stories also confirmed the scientific conjecture that the *Erebus* had been *sailed* south toward its last anchorage by a few surviving sailors, rather than simply having *drifted* south with the ice.

The documentary makes a point of these unknown sailors having been the first Europeans to have found the entrance to the Northwest Passage even though they paid for their knowledge with their own destruction. What is remarkable about this “discovery” is the role that Indigenous

⁵ Finney is one of several non-Indigenous scholars who created an awareness for the contributions of Indigenous seamen to the history of the Pacific and of oceans in general. See also Chappell 1997.

knowledge plays in producing Canadian pride.⁶ As geographer Philip Steinberg reminds us, Indigenous knowledge and the Indigenous Arctic presence are relevant for Canadian claims to that area, its passage rights, and its resources.⁷ The discovery of the *Erebus* at what is considered the entrance of the Northwest Passage strengthens Canada's territorial claim—but only on the provision that the Inuit, whose presence in the area precedes that of non-Indigenous people, are considered as being domestic to Canada even before Canada began to exist as a nation and England included the region in its Commonwealth. Although Canadian territorial claims crucially depend on Indigenous presence and knowledge, it is to be feared that the spoils from Arctic drilling and mining will be divided among large transnational corporations while local inhabitants will suffer the ecological consequences.

MOBILE MARITIME PACKAGES

Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh's book *The Many-Headed Hydra* (2000) encourages us to include the distinct histories of *all* people whose lives have been affected by the sea as being related and intertwined. With their examples of various political lives crisscrossing the "Red Atlantic" of the late 1700s, they suggest mending a rift that can still be observed between historical and literary narratives of the sea on the one hand and the largely abstract and unstoried existence of the sea as an uninhabited space in the discourses of geography and philosophy on the other. Such a view is generally based on the erroneous assumption that history takes place on land, not at sea, paving the way for geopolitical abstraction. Such a land-based macro-geographical ordering of the world has itself come under critical attack. In their book *The Myth of Continents* (1997) Martin Lewis and Kären Wigen refer to the arbitrariness of ordering and dividing land into meaningful entities called continents—therefore transporting the critique of nationalism to a larger geographical realm. They criticize

⁶In the legal conflict, it is the Indigenous presence which might consolidate the Canadian position because the "internal sea" concept requires historical presence and continuous occupation.

⁷In an essay published previously to the archaeological sensation in 2014, Steinberg discusses the legal dispute, especially between Canada and the U.S., about access to the Arctic, about whether the Northwest Passage belongs legally to Canada's "internal sea" or is an international strait. Each of these legal statuses would entail different rights of sovereignty and access (2014, 86–87).

traditional ways of subdividing continents within the discipline of geography and in geographical discourse more generally. Both the distribution of life forms and the geological order of the earth, they write, do not support the common geographical order of continents (Lewis and Wigen 1997, 33–34). Lewis and Wigen regard the current division of the world into continents as an arbitrary case of “metageography”⁸ and counter the well-known Cold War division of the globe into First, Second, and Third Worlds with a culturally less hierarchical scheme of different geopolitical regions, including maritime zones. Steinberg confirms the fundamental error in geographical thought to regard land masses as the basic division and of devaluing oceans as historically less decisive places (2001, 10).

In other words, our geographical perspective has been lopsided; it has been trained to center on mainlands and continents, thus marginalizing islands and maritime spaces. One of the reasons for this terracentric perspective is the fact that it is difficult to conceptualize agency for a fluid matter like water; another is the romanticization of the sea as an empty space where history leaves no trace. In his essay “Of Other Seas: Metaphors and Materialities in Maritime Regions,” Steinberg picks up Hester Blum’s dictum that “[t]he sea is not a metaphor.”⁹ Both criticize the way in which “a raft of scholarship in cultural studies ... [used] the fluvial nature of the ocean ... to signal a world of mobilities, betweenness, instabilities, and becomings” (Steinberg 2013, 156). Steinberg counters this abstract and anti-humanistic notion of the sea with that of maritime regionalism, whose proponents emphasize the “cultural and economic interchange *between* societies” located in oceanic or maritime regions. While conceptions of the sea in historical-sociological scholarship tend to remain undertheorized in Steinberg’s view (as in Braudel, Arif Dirlik, or Wallerstein), another group of oceanic region studies, in his opinion, over-theorizes the sea. Paul Gilroy, Steinberg contends, exploits the theoretical potential of the Black Atlantic as a critical metaphor but then mostly uses it as a trope for his own studies of contemporary popular culture; “[v]enturing into Gilroy’s Atlantic,” Steinberg teases, “one never gets wet” (158). An even greater danger lies with some of the theoretical models inspiring

⁸Lewis and Wigen define “metageography” as a “set of spatial structures through which people order their knowledge of the world: the often unconscious frameworks that organize studies of history, sociology, anthropology, economics, political science, or even natural history” (ix).

⁹This repeats what Bernhard Klein and I argued in 2004 in *Sea Changes*.

postcolonial thinkers like Gilroy—Steinberg mentions Deleuze and Guattari’s reduction of the sea to a “smooth space *par excellence*”—i.e., a space beyond landed hierarchies (158; see Ganser in this volume). This can be seen as another version of the romantic trope that regards the sea as a space of freedom outside the reach of power. What Steinberg finds especially troubling is Foucault’s famous allegorization of the sea in his essay “Of Other Spaces” (“Des Espaces Autres,” 1967) as a “heterotopia *par excellence*”:

the boat 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 and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens. ... In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates. (1986, 27; qtd. in Steinberg 2013, 158)¹⁰

As so many others, Bernhard Klein and I were at first enchanted with Foucault’s beautiful language and used this passage quite uncritically in *Sea Changes* (2004). But of course Foucault here transports a number of well-known clichés, not only about ships and oceans but also about ideas of order: between associations of pirates, treasure hunts in the colonies, and pleasure trips to Oriental gardens, he imagines Puritan colonies in North America as heterotope because they were “absolutely regulated” so that “human perfection was effectively achieved” there (27). In *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*, David Harvey criticizes Foucault’s boat example as reducing the concept of heterotopia to the theme of escape. The pleasure ship, Harvey writes, is as “banal” in its sense of the heterotopic as a “commercialized cruise ship”: without any recognizable critical, liberatory, or emancipatory aspect to it (2009, 160–161). In the passage, the ocean is “reduced to a metaphor: a spatial ... signifier

¹⁰In Foucault’s defense, it should be added that he rejected the publication of “Des Espaces Autres” (1967) throughout his life and, more importantly, that he had indeed provided a more challenging and innovative description of “heterotopia” one year earlier, in *Order of Things* (1966). Here, he emphasizes the “disturbing” aspects of heterotopic sites which, he writes, “secretly undermine language, they make it impossible to name this *and* that, they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy ‘syntax’” by which he means the “syntax which causes words and things ... to ‘hold together’” (Foucault 1973, xviii). It is indicative of criticism’s negligence and/or conservatism that it generally privileges the more romantic text over the theoretically challenging one.

for a world of shifting, fragmented identities, mobilities, and connections. ... Thus, the overtheorization of ocean space by poststructuralist scholars of maritime regions is as problematic as its undertheorization by political economy-inspired scholars” (Steinberg 2013, 158). In contrast, Steinberg argues that the “physical geography of the ocean *does* matter” (159):

How we interact with, utilize the resources of, and regulate the oceans that bind our ocean regions is intimately connected with how we understand those oceans as physical entities; as wet, mobile, dynamic, deep, dark spaces that are characterized by complex movements and interdependencies of water molecules, minerals, and non-human biota as well as humans and their ships. The oceans that unify our ocean regions are much more than surfaces for the movement of ships (or for the movement of ideas, commodities, money, or people) and they are much more than spaces in which we hunt for resources. (159)

Steinberg suggests reconstructing the physicality of the ocean by employing the approach of the mathematician Joseph-Louis Lagrange (1736–1813), who, rather than privileging matter over movement, regards movement as the essence of geography rather than its result.¹¹ Lagrangians define movement with the help of “mobile packages”: “The world is constituted by mobility without reference to any stable grid of places or coordinates. From this perspective, movement is the foundation of geography” (160). The Lagrangian method is perhaps not the best basis for writing the history of maritime regions, but it offers a productive way of thinking beyond prevalent “landed” epistemologies in terms of the agency of the water itself: “we need ... to bring the ocean itself into the picture, not just as an experienced space but as a dynamic field that ... produces difference even as it unifies” (161). Rather than continuing along this new materialist line of thought, Steinberg suggests an ocean-region-based perspective and to look at the world from the perspectives of coasts, swamps, estuaries, islands, wetlands, ships, and ice floes (163; the perspective he suggests in my view bears some similarity with Alexandra Ganser’s concept of

¹¹Lagrangians “trace the paths of ‘floaters’ that travel in three-dimensional space, with each floater representing a particle, the fundamental unit in Lagrangian fluid dynamics. Movement is defined by the displacement across space of material characteristics within mobile packages, not abstract forces, and these characteristics are known only through their mobility” (Steinberg 2013, 160).

“coastality,” 2013). Such a perspective adds a *blue* Atlantic to the black one and the various red ones (in reference to the Indigenous presence and labor history). The ocean-region-based perspective is post- or non-humanist, or, as Steinberg writes, “more-than-human”: a “force that *impacts* humans but as part of a marine assemblage in which humans are just one component” (164). From this new materialist ocean-region-based perspective, the ocean is seen not just a “space that *facilitates* movement—the space across which things move—but ... a space that is *constituted by* and *constitutive of* movement” (165).

Although Steinberg does not give any specific examples, one can easily imagine how the critical perspective he suggests helps us address the more-than-human consequences of, say, oceanic pollution: it invites us to reflect on the complex interrelations between human waste production in the world’s urban centers and the microplastics floating in gigantic oceanic waste zones and in the bodies of marine animals—far away from the centers of human consumption (see DeLoughrey 2010). It expands the scope of cultural theory by allowing us to integrate the physicality of melting Arctic ice, a process which changes the aggregate conditions of the marine world, with social and cultural consequences around the world. Avoiding the pitfalls of object-ontologist aestheticizations of such processes (esp. their inability to speak of the sustained responsibility of human activity), an ocean-region perspective re-centers the critical perspective on maritime spaces as ecotopes where human lives and activities intersect with those of non-human agencies, including the uncontrollable agency of winds and currents.

THE “BLACK” MEDITERRANEAN

Today, the Mediterranean as a major maritime contact zone is increasingly connotated as a sea of death. In her novel *Havarie* (2015; Engl. *Collision*, 2017), Merle Kröger explores the Mediterranean as what Wilson Harris calls a “schizophrenic sea” (1983, 99)—“schizophrenic” in the ways pleasure and luxury meets suffering and death by water. The novel reminds us of the painful complexity, or “Black Atlanticity,” of the contemporary Mediterranean, emphasizing the contemporaneity of luxury tourism and mass migration from Africa, occasioned by persecution, poverty, and the denial of equal access to the benefits of globalization (while receiving large shares of global junk; Bauman 2004). Kröger wrote her novel under the impression of mass drownings in the Mediterranean. Her novel seems to be inspired by Zygmunt Bauman’s bleak analysis of the unequal exchange between the Global North and the Global South. As Iain Chambers writes in *Mediterranean Crossings*:

What is left out of global calculation and lives on as residue, refuse, and remnant, the world's poor—the living dead seeking to survive on less than a \$ a day—is what comes to be socially, culturally, and racially classified in the abject pathologies of the subaltern. Whether it is the migrant and refugee blotching the global imminence of Occidental whiteness, or, contra the noise of progress, the unfathomable echo of a silent South, the consistent fear and terror that yesterday constituted the colonial space today infiltrates and haunts the modern metropolis. In the insistence of what is considered a dead matter (the world of the colonized) but is very much alive, metropolitan space is increasingly zoned, categorized, cut up, and controlled by surveillance and policing. (2008, 6–7)

Stories of this “silent South,” this “black” Mediterranean, have of course haunted us for many years,¹² while being still able to ignore the daily horrors that the coastal inhabitants of Greece and Sicily had to deal with. The situation is not new, as a photo by Javier Baulutz, included in Peter Hulme's essay in *Sea Changes*, of a sunbathing couple with the body of a dead refugee in the background suggests (2004, 197).

Kröger's contemporary sea novel establishes a dialectical configuration between different kinds of ships whose routes cross near the coast of Spain: the rubber boat of a group of refugees running out of fuel near Cartagena; a gigantic pleasure cruiser forced, by the law of the sea, to stay close to the refugee boat until the arrival of the Spanish coast guard; the coast guard itself; and an Irish container ship on its way back from Algeria. Told from various perspectives, the novel unfolds a contemporary world full of vicious contradictions by contrasting of elitist passengers of the pleasure cruiser and refugees struggling for survival. Rather than posing a heterotopia in itself—a “floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself,” driven by desire “from port to port” and “from brothel to brothel” (Foucault), the pleasure cruiser in *Havarie* is part of a tidalectic constellation,¹³ an archipelagic scenario it

¹² See Fritz Baumann's film *Anansi* (2003).

¹³ “Tidalectics” was coined by Caribbean poet Kamau Brathwaite as a counter-concept to dialectics (Reckin 2003, 1). His maritime metaphor emphasizes non-human agency and non-progressiveness, resembling Édouard Glissant's concept of a “poétique de la relation” (“poetics of relation”). In Anna Reckin's words, the term evokes the “recursive movement-in-stasis that ... contains within it specific vectors: the westward, northward movements of the slave trade, the westward push of the harmattan” (2). Brathwaite's critique of dialectics, as a Hegelian and Marxist concept, is misleading, however, as dialectics is not necessarily limited to just *two* entangled and interacting phenomena or agencies—the term referring to “dialogue” rather than “twoness” (“dia-,” not “di-”).

shares with the three other vessels. *Pace* Foucault, the cruiser does not exist “by itself”; rather, it is a multidimensional space reiterating within its own gigantic corpus the asymmetrical power relations that shape the world outside. The liner is, in Gilroy’s words, “a micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion” (1993, 4). The history of involuntary migration across the Mediterranean not only takes place outside its confines but forms an aspect of its work force: invisible to the wealthy passengers, the Syrian refugee Marwan Farouki works illegally in the cruiser’s laundry—on a ship ambivalently named *Spirit of Europe*. Marwan suffers a severe head injury during an accident, but instead of treating him, the crew take him to the disabled refugee boat lying alongside the steamer and leave him there, together with a full fuel tank, which rids them of their legal duty to stay by the boat until the arrival of the coast guard. Marwan does not survive the trip and at the end of the novel Karim, an Algerian refugee in the boat, takes his passport and assumes his identity in order to be reunited with his wife in France.

The novel introduces multiple voices reminiscent of Fanon’s “wretched of the earth” in search of a decent living, expatriates from the Ukraine and from India working as officers and underlings on the various ships, but also the Spanish coast guard member Diego Martínez, who cannot get used to his sad duty of taking the bodies of dead refugees on board. Diego’s own community, a little fishing village near Cartagena, has experienced devastating socio-economic change due to the conflagrations of the refinery of the Spanish oil corporation Repsol at Repesas, Escombreras, Cartagena, in 1969, which has destroyed the livelihood of the villagers and caused disease and death in a whole region.¹⁴ The novel’s important cultural work consists also in including such glimpses of local and subaltern knowledge from the peripheries of the extractive globalized world—of accidents that most of us are not aware of but that have shaped collective identities and continue to do so.¹⁵ It dialectically connects the two

¹⁴For a reconstructed documentary of this disaster, see “Incendio.” The German original of *Collision, Havarie*, has an appendix with photographic references to this and other events mentioned in the novel. This documentary part is unfortunately missing in the English translation.

¹⁵Another recent literary example is Indra Sinha’s novel *Animal’s People* (2007) about the aftermath and continued catastrophe of the accident at the Union Carbide chemical factory in Bhopal, India.

disasters (“Havarie” in German)—that of the oil factory and that of the refugee boat—implying a connection between industrially caused ecocide and various forms of social death. It thereby suggests that human “waste” is not only produced outside of Europe’s borders but also within. The reader is invited to reflect on the connections between the oil-drenched fields around Diego’s home village and the oil-drenched banks of the Niger Delta in Africa that Helon Habila writes about in his novel *Oil on Water* (2010/ 2011).

A consequence of these social and environmental disasters is the psychological deracination and dysfunctionality of most characters. The following passage shows the daily hopelessness with which Diego—and by extension all members of the Spanish, Italian, and Greek coast guards—is confronted:

Cartagena Bay lies silently underneath the almost full moon. Where are the men they spent the day looking for? Where are the other people he has searched for in vain? There have to be hundreds of them by this point.

The travelers on the *pateras* pass along to each other the number for the sea rescue service in Cartagena. “If you’re in trouble, call them.” Floating in the middle of the sea, they stumble across some cell network or another and then call up to the switchboard.

Do you understand? They can call, but they might still be lost if we can’t find them fast enough. They could still die of dehydration. They could still drown. They could still be plowed down by a freighter. They have to cross two shipping channels between Algeria and the Spanish coast, at night, without lights. Invisible to every radar. All of these lost people are silhouettes, like the graffiti on the harbor wall. (Kröger 2017, 203)¹⁶

¹⁶ “Die Bucht von Cartagena liegt still unter dem fast vollen Mond. Wo sind die Männer, nach denen sie heute gesucht haben? Wo sind all die Leute, nach denen er je vergeblich gesucht hat? Es müssen Hunderte sein, mittlerweile.

Auf den *pateras* verteilen sie die Nummer der Seenotrettung von Cartagena. ‘Wenn ihr in Schwierigkeiten seid, ruft da an.’ Dann treiben die mitten auf dem Meer, finden irgendein Mobilfunknetz und rufen oben in der Zentrale an. Verstehst du? Die können telefonieren, aber sie sind trotzdem verloren, wenn wir sie nicht rechtzeitig orten. Die können trotzdem verdursten. Die können trotzdem ertrinken. Die können trotzdem von einem Frachter überfahren werden. Zwei Fahrrinnen müssen sie überqueren auf dem Weg von Algerien an die spanische Küste. Nachts. Ohne Licht. Unsichtbar für jeden Radar. ... Sie sind Schemen, all diese Verlorenen, wie die Graffiti auf der Hafenmauer” (2015, 210).

Like Javier Baulutz's photograph mentioned above, Kröger uses the maritime setting to expose the brutal dialectics of the contemporary world. Her novel also has a disenchanting effect for anyone who still believes, as Foucault did, that the cruise ship was an ideal place—what in German is called a “Traumschiff,” literally a “ship of dreams”—outside of the quotidian social sphere. Here, the cruise ship is a ship of lost souls of expatriate migrants and of degenerate fools whose pleasure is ensured by an underpaid global workforce; it encapsulates the hypocrisy of a world order kept up by the fiction of private happiness while reducing the larger part of humanity to economic dependency and despair. In Kröger's novel, the cruise ship is not the “other” of transnational extraction but is itself a form of extraction: with its make-belief splendor, it sucks morality from people's minds. As a drifting pleasure machine, it is part of a larger heterotopian formation that defies easy semantic identification, that tangles and shatters familiar beliefs (as in Foucault's less exoticist description of heterotopia in *The Order of Things*, 1973, xviii) and calls for a more complex assessment of the present global condition than that offered by Foucault's 1967 essay.

IN CONCLUSION: RESCUING “WASTED LIVES”

Merle Kröger uses the subaltern knowledge and personal memories of her figures as a literary characterization device to explain what brought them to the Mediterranean. Such memory narratives give the reader access to characters' minds and personalities. Høeg uses a similar figural focalization, e.g., when Smilla remembers her encounters with the boy Isaiah during her dangerous investigation of his death. With the help of this intimacy-producing device, both writers utilize the aesthetic potential of literature to create empathy and a sense of responsibility in their readers—the responsibility of the living to remember those who have died as a result of capitalist greed and economic malfunction.

Death is the end of all memories and all knowledge. Drowning is the most common cause of death for refugees and migrants coming across the Mediterranean, reminiscent of the millions who drowned in the Black Atlantic during the first era of globalization. With oblique allusions to the thousands of slaves dying during the Middle Passage, Herman Melville, in *Moby-Dick*, has the *Pequod's* black cabin boy Pip return from his plunge

into the ocean possessed with the special gift of seeing beyond the narrow intellectual frame of his shipmates. He identifies the doubloon, which Ahab had nailed on the main mast as a reward for finding the elusive white whale, as the ship's, and by extension American society's, "navel":

Here's the ship's navel, this doubloon here, and they are all on fire to unscrew it. ... And so they'll say in the resurrection, when they come to fish up this old mast, and find a doubloon lodged in it, with bedded oysters for the shaggy bark. Oh, the gold! the precious, precious, gold! the green miser'll hoard ye soon! Hish! hish! God goes 'mong the worlds blackberry-ing. (1967, 363)

Pip drowns at long last when Moby Dick sinks the *Pequod*, but before his physical death, he walks the deck like a prophet of impending doom, adopting the Pentecostal gift of "speaking in tongues" and visionary historical knowledge. He "remembers" the fates of slaves in the Antilles, never having been there himself. In other words, he possesses an extraterritorial epistemic gift unavailable to his shipmates. Through his "crazy-witty" talk we hear fragments of a story that has never really been told—that is beginning to be told only now, e.g., by postcolonial and African American writers, and to be heard within scholarly discourse.

Zygmunt Bauman's concept of human disposability, for which he coined the phrase "wasted lives," helps us connect the human dimensions of transoceanic history. While during the time of the transatlantic slave trade human lives were wasted in order to keep the capitalist machine running, technological improvements, of which digitalization is but the latest version, make human lives more and more redundant and disposable—a massive denial of the human need and right to work (Bauman 2004, 39–45 et passim). Climate change and land-grabbing on an unprecedented scale aggravate the present crisis. It is their shared dispossession and disposability that unites the angry white men of the American Midwest (and other economically undeveloping regions in the Western world) with those they oppose, refugees and migrants seeking economic security by coming across desert and maritime borders. Both of these phenomena—the dehumanization of large sections of the lower middle class and the fates of those "illegal" border-crossers—Bauman suggests, are by-products of what he calls "liquid modernity," a term that invokes the memory of the watery spaces whose crossings set into motion the modern exploitation-based system.

Young Olaudah Equiano, Melville's Pip, Høeg's Isaiah, the dead refugee boy Aylan Kurdi: the ultimate victims of interconnected global maritime violence are children. Their fates connect different geographies and intercultural conflicts. The waters are "heavy" with their stories, which is not least an effect of the "unloitering vigilance" and monomaniacal resolve of global greed that Melville allegorized in Captain Ahab (see *Moby-Dick*, "The Chart"). A critical approach from the humanities requires that the stories of the many unnamed maritime workers, slaves, and migrants be told contrapuntally with those of discoverers and conquerors—both from the center and from the margins of the global engine. As we are moving toward more relational approaches, analyzing the entanglements of racial capitalism, territorial dispossession, the nexus between predatory capitalism and social austerity, as well as the "intimacies" of it all,¹⁷ the dialectics and tidalectics of maritime mobilities will remain a central concern.¹⁸

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¹⁷For those new developments, see Byrd et al. 2018; for "intimacies," Lowe 2015.

¹⁸I dedicate this essay to the Turkish rescue worker who brought Aylan Kurdi's body onto land.

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