CHAPTER 1

Language
Cosmopolitan Pasts and the Problem of Translation

> What language did Ben Yiju speak with Achchu? Or with Bomma? Or with the "Arabs, Persians, Guzarates, Khorasanys, and Decanys" who lived in the Malabar, and with whom, given the nature of his occupation, he must have had to do business?
>
> —Amitav Ghosh, "The Slave of Ms. H. 6"

> Languages do not globalize.
>
> —Gayatri Spivak, "Cosmopolitanisms and the Cosmopolitical"

Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* opens with an uncanny apparition. A large ship sailing on the Indian Ocean appears to Deeti, a young Bhojpuri woman living in the northern part of India, soon to undertake a journey across the sea as an indentured laborer destined for Mauritius. Standing in the river Ganga, Deeti sees a vision of an object she had never seen before: "an immense ship with two tall masts," that could not have physically made its way up the river to her inland village far from the sea.[1] Deeti's vision of the ship *Ibis*, which she would board later in the novel, disrupts the linearity of the narrative and warps space and geography, bringing the sea into land, conflating the center and the periphery. While this seemingly fantastical vision gives a touch of "magical realism" to a text written predominantly in the realist mode, the ship's appearance, nonetheless perfectly aligns with the colonial reality of the Indian village in the middle of the nineteenth century. Signs of the empire built on sea already assume a powerful presence in this village located in the periphery of the periphery: Deeti is surrounded by poppy fields, an opium factory with a British flag flying on top, and a church. Her vision, which one might read as a reflection of this colonial condition, fills Deeti with apprehension. It strikes her as a problem of language:

> Deeti knew that the vision was not materially present in front of her – as, for example, was the barge moored near the factory. She had never seen the sea, never left the district, *never spoken any language but her native Bhojpuri*,

> yet not for a moment did she doubt that the ship existed somewhere and was heading in her direction. (8; emphasis added)

The barge and the factory, "materially present," interpellate Deeti as a colonized subject in nineteenth-century British India, containing her in the periphery of the global colonial order of production. Deeti is quick to recognize this colonial difference, conflating the condition of being autochthonous with her monolingualism. However, her confidence in her vision as part of her destiny pulls her out of her monolingual provinciality and places her in the temporality of the future anterior, casting the ship as already contained in her past. If the ship is a site of plurilingual cosmopolitanism, or "a Babel of tongues," as Ghosh puts it elsewhere, her vision reveals Deeti as already immersed in the cosmopolitanism of the sea, inhabiting multiple languages, beyond her native Bhojpuri.[2] On the one hand, translation as the condition of coloniality "produces strategies of containment," making "colonized cultures" appear "static and unchanging rather than historically constructed."[3] Translation casts Deeti as a colonized subject in nineteenth-century India, containing her in the periphery of the global colonial order. On the other hand, Deeti's vision undertakes a reversal of this colonizing process. It sets her adrift, placing her in the dynamic site of being in-between languages: despite having lived an autochthonous existence, Deeti's monolingualism is revealed as already imbricated in the fluid cosmopolitanism of the sea.

Deeti must respond to the ship's cosmopolitan interpellation from her provincialized colonized existence, mirroring the challenge that Ghosh (or for that matter, any contemporary fiction writer) faces in writing about the Indian Ocean world. How could Deeti be privy to the cosmopolitan space of the ship and the sea if she has never stepped out of her village's monolingual terrain? Likewise, how might Ghosh represent a multilingual cosmopolitanism of the Indian Ocean past using a language that speaks to the present?[4] This question casts a quiet shadow on English and the anglophone novel as the language and form of Indian Ocean fiction, and by extension, of world literature. Beyond the historical context of nineteenth-century British-occupied India, coloniality extends to the conditions of production of global Anglophone texts that recount fictionalized pasts for the contemporary world. Aamir Mufti argues that the Anglophone novel is subject to a "politics of translation" since its form emerges out of a "sort of *translation* of non-Anglophone and vernacular social and cultural spheres and life-worlds into the novelistic discourse of English and its cultural system more broadly."[5] While it attempts to

assimilate "vernacular realities" into English posing as a capacious language of a global cultural system, it also has to contend with its "social reach and claim to authenticity" regarding localized vernacular expressions.[6] In other words, grappling with the closing and widening of the "social distance" between the author's language – that is, English – and the various languages marked as vernacular, the Anglophone text, on the one hand, provides a cosmopolitan space for mediating linguistic plurality of the Indian Ocean; but, on the other, it threatens to engulf and subsume Indian Ocean vernaculars into English, concealing the very differences and discrepancies it seeks to represent.[7] The ship *Ibis* in Deeti's vision (and by extension the Indian Ocean), thus, mirrors the ambivalence of Ghosh's English: both are vessels for colonization as well as cosmopolitanism.

This chapter pursues this parallel to explore the relation between cosmopolitanism and multilingualism in Indian Ocean historical fiction. The form of the Anglophone novel provides an insightful lens to examine the constructions of Indian Ocean cosmopolitanisms, which repeatedly and inevitably come up against the problem posed by language. This problem is twofold. First, insofar as cosmopolitanism involves contact beyond particular spheres of locality, nation, race, ethnicity, or religion, it is inevitably mediated by language(s). But language is not a neutral means of communication; it is imbued with politics and power. Likewise, cosmopolitanism should be understood as constituted by and through power relations and systems of oppression. So, the question is not simply about what language diverse peoples brought together by the Indian Ocean spoke with each other and how to represent them, but rather in what ways language politics shaped, facilitated, or occluded cross-cultural exchange and understanding. Second, for Indian Ocean fiction, this historical problem of reconstructing cosmopolitan encounters carries additional questions about the form and aesthetics of the realist novel: How does the novel with its formal capacities and linguistic constraints represent a linguistically heterogeneous world? And conversely, how does the turn to a linguistically plural past, as that of the Indian Ocean, reshape the form of the novel?

Language and translation play a critical role in mediating cosmopolitan aspects of Indian Ocean pasts in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008) and Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Paradise* (1996). Set in the colonial era, on opposite Indian Ocean shores – one in India, the other in East Africa – both narratives are driven by historical forces linked to the ocean, primarily colonial expansion, migration, and trade. *Sea of Poppies* tells the intertwined stories of a diverse set of characters, including Indian indentured

laborers, convicts, stowaways, and sailors as they travel from Calcutta to Mauritius during the mid nineteenth century. Similarly, *Paradise* follows young Yusuf, forced into bondage, as he journeys with a trading caravan from the Swahili coast toward the African interior at the onset of early twentieth-century European colonialism in East Africa. The impulse to renarrate history in these novels can be understood as "the post-colonial desire to *re-translate*" the past, which means that the archival work of recuperating multilingual pasts is inseparable from the work of translation.[8]

As postcolonial writers who came of age witnessing dystopic nationalist violence in the aftermath of national independence in South Asia and East Africa, Ghosh and Gurnah share in their writings the interest in challenging the ethno-territorial construction of the postcolonial nation-state; and both turn to the Indian Ocean as a vantage point of such critique. Gurnah's novels present the littoral locations on the Swahili coast as an "amphibian" site of interaction between the African interior and the Indian Ocean world revealing "the mutability and mutual permeability of Africa and the world rather than marking the boundary between them."[9] Ghosh's writings also consistently pursue South Asia's historical connections to other Indian Ocean locations and beyond "interrupted" by European imperialisms and the demands of the postcolonial nation-state.[10] His works seek to reconstruct the past from fragmentary evidence, often with an aim to gain a historical sense of exchange, fluidity, and mutuality against the grain of an increasingly compartmentalizing modernity. While, as various critics have noted, the two authors tend to diverge in their attitude toward the past – Ghosh's optimism, in contrast to Gurnah's melancholy – both writers, writing in English, experiment with the form of historical fiction in response to the pressures of cultural translation generated by the linguistic and cultural polymorphousity of the Indian Ocean world.[11] Specifically, their novels exhibit a self-consciousness regarding the Anglophony of the text, and its limits and possibilities for mediating what Michael Pearson calls the "real gallimaufry of people around the littoral of the Indian Ocean."[12] This self-consciousness manifests most explicitly in *Sea of Poppies* and *Paradise*, which use textual strategies such as direct incorporation of multiple languages or indirect description of linguistic difference, to portray various cross-cultural cosmopolitan encounters. The novel's commitment to represent *a multilingual reality*, however, draws attention to the textuality of the text away from the fictional referent, thus, interrupting *the texts' realism,* that is, the illusion of an unmediated access to the past. This paradox generated by the

multilingual imperative reveals a fraught (an)archive of language, difference, and power that shape contemporary fictional portrayals of Indian Ocean cosmopolitanisms.

Translation and "untranslatability" are "constitutive" of Indian Ocean literary worlds.[13] For Indian Ocean novels, the task of translation involves not only constructing linguistic difference in cross-cultural interactions made possible by oceanic routes of circulation but also adapting this linguistically heterogeneous past for contemporary readers of fiction. *Sea of Poppies* and *Paradise* draw on multilingual nineteenth-century sources to recreate a colonial Indian Ocean world for a twenty-first century audience in the predominantly monolingual form of the novel: Ghosh uses colonial dictionaries to reconstruct the linguistic heterogeneity of colonial India and the Indian Ocean world, and Gurnah, likewise, reworks nineteenth-century Swahili travelogues to tell the story of trading expeditions in East Africa. However, in these novels, translation does not always render one linguistic or cultural expression intelligible within another linguistic or cultural context, but instead it makes visible translative processes that undermine not only the transparency of expressions but also the translatability of the past. These translative gestures could be understood as "languaging" – a concept coined by Walter Mignolo to describe a mode of existing within a field of multiple languages eroding the grounds of their authenticity and purity, and thereby, revealing and undermining the hierarchy of languages linked to colonial power.[14] Languaging happens in the interstitial zone between languages and dissociates the naturalized links between language and bodies, language and territory. This concept allows us understand the Indian Ocean not as a "contact zone" between separate cultures, but as a "multilingual local" where different languages were always already in contact, infected and inflected by each other.[15] The multiple linguistic registers in *Sea of Poppies* and *Paradise* likewise "ceaselessly overlap and draw apart" from each other like waves on the shore, wherein the patterns of intersection and divergence contend with transoceanic historical forces.[16] Both novels create what Emily Apter calls "language worlds" that exceed dichotomized categories and "responds to the dynamics of geopolitics without shying away from fractious border wars."[17] Ghosh's parody of the colonial dictionary in "The *Ibis* Chrestomathy" reveals the poetic potentialities in the errancy of words within and across languages, reflecting the mobilities of migrants across the ocean; meanwhile, rewriting colonial Swahili travelogues, Gurnah's *Paradise* represents the pitfalls of cross-cultural exchange where translatability is subordinate to uneven economic relations.

Ghosh and Gurnah's portrayal of multilingual encounters in this manner emphasizes cosmopolitanism not as liberation from particular sociocultural determinations into some kind of greater world community – a state of deracination as envisioned by liberalism – but rather as a complex drift of making and breaking attachments. These authors foreground the opacity and heterogeneity of texts, languages, and archives that mediate cross-cultural encounters both within and through their novels. They insist on "the mobilities *within* the texts and . . . the circulation of these texts into contexts where some original meanings are inevitably untranslatable."[18] This (an)archival mode involves a self-conscious turning toward the translation and movements of words and their meanings from one language to another, from the past to the present, and from archival documents to the fictional narrative. Thus, the use of historical realism in both novels is accompanied by a self-reflexivity about the epistemological limitations of the realist form to accurately mediate, or rather translate, historical reality. Resulting from the multiplicity of linguistic registers, which strike up against the authorial English of narration, this self-reflexivity goes beyond just the foreignizing of English. It turns the archive fugitive, anarchival, making it slip through the multivalent linguistic play and oceanic drifts. The semantic drifts and occlusions between languages interrupt the narrative, undermining the status of the anglophone as a medium of cosmopolitan exchange today.

Thus, the argument I present here is twofold: first, turning to the linguistic aspect of the archive, Ghosh and Gurnah articulate a language politics that limits and shapes the forms of cosmopolitan intercourse in an Indian Ocean context. Culturally and historically conditioned power relations within language use influence the meaning and implications of cultural exchange, linguistic hybridity, and semantic fluidity and opacity. Second, in doing so, these texts also self-reflexively question the hegemony of English and the Anglophone text as vehicles for cosmopolitan modernity. Both novels participate in and critique what Mufti calls "Anglicism" – the "modes of domination of English as literary language and cultural system, which now constitute the preeminent ground for adjudication and assimilation of diverse bodies and practices of writing into world literature."[19] Anglicism seeks to capture a "cosmopolitan or 'one world' reality" by mediating the local and the universal. However, the paradoxical cosmopolitanism and particularism of Indian Ocean encounters – the fact that the forms of Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism are historically, geographically, and culturally particular – confound the world-encompassing possibilities of English as a medium.

Wrestling with English: Cosmopolitan Vernaculars of the Indian Ocean

The term "cosmopolitan," with its Greek roots "*kosmos*," world, and "*polītēs*," citizen, offers a mode of "jumping scales" – to recall Neil Smith discussed in the Introduction – connecting the individual to the world, beyond what is proximate as local, communal, or national. It signifies a relationship to the world in its totality, a circle of belonging that transcends particular cultural affiliation or political loyalties. As an adjective, the word "cosmopolitan" describes individuals, places, or communities with the capacity to accommodate multiple, globally dispersed, identities, cultures, and localities. It suggests an ethics of belonging and a model of coexistence that overcome divisions based on race, ethnicity, religion, caste, or nationality. Whether as a political project for world governance, a principle for cultural pluralism, or an ethical ideal for individual conduct, cosmopolitanism has been a subject of extensive debate and revision over the past few decades across various disciplines in the humanities and the social sciences. Since the 1990s, it has provided a conceptual space for thinking about sociality beyond national boundaries facilitated by global connectivity, cultural flows, and migration. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to capture all the facets of these debates, in what follows I draw attention to the literary valences of the term as it pertains to the texts under discussion.[20]

In his theory of world literature, Pheng Cheah emphasizes its commitment to the project of cosmopolitanism, insofar as cosmopolitanism constitutes one's ability to transcend "the limited ties of kinship and country to embrace the whole of deterritorialized humanity."[21] For Cheah, the "world" in world literature has less to do with global circulation of texts than with literature's capacity to "world" an alternative to the global capitalist system and its regime of borders and hierarchies. Cheah understands the "world" generated by this kind of literature, as a normative ethico-political ideal that "gives us accessibility to others so that we can be together"[22] While Cheah primarily applies this definition to postcolonial novels that register and resist the impact of capitalist globalization in the Global South, novels like *Sea of Poppies* and *Paradise* also participate in this kind of world-making by turning to transcultural encounters in the Indian Ocean. These encounters among less privileged and racialized subjects, such as laborers, sailors, convicts, and fugitives, point to a form of cosmopolitanism forged within the circumstances of violence and displacement, often precipitated by colonial modernity.[23] In articulating

cosmopolitanism from the site of "colonial difference" instead of "cultural difference" – to echo Walter Mignolo – such "critical" cosmopolitanisms emphasize the entanglement of local struggles with global and transnational processes.[24] Shorn of its epistemological privilege, cosmopolitanism in this sense is not a universal sociality accessible to the powerful few. Rather, this cosmopolitanism emphasizes the coloniality of cultural differences, that is, the experience of inhabiting multiple localities, identities, or communities with irreconcilable gaps structured by globally connected, yet locally inflected, systems of oppression. Borne by such cosmopolitan encounters, Indian Ocean spaces in *Sea of Poppies* and *Paradise* map not a "smooth play of differences" but "unresolved traumas, accidents and ruptures" prompted by the histories of colonialism and global capitalism.[25]

In Indian Ocean studies, "cosmopolitanism" often presents "a factual 'challenge'" of envisaging a community with ethnic and linguistic pluralism, rather a problem of achieving a normative political goal.[26] This challenge shapes the formal registers of novels like *Sea of Poppies* and *Paradise*. In her study of modernist novels, Rebecca Walkowitz suggests that literary worlding of cosmopolitan spaces, by conjuring "a vision of ethics, community, politics, and new interdisciplinary paradigms," involves the use of what she calls "cosmopolitan style."[27] Following Bruce Robbins' emphasis on aesthetic experience as central to the project of cosmopolitanism, Walkowitz argues that literary style coincides with the modernist efforts to imagine cosmopolitan ethics and politics. Cosmopolitan visions, thus, manifest themselves textually in style and form, since modernist styles disrupt homogenized forms and stage "ethical discomfort or embarrassment that is generated by incommensurate or unconventional associations."[28] Likewise, cosmopolitan styles in *Sea of Poppies* and *Paradise* involve deploying the Anglophone medium and the novelistic form to capture the critical cosmopolitanisms of the Indian Ocean world. The process of simulating disparate cultural and linguistic plurality also registers the incommensurability between the localized cosmopolitan experiences represented in the novels and the aspirationally cosmopolitan Anglophone medium that seeks to represent them. In *Sea of Poppies* and *Paradise*, this dialectic plays out on the level of language, generating distinct styles that self-reflexively draw attention to the interchange and incommensurability between the languages of interaction and the language of narration.

Ghosh's style in *Sea of Poppies* assembles a multilingual text with untranslated expressions from Indian Ocean languages, every so often interrupting the flow of narration in English. These languages include

Bhojpuri, Bengali, Hindustani, French, as well as the hybridized idioms of Anglo-Indian and Laskari pidgins. Soon after the *Ibis* enters the Indian Ocean, we hear Laskari as the lingua franca of the sailing world, used by lascars who come from different regions around the ocean. Anglo-Indian expressions accompany colonial British characters, while italicized Bhojpuri phrases appear in sections that follow Deeti, who carries the language across the pages along with her journey to the *Ibis*; similarly, scenes involving Bengali-speaking characters, such as the Bengali aristocrat-turned-convict Neel and the fisherman Jodu who joins the *Ibis*'s lascar crew, add another linguistic register; Paulette, born to a French family but raised by a Bengali mother, switches between Bengali and French-inflected English, sometimes mixing them together. The trajectories of these characters converge on the ship *Ibis*, turning it into a "Babel of tongues" that the novel attempts to imitate textually by rendering these languages in roman transliteration.[29] The authorial English wrestles with the push and pull of these regional and cosmopolitan vernaculars of the Indian Ocean.

If Ghosh's English represents the aspirational cosmopolitanism of the Anglophone novel congregating several idioms under its umbrella, the vernaculars participating in the "babel" of the ship points to a cosmopolitanism of nonelite, colonized subjects – the laborers, lascars, and convicts – through which localized languages come in transnational, transcultural contact. *Sea of Poppies* brings together these disparate cosmopolitanisms through languaging, whereby the vernaculars and Ghosh's English – the past and the present – inflect and infect one another. Consider the short Bhojpuri expressions that appear in Deeti's sections. They are transliterated in roman alphabets with diacritical marks and italics to accentuate their difference from the surrounding English words, sometimes accompanied by English translations and sometimes standing on their own. The Bhojpuri expressions interfere with the pace of reading both visually as well as on the level of articulation. For instance, in an intimate domestic scene, when Deeti snaps at her daughter for sleeping late, part of her dialogue is given in Bhojpuri: "Where were you? *Kám-o-káj na hoi?* You think there's no work to be done?" (6). The reader is asked to switch between different linguistic registers as the Bhojpuri words and sounds disrupt the flow of English. Even though a reader with no knowledge of Bhojpuri can still get the general sense of what is being asked, the two questions in English are completely different; there is no way for an English reader to know that the Bhojpuri expression in the middle roughly translates into the second question, not the one preceding it. Moreover, the Bhojpuri has a colloquial ring because of its elision of pronouns and the use of the idiomatic, largely

informal expression "*kám-o-káj*," meaning work or chores. By contrast, the English translation – "You think there's no work to be done?" – omits the auxiliary verb, making it grammatically awkward and more lengthy than necessary. Ghosh intentionally foreignizes English by distorting its syntax, as the translation fails to capture the pithiness and spontaneity of the Bhojpuri, evident in the alliteration and doubling in "*kám-o-káj*," a common feature of many South Asian languages. Far from assimilating into the narratorial/authorial English, the Bhojpuri expression retains its opacity, refusing to be recoded as part of the Anglophone cultural system. If the *Ibis* draws Deeti's monolingual Bhojpuri into its cosmopolitan "babel," the Bhojpuri phrase, conversely, provincializes Ghosh's cosmopolitan English, and along with it the cosmopolitanism of the novel's readership. The Bhojpuri expression not only contaminates the English by disfiguring its syntax, but effectively limits its "cosmopolitan" reach.

The global spread of English appears as a relatively recent phenomenon in the context of the long history of the Indian Ocean. The influence of English can be attributed to British colonial expansion in the nineteenth century and the political, economic, and cultural dominance of the United States in the twentieth century.[30] Anglophone education in colonial India was a "hegemonic instrument to persuade the subject population about the desirability of its own subjection."[31] By instilling the English tradition and Western modes of thinking, English education was meant to teach a class of colonized elites to think like the colonizers, facilitating the upkeep of the colonial system of exploitation and extraction. The cosmopolitanism of contemporary anglophone writers like Ghosh too derives from the legacy of the colonial education system that produced a class of English-educated Indians with global knowledge centered around Britain and India. This class of Indians was "able to move into the West with a facility that was not possible for others in India not well versed in this education."[32] Similarly, the global spread of English in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century cannot be separated from the changes in broader global politics and cultural and class inequalities. Peter Ives points to the connection between class-restricted access to the acquisition of English as a second language and the influence of the neoliberal economy through multinational corporations and trade, where English's communicative function conceals its political function that serves the governing economic class.[33]

Globally circulating anglophone texts like Ghosh's and Gurnah's novels likewise conceal the dominance of English as the arbiter of difference between world's diverse languages and cultures.[34] Mufti insists that English can "assume an aura of universality and transparency, ...

disappearing from view precisely as it assumes various mediating and officiating functions."[35] While postcolonial writers like Amitav Ghosh use "localizing linguistic strategies" that turn English into vernaculars that "not only invite readers to 'return' to local contexts, but also galvanize the recessive epistemologies of a globalizing world," Mufti urges us to rethink the oppositional potential of such anglophone texts.[36] Indeed, these writers inflect their English with local syntax, idioms, and cadences (Bombay English in Salman Rushdie, Malayalam in Arundhati Roy), rendering the contours of linguistic maps unstable. However, for Mufti, such texts occupy the "paradoxical historical situation" of the Anglophone novel, which participates in "cultural and formal *innovation* that nevertheless emerges out of a long historical process of linguistic and cultural *assimilation*."[37] This interplay between innovation and assimilation is evident in my reading of Deeti's Bhojpuri. While the Bhojpuri expressions disrupt and infiltrate the English and transform its syntax, the reader may so easily skip the non-English phrases entirely, reducing them to symbols of cultural otherness, what Graham Huggan might call "the postcolonial exotic." Scattered throughout the novel, the non-English expressions can appear as nothing more than a reminder for the reader that the text is a translation of a particular, non-Western story, rendered in a "universal" English idiom. The cosmopolitan style, while insisting on opacity of linguistic difference, paradoxically renders the Bhojpuri transparent, as the "vernacular" other vis a vis the "cosmopolitan" English.

This opposition between the cosmopolitan and the vernacular is called into question through two other linguistic practices Ghosh recreates in the novel: the Laskari pidgin spoken by the Indian Ocean sailors (lascars) and the Anglo-Indian patois used among the British expatriates in India. Formed through an amalgamation of different European and non-European languages, these creolized languages served to facilitate communication across linguistic barriers in colonial Indian and Indian Ocean contexts. When the former slave ship *Ibis* enters the Indian Ocean on its way to India to transport indentured laborers and opium, the Laskari displaces English as the lingua franca, taking over its cosmopolitan function. Zachary, the African American sailor from Baltimore who slowly rises up in the ranks to take over as the second mate of the ship, has to learn this language in order to communicate with his lascar crew. Zachary learns to "wrap this tongue around words like 'dal,' 'masala' and 'achar' . . . memorize a new shipboard vocabulary, which sounded a bit like English and yet not: the rigging became 'ringeen,' 'avast!' was 'bas!,' and the cry of the middle-morning watch went from 'all's well' to 'alzbel'" (15). While the

nautical argot in English becomes unintelligible in the Indian Ocean, Zachary is not mistaken in hearing traces of English in the Laskari vocabulary. Words imported from English are transformed and inflected with sounds and words from other languages to the point of being unrecognizable as English. Moreover, English is only one among many languages that that contribute to the making of Laskari, which also localizes bits and pieces of various Indian Ocean languages, including Hindustani, Bengali, Arabic, Persian, English, and Portuguese, into the space and structure of the ship and the ocean.[38] Vernacular to the ship and the sea but cosmopolitan in its function, Laskari facilitates communication among lascars who come from different parts of the Indian Ocean world.

Similarly, the British who were born and/or living in India used a mixture of English and Hindustani as the primary means of communication with their Indian subordinates. Anglo-Indian words are scattered throughout the novel but are used prominently by the river pilot, Mr. Doughty. Consider this dialogue, in which he recounts the extravagance of feasts organized by Raja Neel Rattan, a landowning Bengali aristocrat: "Wasn't a man in town who could put on a burra-khana like he did. Sheeshmull blazing with shammers and candles. Paltans of bearers and khidmutgars. Demi-johns of French loll-shrub and carboys of iced simkin," and this continues for a page and a half (46). The reader of English cannot help but stumble in this passage since almost every third word is of non-English origin. Doughty's speech, while being grammatically similar to English, incorporates many Hindustani words without translation. But even the readers who may be familiar with modern Hindi or Urdu are challenged by the use of the Hindustani here, because these words are spelled in an English accent: thus, *shīsh-méhél*, which means "palace/hall of mirrors" changes into "Sheesh-mull"; *badā khānā*, meaning "lavish feast," to "burra khana"; *lāl-sharāb,* meaning "red wine," to "Loll-Shrub," and so on.[39] The foreignizing of language occurs in both directions, between English and Hindustani, increasingly blurring the distinction between the two.

These linguistic practices are instances of what Françoise Lionnet calls "Creole cosmopolitan," a term that conjoins together two concepts typically represented as antithetical to each other. On the one hand, "Creole" characterizes cultural or linguistic formations at the periphery and carries a racialized sense of contamination, immobility, and isolation, "a racial, cultural, economic, and linguistic deficit embodied by the illiterate manual or indentured laborer, slave, or economic migrant." Cosmopolitanism, on the other hand, connotes "a dubious ontological excess" and is associated

with freedom of movement and refinement of culture that comes with contact with the wider world that one would expect in the metropolitan centers.[40] In bringing together these diametrically opposed terms, Lionnet draws attention to the migrant roots of creole cultures: even if not on their own terms, slaves, laborers, and economic migrants also engage in transnational mobility and contact and generate cosmopolitan cultural forms from their creolized locations.

Recognizing Laskari and Anglo-Indian idioms as Creole cosmopolitan reveals Indian Ocean cosmopolitanism as a racialized practice emerging at the peripheries of empire through colonialism, slavery, and indenture. The affinities and contrast between these languages and English, between the creole and the cosmopolitan idioms, form the basis for the narrative movement that works toward dismantling the grammar of cultural otherness and transforming the reader's relationship with language. Although the authorial English remains more or less distinct, more or less intact, even when some Anglo-Indian and Laskari words enter the language of narration through direct or indirect speech modes, Ghosh makes these languages speak back, implicating himself and his readers into the politics of language that the novel both represents and participates in. The Anglo-Indian and Laskari languages mark two distinctly cosmopolitan creoles occupying different peripheral positions in the imperial hierarchy. The British living in India, sometimes referred to as Anglo-Indians, occupy the place of colonial privilege vis a vis the Indians and yet, were deemed inferior to the British associated with the metropole. By contrast, categorized as "natives," the lascars are positioned at the lowest echelons on the socioeconomic and racial hierarchy. In the novel, the lascars and British characters stay segregated within their social spheres, with the single exception of Zachary Reid – who, being a white-passing Black American sailor, is able to enter both circles. It is to this singular character I turn to, whose evolving relationship to language not only points us to the particular sociohistorical processes by which linguistic cosmopolitanism of English is marked by race and class, but also models the reader's relationship to the novel's various linguistic registers.

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The story of Zachary and the *Ibis* links the Indian Ocean to the Black Atlantic: Zachary is a son of a freedwoman in Baltimore, Maryland, and the *Ibis* was used to transport slaves across the Atlantic until the abolition of slavery forced it into the Indian Ocean, where it would go on to transport indentured laborers and later, carry opium to China. As the

Ibis enters the Indian Ocean rounding the Cape of Good Hope, Zachary quickly rises in the ranks from a crew member to the ship's second mate when the white crew abandons the ship, repelled by the prospect of working alongside lascars. His first impression of the lascars and their lifestyle is worth quoting at length:

> He had thought that lascars were a tribe or nation, like the Cherokee or Sioux: he discovered now that they came from places that were far apart, and had nothing in common, except the Indian Ocean; among them were Chinese and East Africans, Arabs and Malays, Bengalis and Goans, Tamils and Arakanese. They came in groups of ten or fifteen, each with a leader who spoke on their behalf. To break up these groups was impossible; they had to be taken together or not at all, and although they came cheap, they had their own ideas of how much work they would do and how many men would share each job – which seemed to mean that three or four lascars had to be hired for jobs that could well be done by a single able seaman. The Captain declared them to be as lazy a bunch of niggers as he had ever seen, but to Zachary they appeared more ridiculous than anything else. Their costumes, to begin with: their feet were as naked as the day they were born, and many seemed to own no clothing other than a length of cambric to wind around their middle. Some paraded around in drawstringed knickers, while others wore sarongs that flapped around their scrawny legs like petticoats, so that at times the deck looked like the parlour of a honeyhouse. How could a man climb a mast in bare feet, swaddled in a length of cloth, like a newborn child? No matter that they were as nimble as any seaman he'd ever seen – it still discomfited Zachary to see them in the rigging, hanging like monkeys on the ratlines: when their sarongs blew in the wind, he would avert his eyes for fear of what he might see if he looked up. (13)

Zachary's perspective is not that of a neutral observer; he assumes the position of "an 'elite' white man vis-à-vis the lascars and other workers in the hierarchy below him."[41] Although he begins by acknowledging their heterogeneity, that they had "nothing in common except the Indian Ocean," he subsequently resorts to reductive racial tropes in describing their attire and behavior. Nandini Dhar notes the terms "new born child" and "monkeys" as instances of infantilization and dehumanization central to European colonial discourses. The assertion that "three or four lascars had to be hired for jobs that could well be done by a single able seaman" further casts them as racially inferior and lacking human abilities, thus justifying the "cheap"-ness of their labor. The distinction between lascars and (white) seamen echoes the British laws which distinguished "native" seamen of the Indian Ocean from "white" European sailors. Historian Ravi Ahuja notes that lascars were paid "a third and a fifth of

the pay of European sailors from the nineteenth century up to the 1980s" and allotted "only about half the accommodation space on board to which a 'seaman' was entitled."[42] Zachary's colorful yet derogatory description of the lascars racializes the Indian Ocean space while concealing the harsh, discriminatory working conditions that the lascars were subjected to.

Although Zachary's ignorance of racial labor regimes aligns him with colonial whiteness, his ambivalent position within the colonial racial hierarchy as a Black American also pushes him to distance himself from it. He asserts his difference most evidently through his ability to mingle with the lascars and embrace their lifestyle and language, in a reversal of the racializing gaze of his initial impression of the lascars. For instance, he shows preference for *karibat*, a curry dish prepared for the lascars, over the food preferred by white sailors, and chooses to stay in a boardinghouse that primarily served South Asian sailors. Most significantly, he strikes up a friendship with Serang Ali, the lead lascar, and familiarizes himself with the serang's Laskari pidgin:

> Zachary came on deck at dawn to be greeted with a cheerful: "Chin-chin Malum Zikri! You catchi chow-chow? Wat dam t'ing hab got inside?"
>
> Although startled at first, Zachary soon found himself speaking to the serang with an unaccustomed ease: it was as if his oddly patterned speech had unloosed his own tongue: "Serang Ali, where you from?" he asked.
>
> "Serang Ali blongi Rohingya – from Arakan side."
>
> "And where'd you learn that kinda talk?"
>
> "Afem ship," came the answer. "China-side, Yankee gen'l'um allo tim tok so-fashion. Also Mich'man like Malum Zikri."
>
> "I ain no midshipman," Zachary corrected him. "Signed on as the ship's carpenter."
>
> "Nevva mind," said the serang, in an indulgent, paternal way. "Nevva mind: allo same-sem. Malum Zikri sun-sun become pukka gen'l'um. So tell no: catchi wife-o yet?"
>
> "No." Zackary laughed. "'N'how about you? Serang Ali catchi wife?"
>
> "Serang Ali wife-o hab make die," came the answer. "Go top-side, to hebbin. By'mby, Serang Ali catchi nother piece wife. . ." (16)

As one comes across this dialogue, the reader is as startled as Zachary, perplexed and challenged by this strange language, which, again sounds like English but is noticeably different. But once past the initial confusion, the serang's speech begins to infect Zachary's as he gets accustomed to it: Zachary skips the verb when he asks, "where you from?" and later, uses a pidgin word in "Serang Ali catchi wife?" Initiating Zachary into the serang's Laskari lingo, Zachary's speech, in fact, mixes African American vernacular with the Laskari pidgin. The ease with which Zachary is able to

mold his tongue is linked to his slave lineage in the United States. Born to an enslaved mother and growing up in the white slaveholder's household, he learns to switch between the master's language, "as clipped as that of any college-taught lawyer," and his mother's African American vernacular (50). This allows Zachary to forge a cordial relationship with Serang Ali through what Dhar calls a "solidarity of tongues" which forms "at some distance from the 'correct' English of the power-elites – borrowing and appropriating elements of that elite/power English."[43] Furthermore, this solidarity emerges out of an iterative relationship with earlier scenes of the serang's own acquisition of the language from a "Yankee gen'l'um" in an "Afeem ship." This illustrates the way vernacular tongues, African American and ship pidgins, move toward the cosmopolitan in the oceanic context. The languages jump ship along with the sailors, loosening their tongues, as they drift across the ocean. The reader too is inserted into this circuit through the "vessel" of the anglophone novel. Like Zachary, with some effort, the reader learns to read, if not speak, Serang Ali's peculiar ship argot.

As the ship's second mate, a role reserved for Europeans, Zachary also has access to the circle of the elites, but this requires him to act, dress, and speak like them. Ironically, it is Serang Ali who helps with his transformation, giving him a completely new attire with the help of a few lascars. Transformed into a European gentleman, Zachary becomes "an almost unrecognizable image of himself in the mirror, clothed in a white linen shirt, riding breeches and a double breasted-summer paletot, with a white cravat knotted neatly around his neck" (19). But, in addition to changing his attire, Zachary's upward social mobility – which Kesi Augustine aptly calls "falsely heroic" – also depends on his ability to speak like his white employers, which would supplement his overall complicity with the racial colonial system.[44] Here Ghosh reveals a different dimension of linguistic hybridity, one that works in the service of colonial power. Being a member of the ruling class does not mean cutting off all ties with the lower classes, but being selective about the kind of contact one has with them. Zachary learns this lesson from Mr. Doughty, who urges him to acquire the native tongue but warns him against using the language in ways that might threaten his standing as a white (passing) man:

> This was India, where it didn't serve for a sahib to be taken for a clodpoll of a griffin . . .. This was no Baltimore – this was a jungle here, with biscobras in the grass and wanderoos in the trees. If he, Zachary, wasn't to be diddled and taken for a flat, he would have to learn to gubbrow the natives with a word or two of the zubben . . .. "The zubben, dear boy, is the flash lingo of

> the East . . .. Just a little peppering of nigger-talk mixed with a few girleys. But mind your Oordoo and Hindee doesn't sound too good: don't want the world to think you've gone native. And don't mince your words either. Mustn't be taken for a chee-chee." (47–48)

Zachary must learn to blend his language with the native "zubben" (an Anglicized version of *zabān*, the word for both "language" and "tongue" in Hindustani) in just the right places, such that he is comprehensible enough to keep the "natives" in their subordinate place but not so fluent that he is taken to be one of them. Here the disruption of the ideologically constructed binary between the colonizer and the colonized through mimicry works to consolidate colonial hierarchy instead of "disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse" to disrupt its authority.[45]

This passage also models the type of linguistic hybridity it describes: it is peppered with numerous non-English words of Hindustani origin, but just enough that the reader in English may follow the gist of the message. As we have seen with the examples of Bhojpuri and Laskari, Doughty's advice for Zachary, in fact, captures the novel's general technique for incorporating non-English languages. This model of linguistic appropriation implicates both the metropolitan writer and reader of Anglophone texts like *Sea of Poppies* that seek to represent and consume the world's "peripheral" cultures and languages. The "little peppering" of non-English words and phrases throughout the novel stops short of alienating the readers of English, while still providing them with a taste of local and regional linguistic "flavors." The hybridization of English emerges as "not a means of transgression, but a technique for getting closer to strangers which allows the reassertion of the agency of the dominant subject."[46] What appears to be a destabilization of the dominant language paradoxically secures the relation of power "through this very process of destabilization."[47]

The metafictional moment in Doughty's speech draws attention to the continuity and complicity of the postcolonial Anglophone text with colonial language politics – between the past the text seeks to represent and the present medium of representation. The past bleeds into the present through language. Thus, it is important to note that the various ways Ghosh weaves together different languages and idioms throughout the novel do not provide any reason to regard the novel as a celebration of multilingualism or multiculturalism.[48] As Sara Ahmed writes, such "access to cultural capital and knowledges embedded in colonial and class privilege . . . give[s] the dominant subject the ability to move," rendering "the stranger . . . *knowable, seeable, and hence be-able*."[49] Within the novel's historical context, the knowledge of the "zubben" allows the privileged

white subject (or a white-passing subject) to see, be, and know the natives without turning into one of them. In the context of the novel's circulation and consumption, its reader like Zachary has the option to travel without traveling the Indian Ocean, "exercise fantasies of unrestricted movement and free will" through the novel's English medium.[50] However, mirroring Zachary's social mobility based on his racial passing, the reader's cultural mobility that relies on English as the seat of cosmopolitan privilege also remains illusory: Ghosh repeatedly alerts the readers to the asymmetry and opacity among languages in the Indian Ocean world. Zachary's interlingual interactions, thus, mirror and, thereby, unsettle the reader's privilege vis à vis the Anglophone medium and interpolate the reader into the creole cosmopolitanisms of the *Ibis*, where English becomes cosmopolitan through creolization rather than by virtue of its exception.

In his essay "Speaking of Babel: The Risks and Rewards of Writing about Polyglot Societies," Ghosh discusses the challenges in portraying multilingual characters through the "fundamentally monolingual" form of the novel.[51] Despite its celebrated heteroglossia theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin, which allows the form to gather multiple registers of speech through varying dialects and diction, these voices must ultimately speak the same language. One may choose to accurately render different languages using different scripts or phonetic transliteration, as Ghosh does in *Sea of Poppies*, but the reception of unfamiliar words and phrases would depend on the reader's linguistic knowledge. While a plurilingual text may strike one as "experimental or innovative" when read in a monolingual context, in a "linguistically plural culture," Ghosh suggests, such an experiment may appear "retrograde, or childish, or merely an exercise in ornamentation."[52] *Sea of Poppies*'s multilingual experiment might appear innovative to Western readers, but in a linguistically plural Indian Ocean context, it risks becoming "nothing but babble."[53] Perhaps for this reason, at the end of the novel, Ghosh departs from the novel form entirely by turning to the dictionary, an inherently multilingual genre that facilitates scale jumping by bridging linguistic divides. Past the "Acknowledgements" section that cites various scholarly and archival sources (including colonial dictionaries), Ghosh includes an appendix titled "The *Ibis* Chrestomathy," that lists a number of (but not all) "non-English" words alongside short commentaries. But before taking a closer look at this paratextual feature, let us first turn to a different novel set across the ocean in East Africa that takes a different approach to expressing linguistic plurality in the Swahili coast. Unlike Ghosh, Gurnah's *Paradise* represents a diversity of tongues, not by inscribing transliterated non-English words and phrases, but by

drawing attention to linguistic gaps, translations, and mistranslations relying mostly, if not solely, on English. How does this approach, which, Ghosh suggests, might be even more "economical" than his own, influence the portrayal of cosmopolitan intercourse in the Indian Ocean?[54] To what extent does it challenge or reinforce the status of English as a colonial/cosmopolitan medium? Gurnah specifically relies on colonial Swahili travelogues to recreate the early twentieth-century Swahili trading world. This raises an additional question: How does the novel, written in English, mediate the linguistic alterity of its sources?

Breached Translations in *Paradise*

Gurnah's *Paradise* follows a trading caravan from the Swahili coast to the interior, depicting interactions between various communities through the lenses of language and translation. As Gwyn Campbell has observed, the spread of Islam created a "*Pax Islamica* over vast regions that stimulated economic and cultural development over the entire Indian Ocean World."[55] While Islam and trade enabled interactions between the coast, the interior, and the greater Islamic world of the Indian Ocean, these forces also shaped the relationship between coastal cultures and the non-Islamic communities inland. During the nineteenth century, the majority of commodities that traversed the Indian Ocean, including ivory and enslaved people, came from a vast hinterland linked through trading networks that stretched to regions in the Congo. At the same time, the Arabocentric culture on the Swahili coast, ruled by Omani Arabs, locked the relationship between the coast and the hinterland in a hierarchy: the Islamic coastal culture, associated with affluence and political power, was deemed the embodiment of *ustaarabu* or "civilization," whereas the non-Muslim communities of the interior, often associated with slavery, were seen as *washenzi*, or "barbarians."[56] The diverse East African society that Gurnah portrays in *Paradise*, thus, reflects a society "riven by fissures, with factions that divide society along the lines of ethnic loyalties and communal grievances, even before the advent of European colonialism."[57] It is composed of cultural, religious, ethnic, and linguistic hierarchies held together not by Islam or other shared beliefs or values, but by the economic ties of the caravan trade.[58] In this portrait of a society where "everything, whether goods or human beings, is commodified," Gurnah reveals the fragility of economic ties to be linked to the precarity of translation and linguistic difference in cross-cultural interactions.[59]

Like *Sea of Poppies*, *Paradise* is a historical novel. It is set at the turn of the century, around the beginning of German colonization of present-day mainland Tanzania. It tells the coming-of-age story of young Yusuf, sold into bondage as a *rehani* at the age of twelve by his father, to an affluent coastal Arab merchant called Uncle Aziz.[60] Even before Yusuf begins working for Aziz and joins trade expeditions to the interior, domestic scenes depicting Yusuf's home early in the novel show signs of division fueled by discourses of othering. Since they live far from the coast surrounded by non-Muslim communities, Yusuf's father warns him not to play with the "Washenzi, who have no faith in God and who worship spirits and demons which live in trees and rocks."[61] Rifts persist within the household as well: Yusuf overhears an argument between his parents where his father disparages his mother's inland origins, calling her "the daughter of a hill tribesman from the back of Taita who lived in a smoky hut and wore stinking goatskin" (13). But immediately in the next paragraph, we learn about his father's earlier marriage to an Arab woman, when he was treated in the same way due to his racial origins and was forced to elope with her against her parents' wishes:

> For although he carried a good name, anyone with eyes could see that his mother must have been a savage and that he himself was not blessed with prosperity. And although a name could not be dishonored by the blood of a mother, the world they lived in imposed some practical necessities. They had greater aspirations for their daughter than to let her become the mother of poor children with savage faces. (14)

In these passages, the discourse of othering creates hierarchical binaries based on religion, place, wealth, and race. These binaries become the basis for measuring the worth of civilization and honor, inferiority and superiority. Throughout the novel, dialectical notions of honor and shame dictate the actions of many characters and their attitudes toward each other. But as ideas about honor and shame can change arbitrarily based on context and culture, Yusuf eventually comes to realize that honor is determined not by independent moral or ethical standards, but by power. Living a life in bondage, Yusuf "had neither a flag nor righteous knowledge with which to claim superior honor" (237). Tracing the shifting discourses of civilization and barbarism in which what remains constant is the insistence on the boundary between the self and the other, Gurnah calls into question the idea of the Indian Ocean littoral as a world of fluidity and exchange, where all boundaries are "moveable and porous."[62] Indian Ocean historians have pointed out that as nodes for traders and travelers from distant places

across the ocean, port cities were home to diverse, cosmopolitan societies, and the spread of Islam along these littoral cities provided a "unified yet flexible legal" framework for trade and travel across the Indian Ocean.[63] The novel turning inland from the ocean exposes the limits of this framework. In Gurnah's fictionalized telling of the trading journeys to the interior, intercommunal divisions and hostilities come to the surface through linguistic gaps, miscommunications, and mistranslations.

Throughout the novel, Gurnah draws on a range of intertextual references, ranging from the European classic *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad to the *Qur'an* and nineteenth-century Swahili travelogues. Comparing the treatment of language in *Paradise* with Gurnah's Swahili sources illuminates the function of translation in Gurnah's text. His account of Yusuf's journey borrows various elements from primarily two Swahili texts, namely the Zanzibari slave trader Tippu Tip's autobiography *Maisha ya Hamid bin Muhammed el Murjebi*, and Selemani bin Mwenye Chande's "Safari Yangu ya Bara Afrika" ("My Journey Up-Country in Africa"). While these sources provide a rare glimpse into colonial and precolonial East Africa from the Swahili perspective, their production was still tied to the prerogatives of European colonialism. Both texts were transcribed and published by Europeans and owe their existence to European linguists, ethnographers, and administrators. Tippu Tip's autobiography was written under the directive of Dr. Heinrich Brode, an employee of the German Consulate at Zanzibar, who transcribed, translated, and published the text in an Orientalist journal in Germany in 1902 (in Kiswahili and German). Similarly, Chande worked as a chief informant to the German collector Carl Velten, who transcribed and collected his account along with other accounts by Swahili informants. As part of the colonial repertoire, these Swahili accounts do not provide unmediated access to the Swahili point of view. The production of the original texts is conditioned by their colonial destination, traveling "a complex path to publication with the interests of ethnographers, linguists and colonial officials overshadowing any sense of agency for the Swahili storytellers."[64] The subjective perspectives of the storytellers Tip and Chande as native informants remain buried under the information extracted for the colonial enterprise.

This is evident in the introductory note to the English translation of Chande's "My Journey Up-Country in Africa," published in a 1965 collection edited by Lyndon Harries. It begins with the remark that "the special interest of this account by an African of a journey up-country to get ivory is that it provides detailed information about the route."[65] The rest of the

text describes the route, giving the names of the places that Chande travelled through. Nowhere does the text mention his name, let alone his biography. The perspective of the storyteller is actively suppressed, while the transactions and interactions that help Chande navigate the route are highlighted instead. Similarly, Michelle Decker notes the "undifferentiated narratorial attention" to utilitarian interactions with villages in Tippu Tip's autobiography. Questioning the classification of the text as an autobiography, Decker argues that Tip "withholds his interiority" as he "fashions himself as a collection of silences."[66]

One of the ways these texts silence the subjectivity of their authors in service of the colonial enterprise is through the leveling of linguistic difference. Both Tip's and Chande's monolingual accounts barely mention the presence of other languages across the vast geography they traverse, even when they describe encounters with different non-Swahili speaking communities. Both accounts are rife with descriptions of conflicts, often violent, costing lives, whether because of the villagers' hostility toward the traders or due to the failure to reach a deal. Except in rare instances, they present the conversations with different village chiefs in Swahili without any indication of a different language being used. The translator disappears, as the Swahili texts were written primarily to consolidate colonial knowledge about the ivory trade. Since the only translations that mattered were those from Swahili to European languages, the linguistic difference among different communities represented in the texts remains concealed.

There is one exception in Tippu Tip's autobiography, where the text shows an awareness of linguistic difference. In this episode, Tip's entourage arrives in the Irande country looking for ivory and comes across the Warua people. Tip observes that they don't have guns, only bows and arrows, and reports a conversation: "The guns we had with us, they asked us, 'Are they pestles?' – the word they used being that for the pestle for pounding with. And we replied that they were pestles."[67] Michelle Decker argues that in refusing to explain the function of guns to the Warua, Tip uses their ignorance about modern technology as a means for maintaining the isolation of the interior from the cosmopolitanism of the coast.[68] While this could be the case, as we read further it becomes apparent that the issue in this particular exchange might not have been so much about the knowledge of superior technology (guns) as about the knowledge of different languages. Later Tip reveals that they had been among people with whom they did not have a shared language in which to communicate:

> In the area through which we were passing, people were hostile and stole from us, but we were patient, because they had arranged it so that we had no weapons, we had taken pestles. Anyway, we went on, and one day came in contact with a man who, fortunately, could speak Kirua. We also knew Kirua. Many of these people travel to Urua; and he asked us "What do you really want?" We told him that we were looking for ivory.[69]

This is a rare instance in the text where Tip admits the limits of his linguistic abilities. His relief at meeting someone who knows Kirua casts doubt on the confidence and credibility of the earlier exchange with the Warua regarding the pestles as well as of the ethnographic description that follows. This suggests that it is not the Warua, but Tip who might be on the side of ignorance, since the local knowledge is inaccessible to Tip given his inability to understand the local language. Tip's cosmopolitanism as a coastal trader and traveler conceals his linguistic and cultural provincialism vis a vis the Warua.

Unlike Tip and Chande, Gurnah's rewriting of these accounts in *Paradise* accentuates the problem posed by language. For instance, linguistic difference is discernible early in the novel, after Yusuf is displaced from his home inland to work for the merchant Aziz at his mansion on the coast as a *rehani*, a bonded servant, alongside Khalil. Unlike Yusuf, Khalil, originally from the islands, is a native Arabic speaker. The narrator describes Khalil's way of speaking as having "the pronounced accent of the Arabic-speaker although his Kiswahili was fluent. He managed to make the liberties he took with the syntax seem inspired as well as eccentric. In exasperation and anxiety he burst into a powerful torrent of Arabic which forced the customers into silent but tolerant retreat" (22–23). Linguistically marked among the community of Swahili speakers, Khalil speaks from the interspace between Arabic and Swahili. Given its significance in Islam and the hierarchy of languages in the Indian Ocean world, Arabic gives Khalil an upper hand, which he uses at times of crisis. Khalil talks to Aziz in Arabic and Yusuf is excluded from these conversations. Since the narrative is mediated through Yusuf's Swahili translated into English, the reader is consequently twice removed from the Arabic already impenetrable to Yusuf. Although the English "translations" level out the differences in the dialogues, Gurnah's descriptive language consistently alerts the reader of a linguistic landscape that becomes increasingly uneven and heterogeneous as the narrative follows Yusuf and the caravan through different villages in the interior.

Gurnah models the character of Aziz after Tippu Tip and borrows several plot elements from Chande's account of his travel, making some

notable modifications. For instance, he changes the name of the chief of an inland village from Chata to Chatu. Noting the Swahili meaning of "chatu," which is "python," Fawzia Mustafa observes that the disguised meaning "allows for both the Biblical allusion to Eden as well as the locally mythic one."[70] This wordplay in Swahili remains inaccessible to non-Swahili speakers including Chatu himself, placing him at once inside and outside the Swahili linguistic sphere. However, the most significant addition Gurnah makes is the insertion of the translator Nyundo, who becomes indispensable once the crew passes the limits of the Swahili-speaking territory. All of the crew's exchanges with the villagers, and later, the Germans, pass through Nyundo. Gurnah devotes significant blocks of text to describing Nyundo's attempts to translate between the traders and the villagers. Like Ghosh's insertion of non-English words and phrases, Nyundo's translative acts insist on the language difference, highlighting the anxieties generated by the impossibility of transparent communication. Consider the following exchange between Aziz ("the merchant") and a village sultan who offers him some beer, as Nyundo translates between them:

> "I am grateful, but I must decline," the merchant said.
>
> "He asks why?" Nyundo said, grinning. "It's good beer. Is it because you think there's poison in it? He's already tasted it for you. Don't you trust him?" The sultan then said something else and the elders laughed among themselves, cackling with long-toothed merriment. The merchant looked at Nyundo, who shook his head. His gesture was ambiguous, perhaps he had not understood or thought it best not to translate.
>
> "I'm a trader," Uncle Aziz said, looking at the sultan. "And I am a stranger in your town. If I drink beer I'll begin to shout and get into fights, and this is not how a stranger on business should behave."
>
> "He says it's because your god won't let you. He knows about that," Nyundo said, as the sultan and his people laughed again among themselves. Nyundo took a long time before translating the sultan's next remark. The grin had disappeared from his face and he spoke carefully to give the impression that he was striving for a faithful delivery. "He says what kind of cruel god is it which doesn't allow men to drink beer?" (139–40)

The sultan's words are made available to both the reader and Uncle Aziz through Nyundo's translations. However, far from giving a faithful, unaltered translation, Nyundo takes on interpretive and evaluative functions as well. His "grinning" gesture recognizes the sarcasm in the sultan's question and insistence that they accept the drink, anticipating the

laughter from the sultan. In paraphrasing the sultan when he asks, "Don't you trust him?," he removes the attribution and appears to speak for himself, adopting a derisive attitude toward Aziz, aligning with the sultan and the elders. However, if the translator disappears in the first part of the dialogue, right after this, Nyundo does not translate what the sultan says next, leaving both Aziz and the reader in the dark. Instead, Nyundo just shakes his head, a gesture that is lost to Aziz in the uncertainty of the "perhaps." So not only the translations, but the translator himself becomes opaque at this point. In attempting to translate a single exchange, Nyundo oscillates from extreme transparency, in which he coincides with the source, to total opacity, where he himself becomes untranslatable. The difficulty of linguistic translation is further compounded by the perils of cultural translation when Aziz refuses the drink. Although the sultan knows that Aziz's religion forbids him from drinking, this knowledge does not translate into a cultural understanding, leading the sultan to mock Aziz's religion.

Later in a different village, a similar encounter takes a more hostile turn. The village chief Chatu confiscates all of Aziz's trading goods as restitution for the harm caused by a different group of coastal traders, who had robbed and kidnapped people from his village to sell them as slaves. Aziz protests, insisting that he has "only come to trade," but Chatu ignores him and alerts him to the fact that coastal traders like Aziz have enslaved and robbed Chatu's people and treated them as animals, invoking the history of conflict with coastal traders in the region (160). Nyundo's struggle to translate this heated exchange reflects the fragility of a relation structured by the economy of the caravan trade. His translations are unable to mediate the irreconcilable understandings of the history of exchange between the two groups. While Chatu conflates Aziz with other slave raiders and predatory traders and demands material restitution for the destruction of life and property they caused, Aziz's insistence on the transactional nature of his relationship to Chatu blinds him to the irremediable damage done to Chatu's community by such trading expeditions.

When the Germans arrive with guns at the scene of this exchange, imposing their own hierarchies, the number of translators and interpreters multiplies, creating possibilities for further divisions, misunderstandings, and erasures. Claiming to enforce "the law of the government," the Europeans purport to resolve the conflict by forcing Chatu to return the goods to the traders, dismissing Chatu's demand for reparations, and prohibiting Aziz from conducting trade (170). The imposition of

the colonial order erases the history of exchange between the groups and their conflictual understandings of the past.

Like Mr. Doughty's advice to Zachary in *Sea of Poppies,* the multiplying chain of translators in *Paradise* serves a self-reflexive metafictional function, projecting Gurnah himself as another node in the chain linking the Indian Ocean past with the present. The precarity of translation depicted in *Paradise* extends to the novelist, who too becomes errant and unassimilable excess in this fictional reconstruction of the past. Like Ghosh, Gurnah draws attention to the text as a mediated narrative, written in English but existing between several languages that flow into each other but also, to a certain extent, always remain opaque to each other and to the novel's global readers. *Paradise* and *Sea of Poppies* use different narrative techniques to grapple with the limitations posed by the novel's linguistic injunction: while Ghosh uses direct representation of Indian Ocean languages, Gurnah takes the indirect route of marking linguistic difference through narratorial commentary in English. They cannot escape the authoritative position of English as the arbiter of linguistic plurality; but both texts self-reflexively undermine the "realist" aesthetic of the novels, which not only disrupts their mimetic relationship with the past but also suspends the exoticizing gaze of the Anglophone novel on the Indian Ocean. Their anarchival mode implicates the reader in Indian Ocean's linguistic flows and opacities. Instead of the Anglophone text capturing a cosmopolitan past, it is the Indian Ocean encounters that shape Anglophone idiom and subsume the language within their polyphony at the intersection trading networks, shifting racial formations, and post/colonial routes of knowledge. The final section of this chapter turns to the "*Ibis* Chrestomathy," Ghosh's parodic dictionary appended to *Sea of Poppies*, to consider how a genre premised upon linguistic difference and epistemic authority might be used to stage the linguistic transformations within the migratory Indian Ocean space.

Itinerant Words of the *Ibis* Chrestomathy

The "*Ibis* Chrestomathy" is exemplary of Ghosh's fascination with lists. As Anupama Mohan has noted, "The list as archive is a central device for Ghosh in assembling vast but provisional unities among the multiple languages spoken by the characters."[71] In the "*Ibis* Chrestomathy," Ghosh adopts the glossary, the Orientalist tool for enumerating "things Oriental into manageable parts," in order to undermine its stability as a compendium of knowledge.[72] Glossaries are common features in early

postcolonial novels as an explanatory device, but they disappear in later Anglophone novels, mainly because of their association with Western constructions of the non-West as exotic and hence in need of being translated into a Western idiom. In this regard, the glossary as a genre carries the vestiges of the colonial era, as they were widely used to facilitate the colonial administration by making local meaning available to colonial officials. Dictionaries such as Henry Yule and Arthur Coke Burnell's *Hobson-Jobson* (1886) and Thomas Roebuck's *Laskari Dictionary or Anglo-Indian Vocabulary of Nautical Terms and Phrases in English and Hindustani* (1882) played an important role in the production and legitimation of the Anglo-Indian imperial subject through language, allowing this imagined consumer of the dictionary, the Anglo-Indians, to claim authority over local knowledge and peoples.[73]

The "*Ibis* Chrestomathy" problematizes the ideological function of the glossary by performing a parody of the genre. Jon Kertzer notes that "Ghosh's wordplay [in the novel] highlights the ambiguous way language mediates between authority and knowledge."[74] This occurs most explicitly in the chrestomathy. The novel's para-text situates the "glossary" not as exterior to the novel but as part of its fictional world, integrated to its narrative space and time. The chrestomathy is prefaced with a note by the narrator of *Sea of Poppies,* explaining that it was originally compiled by Neel, one of the main characters in the novel who ends up on the ship *Ibis* as a convict. Here, the narrator reveals himself as a descendant of Neel and indicates that the document emerges out of Neel's interest in words, specifically those non-English words that entered the English language through journeys around the Indian Ocean. The formatting of the text with two columns and footnotes, distinct from the rest of the novel, simulates the pages of a dictionary. Furthermore, the chrestomathy prolifically invokes the authority of several major dictionaries from the colonial era, including Roebuck's *The Laskari Dictionary*, the *Hobson-Jobson,* and the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), mimicking Orientalist texts mired in a "system for citing works and authors."[75] While through its form, the chrestomathy points to a continuity between the colonial past and the postcolonial present, its function as parody renders the past elusive and ambivalent.

The narrator's preface posits the chrestomathy as a process rather than a finished product. Unlike colonial dictionaries that render foreign words transparent to colonial agents, the "*Ibis* Chrestomathy" treats words not as objects of knowledge but as "people . . . endowed with lives and destinies of their own" (501). It rejects the idea that language can be contained and

challenges colonial knowledge production deployed in the service of power:

> The *Chrestomathy* is a work that cannot, in principle, ever be considered finished. One reason for this is that new and previously unknown word-chits in Neel's hand continue to turn up in places where he once resided. These unearthings have been regular enough, and frequent enough, to confound the idea of ever bringing the work to completion. But the *Chrestomathy* is also, in its very nature, a continuing dialogue. . . (502)

As a "continuing exchange of words between generations," the chrestomathy eschews finality and insists on the temporality and historicity of words, rendering the past of the words as fluid and undetermined as their future. In addition to being citational in the Orientalist sense, the chrestomathy is also an archival and genealogical project tied to Neel's family and lineage. The knowledge compiled therein is subject to the vagaries of the archive, the "unearthings" of "new and previously unknown word-chits," and cannot be dissociated from the personal whims and beliefs of Neel, the archivist.

By juxtaposing Neel's voice alongside references to colonial dictionaries, this document performs a rewriting of the oceanic past woven with a web of words, recontextualizing not just the words but the dictionary itself as an instrument of knowledge production. The chrestomathy inserts the disembodied and apoliticized genre of the dictionary into the political and historicized perspective of the embodied colonial subject epitomized in Neel. The materiality of this embodiment is recognized in the "word-chits in Neel's hand," which serve as the source for the entries. Initially from a landowning family in Calcutta, Neel is later convicted of fraud and condemned to hard labor in Mauritius (38). So, coming from an outlaw, this (an)archive is literally located outside the law. Moreover, in several entries, the narrator's voice interjects quotes from Neel's "word-chits," bringing the novel's heteroglossia into the glossary. This blurring of the line between the fictional text and the para-text urges the reader to question the authority of this glossary, or any such document for that matter, and its capacity to "demystif[y] and decod[e] some of the common misconceptions of the origins of words."[76] In fact, this glossary does little to shed light on the many untranslated expressions throughout the text. Every entry cites an English dictionary but adds commentary by Neel. Instead of simply providing different meanings of the words, Neel's meta-commentary animates each word, concocting narratives that trace their trajectories as they travel from one language to

another. The attitude toward other sources is largely satiric, at times critical and even irreverent.

Take for instance, Neel's mildly dismissive note on the word "achar," which, as he indicates, has secured a place in the *OED*:

> **+achar**: "There are those who would gloss this as 'pickle,'" writes Neel, "although that word is better applied to the definition than the thing defined." (504)

Here, "pickle" refers to the definition given by the *OED*, which glosses "achar" as "a type of pickle or relish made from fruit or vegetables preserved in spiced oil or vinegar."[77] Neel turns the English definition of the word over and onto itself, exploiting the double meaning associated with the word "pickle" to produce a "self-erasing definition worthy of Lewis Carroll."[78] On the one hand, "pickle" denotes preserved food, usually vegetables preserved in liquid such as vinegar or brine. This is the definition that is closest to the meaning of "achar," which refers to a component of South Asian meals made up of vegetables preserved in oil and spices. On the other hand, in its colloquial use, "pickle" also means a difficult situation, or, as the *OED* puts it, "a plight, a predicament."[79] Neel's comment points to this double meaning and hence, the ambiguity and instability inherent the English language, even without the introduction of foreign words such as "achar." The elusiveness of Neel's definition further highlights the failure of translation: the opacity of the word "achar" persists despite its importation into the *OED*.

In the chrestomathy, or "the vessel of migration" as the narrator calls it, if words like "achar" resist migration into English, there are other words that travel, transform, and adapt to their new linguistic environment, leaving behind their old meanings. Take the entry for the word "shampoo," for example, a word that has entered common usage in English. Here too, Neel is less interested in determining its meaning or origin than in mapping its trail as it travels from *cãpo/cãpnā* in Hindustani to "shampoo" in English. He takes interest in the meaning of the Hindi verb, which relates to "massaging" or "pressing," only because he sees in the migration of this word an allegory for British colonialism in India. He asks: "Is it not a commentary on the relationship of England and India that most of the Hind. [Hindustani] candidates for the Peerage of the English Verb pertain to grappling, grasping, binding, tying and whipping?" (540).

Conversely, there are some words that not only fail to survive their odysseys across languages, whether due to corruption, misuse, or competition with other words, but also transform their meaning in the original

language as a result of contact between languages. The Hindi word "karcanna," now commonly translated into English as "factory," is a case in point:

> **carcanna/karcanna**: (***The Glossary**); Already in Neel's lifetime this long-pedigreed English word (from Hind. *kar-khana*, "work-place" or "work-shop") was slowly yielding to the term "factory" – a lexical scandal in Neel's ears, which were still accustomed to hearing that word used to designate the residence of a "factor" or "agent." But it was not for nostalgic reasons alone that he mourned the passing of **carcanna/karcanna**: he foresaw that its wreckage would also carry into oblivion many of those who had once worked in these places of manufacture – for example the factory-clerks known as **carcoons**. It was in mourning the fate of this word that the unknown wordy-wallah penned his comments on logocide. (517)

This entry shows again that the chrestomathy does not serve the utilitarian function of a glossary. Here Neel is concerned with the demise of this word and its altered usage within its language of "origin." The death of a word dramatized as "logocide" and animated in a nautical metaphor as "wreck-age" has implications far beyond its immediate usage. *Carcanna* becomes a synecdoche for a waning world, for a particular workplace associated with a precapitalist mode of working. The loss of this word implies an end to the community of workers who worked in such places, and its acquisition of a new meaning signals a changing world order. Neel presents *carcanna* as an allegory of loss in the wake of colonial and capitalist incursions in the Indian Ocean world. What is central to this entry is not the "knowledge" regarding the word or its meaning, but rather the memory of a particular form of community associated with the usage of the word. Neel displaces the function of the dictionary from cognition to affect.

The chrestomathy repurposes a historical dictionary through poetic invention, revealing the semantic trajectories of words as they travel across the uneven field of multiple languages.[80] Ghosh adapts the dictionary into a poetic idiom that codes both imperial histories from above, as in the entry for "shampoo," as well as migration histories from below, as in the entry for "carcanna." If the novel as a fundamentally anthropocentric form tells stories of human characters, the chrestomathy allows Ghosh to make words and languages the protagonists of their own migration stories. Throughout the chrestomathy, words travel or resist traveling across languages and through space and time, they make friendships and rivalries, some are elusive, some contradict themselves, some stray from their meanings, some are celebrated for their poetic soundness and resilience across languages, while some die, caught in shipwreck, and are mourned

for. In this sense, these words mirror the lives of the characters in the novel, the migrants, lascars, sailors, and prisoners, who move across geographies and languages as they sail across the ocean. The errancy and ambiguities inherent in the words and their resistance to translation as they straddle the space between languages defy the transparency that dictionaries impose over local idioms. The chrestomathy as *anarchive* reveals that as words traverse the Indian Ocean along with their speakers, their meanings and usage drift in different directions through the occlusions and passageways, diversions and returns at the intersections of languages.

The "*Ibis* Chrestomathy" presents the limit case of translative gestures that animate novels like *Sea of Poppies* and *Paradise.* Departing from the novelistic form, it distills Indian Ocean encounters to contact between languages. While this interrupts the text's representational function, it also accentuates the text's referential claims through a direct, indexical rendering of languages being represented. When languages themselves become historical referents, anarchival drift takes the form of translation that follows a double movement: first, a movement backward into the past that turns the archive fugitive, exposing within its anarchic folds polymorphous linguistic formations as the radical alterity of oceanic drifts – the materiality and historicity of Indian Ocean encounters; and second, a movement forward, retranslating the anarchic fragments of the past into a narrative accessible to a contemporary audience. In the texts discussed here – *Sea of Poppies*, *Paradise*, and the chrestomathy – this second movement involves translation of narratives taking place in different languages and in different times into today's English, within the constraints of the novel form. The double movement returns the Anglophone idiom to the Indian Ocean past and sets it adrift in a sea of languages, staging "histories of language travel that do not necessarily reproduce imperial trajectories," and thereby, undermining its hegemonic status as the adjudicator of cosmopolitanism in the present.[81] The semantic drift between languages is inseparable from the slippage between history and fiction, between the sociohistorical processes that shaped the nineteenth-century Indian Ocean world and the fictional narratives that translate these processes for twenty-first century readers. The linguistic plurality of the Indian Ocean haunts the texts, incorporating the Anglophone medium within the incommensurable spaces of linguistic cosmopolitanism.