



INDOWS International Symposium 2023

*Currents of Metamorphosis
across the Indian Ocean*

Abstracts



環インド洋地域研究
Indian Ocean World Studies

Session 1. The Metamorphosis Stage: The Sea

A Genealogy of *Kālā Pānī*: Indian Convicts and the Idea of Transportation

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This paper will examine the idea of penal transportation in colonial and postcolonial India using Hindi and Urdu sources.

First, the concept of *kālā pānī* (black water) associated with penal transportation will be examined. In modern India, the sea per se or crossing the sea was termed *kālā pānī* in Hindi and Urdu. Whether crossing the sea could be a taboo for caste Hindus was often a subject of debate. The Andaman penal settlements that became a major penal colony in the latter half of the 19th century were also referred to as *kālā pānī*. Thus, the history of the concept of *kālā pānī* will be reviewed first.

Then, the writings of Muḥammad Ja‘afar Thānesarī will be examined. Thānesarī was transported to the Andaman Islands from 1865 to 1884 for sending money to anti-British Muslim groups on the North-Western Frontier. His account of his penal servitude, *Tawārīkh-e ‘Ajīb* (1884/1885) was written in Urdu and was later reprinted numerous times with the title *Kālā Pānī*. After the partition of India and Pakistan, his writings were given various meanings. Reviewing how his book has been interpreted, this paper will re-examine the concept of *kālā pānī* in colonial and postcolonial South Asia.

Session 1. The Metamorphosis Stage: The Sea

The Indian Ocean in Malay Literature

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The Malay world is an immense archipelago made up of thousands of islands. The seas are an essential part of its geography, they have forged its history, they mark its identity. In Indonesian and Malay, the homeland is called *tanahair*: “land and water”.

The coastal populations of the archipelago have been sailors from the dawn of times. Contacts with India started before the Current Era. The Malays remained familiar with the Indian Ocean until the arrival of the Europeans, who soon imposed their superiority and monopoly.

The sea is omnipresent in Malay reality, it also has a place in the imagination. It is the source of myths, tales and metaphors.

Considering the omnipresence of the sea, what image does Malay literature give of it, in particular of the Indian Ocean? I will analyze two 17th century texts relating to 15th century Malacca: the chronicle *Sulalat al-Salatin* and the epic *Hikayat Hang Tuah*. It appears that in these two texts sea journeys are numerous, including journeys across the Indian ocean, but the ocean itself remains elusive. Voyages are treated in a literary way, using stereotypes which together reflect a geographical vision of the world. According to this vision, the sea can be crossed without difficulty: the ocean is not dangerous, it is not an obstacle or a trial, it is absent, erased, the transparent space of communication between the Malay world and the high places of civilization.

Session 1. The Metamorphosis Stage: The Sea

Bahari: Poetry of the Ocean and an Ocean of Poetry from Zanzibar

Clarissa Vierke

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Bahari in Swahili refers to “ocean”, “sea”, but also to “genres of Swahili poetry”. Taking inspiration from the double entendre, I want to think about the relations of the ocean and poetry. How does popular Swahili poetry from Zanzibar imagine the Indian Ocean? How has the Indian Ocean shaped Swahili poetry?

Last year, in cooperation with the State University on Zanzibar, we invited 25 poets from the islands of Unguja and Pemba to compose Indian Ocean poetry. Their verses, which cover a large variety of perspectives, suggest a critical vocabulary questioning some of the dominant views in Indian Ocean literary debates. Against an often nostalgic backward perspective on the ocean, some of the poems suggest it as part of a concrete material(ist) world, defined by economic power imbalances, characterized by fish trawlers and off-shore oil platforms as well as tourist beach hotels. In some, the ocean is an exploitable resource, a promise of a better future, in others, the worry about its ecological fragility related to destroyed coral reefs, and increasing cultural tensions linking it to earlier histories of colonial domination prevail. Highlighting the importance of thinking about the Indian Ocean from a specific place, I will show that the ocean is ingrained in a variety of local discourses, cross-secting with national and international rhetoric of, for instance, development and climate change. Notions of the ocean keep on changing over time. In some poems, the ocean is linked to changing transcontinental socialities: the poems form gestures at various cultural and historical layers.

Taking inspiration from recent scholarship that thinks about the ocean as a method, I will also make a difference between poetry *of* the sea, speaking about the sea, and poetry *as* the sea, which mimetically recreates the sea. In the latter, the ocean reappears as a concrete physical force of breaking waves, storms, a raw and wild, unfathomable force.

Session 2. Metamorphosis of Literature

Arabic and Vernacular Literacy in the Indian Ocean: Beyond the Sacred Script

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The map of the cultural influence of Arabic language and literacy in the Indian Ocean has become increasingly complex over the last decades due to the renewed interest for lesser studied Islamicate vernacular traditions, such as Divehi, Arabi Malayalam, or Arabu Tamil. These textual traditions constitute, along with the better studied Swahili, Dakani, and Malay, examples of the adoption of Arabic as a model for the “literization” of vernacular languages, or certain registers of those languages, in coastal areas around the Indian Ocean. Another instance of the use of Arabic literacy to create a new textual tradition is Middle Bengali. With this presentation, I will study the way Middle Bengali as a literary, poetic language was transcribed using the Arabic script. I will approach the issue comparatively with other vernacular traditions that underwent similar transformations around the Indian Ocean. I want to pay special attention to the genres of Middle Bengali literature represented in such manuscripts and test the limits of the argument of the adoption of Arabic as a sacred script used to Islamicize Indic textual traditions. My aim is not to dispute the fundamental role of religion in the making of such traditions, but to observe the non-religious consequences of the adoption of the Arabic episteme in Indic contexts.

Session 2. Metamorphosis of Literature

Trans-Indian Ocean Cultural Flows:

The Influence of Hindi Cinema in Hausa Popular fictions

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Littatafan soyayya (romantic books) are a popular genre of literature in northern Nigeria. Dozens of those books were published every year and read by thousands of people. While communication is fundamental to human life, self and society emerge in dialogue with others surrounding them. In this context, *littatafan soyayya* as a Hausa literature genre is not a closed phenomenon. It is produced and consumed in the context of various influences from other countries and languages. Based on their plots, *Soyayya* books produce a world where the imagined alternative of Indian romance and other cultural elements are incorporated within local Hausa reality. This paper examines the influence of Indian cinema on Hausa social life through the medium of Hausa literature, particularly *littatafan soyayya* (love stories). It analyzes how this pamphlet-type market literature, which began as recently as 1989, has created a popular reading public (literary movement) for willful, passionate heroes and heroines who emulate a style of love and sexual interactions depicted in Indian films.

Session 2. Metamorphosis of Literature

The Metamorphose of the Role of Sukesī/Kaikasī in the *Uttarakāṇḍa*:

**Re-visiting *Opera Jawa*, a Contemporary Indonesian Cinematic Reimagining of the
*Rāmāyaṇa***

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In 2006 the esteemed Indonesian film director Garin Nugroho released *Opera Jawa (Requiem from Java)*, one of his most ambitious and innovative works. The film was commissioned to commemorate the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth, presenting an adaptation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* narrative against the backdrop of contemporary Java. In Nugroho's reinterpretation the story ends with an unforeseen tragedy. Notably, Sukesī (Rāvaṇa's mother Kaikasī in Sanskrit) also takes a prominent role by presiding over a ritual to repose the dead.

Sukesī's story is told in the epic's seventh and final book *Uttarakāṇḍa*. Despite scholarly attributions of a later addition, the *Uttarakāṇḍa* has been integrated into the Javanese society since the ninth century. The text was translated into Old Javanese and episodes from the book, Rāvaṇa's birth and his deeds before his encounter with Rāma, became favorite literary themes within Javanese literature. Even after the advent of Islam around the 16th century, this thematic complex continued to evolve, taking on diverse trajectories within the realms of popular *wayang* (shadow puppet theater) and court literary traditions.

This paper embarks on the journey of tracing Sukesī's evolving role in the history of Javanese literature. By delving into this trajectory, the paper argues that the tradition upheld by the *Uttarakāṇḍa*, enriched through localized adaptations, retains its relevance within the contemporary Javanese society.

Session 3. Metamorphosis of Cultures and Thoughts

A Sonorous Philosophy of Swahili Culture:

Zein l'Abdin and the Swahili Art of "Arab *Taarab*"

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The Kenyan Swahili musician Zein l'Abdin (1932-2016) developed a distinctive brand of Swahili *taarab* music that combined elements of Arab and African musical forms. He honed this so-called "Arab" (*kiarabu*) style of Swahili *taarab* during the 1970s and 1980s in collaboration with renowned Swahili poet Ahmed Sheikh Nabhany (1927-2017), who was famously committed to "preserving" (*kuhifadhi*) Swahili poetry traditions through practices of archiving, curation, and composition. Anthropologist Kai Kresse (2007), drawing on indigenous Swahili conceptions of philosophy (*falsafa*), describes Nabhany's preservation work as a mode of "philosophizing" about Swahili culture. In this presentation, I describe how Zein l'Abdin enriched and expanded Nabhany's philosophizing through musical practice. Drawing on ethnographic data as well as musicological analyses, I argue that Zein situated musical style as a medium for exploring what, borrowing a coinage from Jean-Loup Amselle (1998), may be called the "originary syncretism" of Swahili culture.

Session 3. Metamorphosis of Cultures and Thoughts

**The Importance of the Representation of the Sea, Waves,
and Ships in the Works of Hamzah Fansuri**

Yumi Sugahara

Osaka University

Hamzah Fansuri was a Sufi scholar and poet of the Malay world active in the 16th century, and although he was the first literary figure to break the anonymity of Malay literature and make his name known, few sources are available to clarify his life. The date of his death is also inconclusive. However, there is no dispute from his works that he was well-versed in Arabic and Persian Sufi literature, in addition to his knowledge of the Qur'an, hadith, mysticism, and other Islamic sciences. Hamza criticized Sufism's conflation with pre-Islamic thought and practice in Aceh and promoted Ibn Arabi's worldview of oneness of being by developing a style of Malay poetry known as *syair*. *Syair* was composed in the Arabic script of Malay (Jawi), which became prominent around the 16th century, and many Arabic words were mixed in. Theological terms were not translated but were incorporated into the poems in their Arabic form, thus promoting the establishment of Islamic terminology in the Malay language. He represented Allah as the great ocean and man as the waves and foam, depicting the waves as being born from and returning to the sea, expressing the relationship between God and man and Sufi love. Although Hamza's works were the subject of criticism by Nurudin al-Raniri in the 17th century and were subject to book burning, they have since been widely known throughout the Malay world, from Aceh, to Java, and even to South Sulawesi. In this paper, I will discuss the motifs of waves, sea, and ships in his prose as well as in the well-known *syair*, which constitute his religious philosophy.

Session 3. Metamorphosis of Cultures and Thoughts

Sonic Waves across the Seas: Radio Ceylon as a Listening Hub

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This paper proposes to map out the affective story of creative defiance on the part of South Asian (and global) listeners of popular Hindi film music that was (and continues to be) broadcast over the Short Wave from a radio station called Radio Ceylon (RC), later known as Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC). The popularity of the Sri Lankan station grew also because there was a puritanical ban on such broadcasts from the official broadcasters, All India Radio, at the moment of India's arrival, between 1952 and 1957. Listeners in South Asia did not simply tune into the station as passive audience, but set up a long and creative collaboration with the radio jockeys who relished playing music from what would come to be known as the golden age of Hindi cinema. The government of India finally woke up to its folly of losing on the commercial revenue accruing from runaway hit parades like *Geetmala* to set up its own channel dedicated to film music. However, since the Indian government took another ten years to make the channel commercial, RC continued to hog the sonic limelight even though it lost its audiences to a more powerful Vividh Bharati by the 1970s. The paper brings several media forms – Bollywood, Radio, Print – to present a historical narrative of trans-national collaboration in non-aligned listening. Based on the available recordings of radio broadcasts, biographies of such legendary presenters as Ameen Sayani, Gopal Sharma and Manohar Mahajan, listeners' own letters and magazines, and ethnographic notes from a sonic pilgrimage undertaken with old listeners, the paper will argue that technology, unless forcibly thwarted, does help humans defy physical boundaries of sovereign nations. It is a layered history of diverse stories told across seas in musical packages designed by listeners inhabiting different corners of the earth, even as they sometimes dreamt of landing on the moon together.

Session 4. Metamorphosis of Languages

The Gypsy Languages of Iran: An Overview

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Apart from the two Indo-Aryan languages of Jaḍgālī and Kholosī, Iran hosts a number of Gypsy communities still preserving to some extent two varieties of their ancestral language, i.e. Romani and Domari. In spite of being under the heavy influence of Persian and Āzari Turkish, Iranian Romani (or /Romāno/, as it is called by its speakers) has still preserved its Indo-Aryan nature. However, traces of Iranian Domari can only be found in the jargons created by the Gypsy communities of Iran. These jargons, which are grammatically based on the languages of the host communities (mostly Persian dialects), provide us with a considerable number of Domari words of Indo-Aryan origin.

Session 4. Metamorphosis of Languages

Balochistan as a Linguistic Area

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Masica (1976) demonstrated that languages of South Asia belonging to different language families share several linguistic features such as verb serialization. While there are also proposals such as the Middle East as a linguistic area, little attention has been paid to historical Balochistan, which lies between South Asia and the Middle East. In this paper, we will point out that the languages of Balochistan, which include Balochi, an Indo-European language, and Brahui, a Dravidian language, share a peculiar syntactic construction. In the languages of this area, coordinating conjunctions such as *o* 'and' are usually omitted in sequential context. Furthermore, Balochi, Brahui and Dehwari share the asyndetic conditional, in which no conjunction such as *aga* 'if' is needed to form a conditional clause. The only marker of the conditional is the backshifting of the verb in the protasis, such as using a past form to express a present and future event or action. The asyndetic conditional is rare cross-linguistically, and we pursue the possibility that it is an areal feature not shared by the languages of the adjacent areas along the Indian Ocean.

Session 4. Metamorphosis of Languages

Traces of Indian Ocean Trade in the Swahili Language

Nobuko Yoneda

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Bantu-speaking people, whose ancestral homeland was near the border between current-day Cameroon and Nigeria, arrived around the east coast of Africa approximately 2000 years ago. A few hundred years later, a Bantu language they spoke incorporated the vocabulary of Arabic, the dominant language of Indian Ocean trade, and Swahili was formed. Therefore, Swahili emerged within an extensive Indian Ocean trading network. This illustrates how the Indian Ocean trade has significantly impacted the African continent, particularly East Africa. It is well known that Swahili contains many loanwords from Arabic, but it also contains many from Hindi, Persian, and other languages of the Indian Ocean Rim. In particular, Indian languages (mostly Cutchi/Sindhi and Gujarati) are the second most important source of loan words for Swahili. In addition to vocabulary, the Indian Ocean trade has also left its trace on the expression of Swahili. Furthermore, Swahili has been a contact language par excellence throughout its history, and this common history of external contacts is important for the identity of Swahili-speaking peoples. This presentation reviews the history of trade in the Indian Ocean Rim through the loan words and expressions of the Swahili language.

Session 4. Metamorphosis of Languages

Metamorphosis of *mukha* across Maritime Southeast Asia

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Serving as a maritime highway, the Indian Ocean has been facilitating the exchange of words, not to mention goods, ideas, and cultures. One of such examples is the Sanskrit body-part term *mukha* ‘mouth, face, countenance’. It has been borrowed into different Austronesian languages of Maritime Southeast Asia (e.g., Javanese *muka*, Malay *muka*, and Tagalog *mukha*) with different degrees of integration. This paper presents the case study of Tagalog *mukha* ‘face’ and demonstrates how this Sanskrit word was integrated and recruited for different lexical and grammatical purposes in this language. It is not only used for referring to a specific body part but also as a grammatical marker for epistemic modality. It is shown that this extended use of *mukha* is the most frequent use of this word in modern Tagalog and that it is well motivated by the cultural and physical role that the face plays in human societies. Furthermore, this paper highlights the influence of the Indian Ocean world on Philippine languages, which may not have been considered to be as important in the literature as the American and Spanish influences.