

## **REVIEW: SMRITI SRINIVAS, BETTINA NG'WENO, AND NEELIMA JEYCHANDRAN (EDS.), *REIMAGINING INDIAN OCEAN WORLDS*. ABINGDON: ROUTLEDGE, 2020.**

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The edited volume, *Reimagining Indian Ocean Worlds*, collects chapters that explore new ways of engaging with Indian Ocean studies, a remarkably evolving field of concern in recent academic discourse. The chapters have in common a dialogical and memoir-like disposition, and they harp on prospective methods of understanding human existence as essentially intersectional, heterogeneous, and interconnected. In substance, the volume insists to pre-empt a plain conjecture of the Indian Ocean as a physiographical unit that delineates and thus disconnects the continents and modern nation states which are centred landward rather than seaward. In effect, the oceanic spaces are considered intersecting terrains for people who experience the two different sides of the same waves that interweave their mutualities through narratives of movements, migrations, labours, translations, and more.

The introduction of the volume, combinedly written by the three editors, gives ample account of their intellectual scholarly trajectory towards this field, set against the backdrop of their biographical anecdotes. Their first-handed detailing of being exposed to multiple cultural landscapes and political borders gives a foundational validation for the work they took up. These anecdotes and the ethnographic methodologies of the authors in the wider volume promise to embark on investigating Indian Ocean worlds by stressing 'the importance of analysing the contemporary and contemporaneous' (13) as well as concerns about the new networks of memory and fashioning of identities as lived today.

The volume is divided into four parts that feature individual chapters by fourteen writers. The first part, titled 'Proximity and distance,' aims to mobilise the discussion relocating the keynote to an ocean-based looking glass, but without severing the ties with the geographical entities whose juxtapositions are crucial in the making of both. In the first chapter 'The Ends of the Indian Ocean: Notes on Boundaries and Affinities across Time,' Jeremy Prestholdt lays the foundational stone for the central thesis of the

book: the possibility of imagining the Indian Ocean not only as a geographical unit along with its porous boundaries, but also as a dynamic idea that has gained and lost relevance over time with its conceptualisations by both native and Eurocentric scholarship. Showcasing the maritime and terrestrial interfaces facilitated by the Indian Ocean, Prestholdt demonstrates how maritime dynamics turn into a confluence of interfaces with other world regions and insists on the necessity of imagining it as an integrated whole rather than from terrestrial-centred imaginations of the geography.

May Joseph, in her chapter titled 'Indian Ocean Ontology: Nyerere, Memory, Place,' brings in a vivid first-person account of her transregional upbringing tracing back to her present bonds with New York, childhood memories of East African country of Tanzania, and ancestral moorings with Kerala, South India. She recalls the pertinent question of citizenship erupted in the immediate aftermath of Tanzania's independence from British rule in 1961. Though she is still not out of the 1960's trauma of perpetual possibility of a forced eviction of Asians from Tanzania labelled as 'inauthentic African citizens,' she deliberates on the very practice of writing the past as a placemaking process, and as a 'vehicle for transacting between the archive and fabulation' (55). For her, the Indian Ocean foregrounds the intersectionalities among micro-histories, personal histories, and the meta-histories associated with placelessness. The imagery of sea functions as a mnemonic method to the claiming of one's past.

In the chapter 'The Littoral, the Container, and the Interface: Situating the Dry Port as an Indian Ocean Imaginary,' Ishani Saraf brings an interesting angle to the field with the idea of 'dry port' and points to the possibility of imagining a *port without a coast*. Centering her discussion on a Delhi-based scrap trade and the international, transregional transactions that actuate it via rails, roads, and airports, her work reconfigures a dry port necessitating a need for redefining our perception of Indian Ocean worlds in contemporary times. Nidhi Mahajan's chapter 'Seasons of Sail: The Monsoon, Kinship, and Labour in the *Dhow* Trade' argues that the social life of seafaring communities in Kachchh, western India, varies with the seasons. Even though they no longer use the wind for travel, the patterns of the monsoon are still determinant factors of their life and livelihood, administrative policies, movement, and stasis.

The second part of the volume, titled 'Landscapes, Oceanscapes, and Practices,' rather sets the focus to places and the processes of placemaking away from the ocean and coastal rims. In her chapter 'Elsewheres in the Indian Ocean: Spatio-Temporal Encounters and Imaginaries beyond the Sea' Nethra Samarawickrema explores new possibilities of perceiving the Indian Ocean from multiple vantage points and traces the 'elsewheres' as conceptualised by the sapphire miners and traders of Sri Lanka who

work in the mountainous hinterlands away from the sea, yet are considered among the communities of the Indian Ocean. Her work seeks to answer the question ‘Can one be an Indian Ocean actor while living in the mountains, having rarely seen the sea?’ in the affirmative. Their movements, quotidian occupational activities, and inland mobilities shape their identities as stakeholders of the larger Indian Ocean littoral geography. She concludes that Indian Ocean connectivities are experienced and imagined through emic senses of space and time that become folded into localised vocabularies and stories of ‘elsewheres.’ These elsewheres change, depending on the position from which one looks.

The chapter ‘Dicey Waterways: Evolving Networks and Contested Spatialities in Goa’ by Maya Costa-Pinto is a study of ‘off-shore’ casinos, demonstrating how they partake in negotiating new changes, reconstructions, and disruptions in the temporalities and spatialities of the former Portuguese colony. These water-based casinos turn to be a node in the myriads of trans-local and inter-cultural mutualities in the Indian Ocean and Lusophone worlds. Christian J. Doll’s chapter attends urban lives in Juba, the capital city of South Sudan, the world’s newest country. He argues that the quotidian ways of people’s inhabiting of the urban spaces constitute the informal, invisible, and social infrastructures in Juba, a locality far-flung from the Indian Ocean. Bidita Jawher Tithi looks in her chapter ‘Displacemaking with *shutki*: Living with Dead, Dried Fish as Companions’ into the socio-economic aspects of the coastal community in southeast Bangladesh who are involved in the dried fish industry.

The third part of the volume ‘Memory and Maps’ engages with the notion of interconnectedness among various locales in the Indian Ocean worlds animated by tropes of memory, maps, migratory circuits, neoliberal policies, and more. Pedro Machado’s chapter ‘Memory, Memorialization, and “Heritage” in the Indian Ocean’ is voluble about the act of remembering the past, memorialization and heritage discussions to examine how communities constitute their present, negotiating with their past through interpretations and assertions. He is particular about the way memories get suppressed within marginalised communities, and thus get invalidated through intervention of state institutions. His discussion, which spans across the thematics of slave trades and movement of indentured labourers in the oceanic scape, situates the analysis within the geographical space of East and South Africa and the Persian Gulf.

Hafeez Ahmed Jamali, in his chapter ‘Shorelines of Memory and Ports of Desire,’ brings in narratives of trade, slavery, and coerced migrations in the context of the Mekran Coast and Gwadar town in Bolochistan Province of Pakistan, proposing a new imaginative, multi-directional, and non-linear framework to conceptualise the

Indian Ocean worlds. His close look at the phenomenon of placemaking in these provinces enables the reader to conceive ‘Indian Ocean worlds as layered places whose social fabric and identity have been constituted by entanglements with significant “elsewheres,” real and imagined’ (165-66). Nicole Ranganath’s chapter ‘The Ship and the Anchor’ is interested in the discussion of mobility and affinity among the Sikh diaspora in Fiji, a place far away from the Indian Ocean and South Asia.

The fourth and the last part of the volume ‘Methods and Disciplines’ offers a closer look at certain ethnographic details from the field. In her chapter ‘Bibi’s *uchungu*,’ Laura Meek brings in a new angle to the scholarship on Indian Ocean worlds, departing from the dominant trope on movements and exchanges between the locales of Indian Ocean littoral communities as she reveals in the chapter how ‘the qualia that comprise a world may inhere in a single place, home, family, and even, body’ (209). Banking on extensive fieldwork in a remote region of Tanzania, she closely engages with the everydayness in the region in order to conceptualise their performances of self-fashioning mediated through the norms of medical care, culinary habits, and memory. Rather than discerning Indian Ocean worlds as mere inert containers, she argues that they should be taken as sites of ‘dynamic and nonlinear spatial-temporal relations’ (205) which are constantly re-modelled through intercorporeal and intergenerational becomings, congealing into worlds as certain practises, qualities, and meanings clot over time.

Pallavi Sriram’s chapter ‘*Marfa masti*’ examines the genre of *Marfa* dance from Deccan, Southeastern India, and tries to relocate their performative cultural moorings back to the temporal and geographical bearings of Hadramawt in the Arab world, and to African ties, and of course to the intrinsic South Indian performance arts. Being herself an expert in critical cultural studies and a dance performer, Sriram brilliantly maintains the Indian Ocean not as a border that demarcates inland geographies, rather as a continuum of the spatio-temporal dynamics that animate the mutualities of cultures and communities across time and space. Proposing to de-essentialize cultural identities, she succeeds in proposing a neo-notion of identity, locatedness, and mobility across the contemporary Indian Ocean. *Marfa*, for her, is ‘not just African, Arabic, Indian, or any hyphenated combination of the three. Rather, it is a set of embodied affiliations specifically between east Africa and south India, of dark skin and rhythmic resonance [...] as it brings together the sociality of Hadrami male authority, the nineteenth-century military histories of Sidi and Chaush in Hyderabad, and the gestures and rhythms of African practises, together with the distinctly South Indian flavour of *teen mar* or *dapankuthu*’ (222).

Though the volume makes a commendably wide-ranging approach to the nuances and particulars of the contemporary academic engagements with the Indian Ocean worlds, it is not rid of a few technical hitches. There is a conspicuous overlap in critical approaches of the authors. Inconsistencies between the chapters and sections are also concerning, though at a nominal level. Nevertheless, the volume *Reimagining Indian Ocean Worlds* is a remarkable addition to a body of scholarship that had thus far been engaging with the notions of sea and land as dichotomic entities rather than complementary elements in a universal continuum: of ideas, materials, time, and space.