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To cite this article: McFaul, Kelsey. “*Burcad Badeed* as Grounds and Method in Literary Expression of Somali Piracy.” *Journal of Indian Ocean World Studies*, 4 (2020), pp. 32-51.

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## ***BURCAD BADEED* AS GROUNDS AND METHOD IN LITERARY EXPRESSIONS OF SOMALI PIRACY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The emergence of maritime piracy in the western Indian Ocean captured global attention from 2007 to 2012, resulting in simplistic and racialized representations of piracy in news and other media. In 2011, two diasporic Somali writers published literary works intervening in this representation: Nuruddin Farah's novel *Crossbones* and Ubax Cristina Ali Farah's essay "Un sambuco attraversa il mare" ["A dhow is crossing the sea"]. This essay reads Farah and Ali Farah's alternative narratives of piracy through the Somali phrase *burcad badeed*, which both translate as 'sea bandits' or 'pirates.' As a method *burcad badeed* first historicizes contemporary piracy within the *longue durée* of the Indian Ocean world. Second, it draws on the ocean as an analogy and aggregator of dispersed forms of knowledge, thereby inviting comparative reading across conventional boundaries of generation, language, and form, and making visible practices of collective, embodied, and polyvocal knowledge production. Finally, *burcad badeed* complicates the distinctions between land and sea which undergird legal definitions of piracy to focalize particular landscapes: Namely the beach and the relationship between coast and hinterland. The beach foregrounds the ecological devastation to which piracy is a response, while the relationship between coast and hinterland frames practices of movement, complex racializations, and senses of belonging in Somalia and on the east African coast.

**KEYWORDS:** *Indian Ocean; Somalia; Nuruddin Farah; piracy; environmental humanities*

In the days before maritime piracy in the western Indian Ocean captivated global attention from 2007 to 2012, a character in Nuruddin Farah's 2011 novel *Crossbones* remarks 'there were no Somali pirates.' 'In those days,' the character, who is a pirate informant, continues, 'there were only these foreigner sea bandits robbing our seas...'. He uses the recently coined Somali phrase *burcad badeed*, which translates as "sea bandits," and which is commonly used as a sobriquet for "pirates."<sup>1</sup> The translation relies on analogy: Pirates are both *like* bandits operating outside state control, and *unlike* bandits because they work on sea rather than on land. The analogy draws on a long history of designating those outside the reach of the state bandits or pirates, a practice that began in the Indian Ocean in the 16th century among the Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch, which suggests such designations are a matter of perspective and relative power. The analogy also challenges the 'bandits at sea' trope within popular and academic literature on piracy, which locates pirates either in the romantic past, where they are 'seen as attractive figures,' or in the present, where they engage in 'brutal behavior...mass rape and murder.'<sup>2</sup> With the romantic periodization of 'in those days' and comparisons of *burcad badeed* to Robin Hood and 16th century Dutch '*watergeuzen*—"sea beggars"—[who] set aside their sea banditry...to bring an end to Spanish occupation,' the informant uses *burcad badeed* as a method to intervene in the global representation of Somali piracy. The true pirates in Somalia, the novel argues, are international ships engaging in illegal industrial fishing and toxic waste dumping, as well as their bandit counterparts on land in Somalia and Euro-America whose complicity is obscured in webs of finance, insurance, and media representation.

Ubox Cristina Ali Farah's essay "A dhow is crossing the sea" (2011) raises a second meaning for *burcad*: It is the 'white butter rising to the surface, priceless butter, white as the foam of the sea.'<sup>3</sup> Like the first, this meaning and its translation rely on analogy: Butter is both *like* the color of sea foam and *not* sea foam. In Somalia, butter is most often made from camel milk churned or shaken until it separates. The thick buttery curds are 'used as food which keeps for long periods and also as a lubricant for the skin, necessary to prevent cracking during the dry season.'<sup>4</sup> A poem which likens the Prophet to *burcad* draws out its 'soothing and lifesaving qualities,' a frontier of protection against the harsh elements.<sup>5</sup> Butter also signifies the wealth of pastoral communities, since 'milk and meat [are] distributed to kin groups [in return for assistance in] raising and maintaining the camel herds.'<sup>6</sup> *Burcad* as butter moves beyond the distinction between

1. Nuruddin Farah, *Crossbones* (New York: Penguin, 2011), 210.

2. C.R. Pennell, *Bandits at Sea: A Pirates Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 5.

3. Ubox Cristina Ali Farah, "A dhow is crossing the sea," *Wasafiri*, 26, 2 (2011), 20.

4. Abdisalam Yassin Mohamed, "Sufi Poetry in Somali: Its themes and imagery," (Unpublished PhD thesis: SOAS, University of London, 1977), 122.

5. Ibid.

6. Jatin Dua, *Captured at sea: Piracy and protection in the Indian Ocean* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020), 18.

land and sea that proliferates in piracy discourse to foreground particular geographies of encounter: The beach and the relationship between the coast and hinterland. On the beach, the effects of toxic waste dumping and other forms of ecological violence rise from beneath the surface of the sea. The relationship between coast and hinterland historicizes the conditions that create piracy and its social, political, and racial stakes.

This paper develops *burcad badeed* as the grounds and method for a comparative reading of Farah's *Crossbones* and Ali Farah's "A dhow" as activist texts seeking to intervene in and disrupt the global media discourse that conflates the 'plague of piracy' with 'a much deeper problem: Somalia itself.'<sup>7</sup> As activist texts, they are part of a tradition of socially and politically engaged African writing including the work of Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie<sup>8</sup> that represents societal struggles against oppression and situates them within the 'larger global context of imperialism and neocolonialism.'<sup>9</sup> *Burcad badeed*, as a Somali term inserted and untranslated within English and Italian writing, inverts colonial, and ongoing neocolonial, power relations. It bends the languages of empire in which piracy discourse is written to artistic and activist ends. These insertions disrupt 'the distinction between natural (or national) and foreign language' in order to imagine 'translingual space beyond it.'<sup>10</sup> *Crossbones* and "A dhow" intervene in the representation of Somalia as a (failed or extra-) national space associated with piracy by situating their narratives within the 'translingual space' of the Indian Ocean. The ocean does not function as an important landscape or site of narrative action, but rather as a site of symbolic memory. *Crossbones* evokes oceanic history and Somalia's place as 'a pearl of the Indian Ocean,' but the closest either brother gets to the sea is an airstrip 'less than half a kilometer away' where '[t]he breeze and the scent of the sea' brush their faces.<sup>11</sup> Ali Farah similarly writes that the 'sound of the ocean...is the leitmotiv of my childhood.'<sup>12</sup> Reading with *burcad badeed* as a method theorizes the ocean, not in Renisa Mawani's terms as 'both metaphor and materiality,' but as analogy and aggregator in the project of constructing alternative narratives about Somali piracy.<sup>13</sup>

7. Peter Eichstaedt, *Pirate State* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 2010), 4.

8. I do not intend to conflate Achebe's idea of the 'novelist as teacher' with Ngũgĩ's nationalist political activism or Ogundipe-Leslie's writing on 'the female writer and her commitment,' nor to suggest that activist African literature is only Anglo- or Italo-phone (cf. Odile Cazenave and Patricia Célérier, *Contemporary Francophone African Writers and the Burden of Commitment* [Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011]). Rather, African activist texts are a related constellation of social and political projects and aesthetic modes. *Crossbones* and "A dhow" are members of this tradition.

9. Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women & Critical Transformations* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1994), 65.

10. Simone Brioni, *The Somali Within: Language, Race and Belonging in 'Minor' Italian Literature* (Cambridge: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2015), 54.

11. Farah, *Crossbones*, 24, 90, 91.

12. Ali Farah, "A dhow," 20, emphasis mine.

13. Renisa Mawani, *Across Oceans of Law: The Komagata Maru and Jurisdiction in the Time of Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 21.

Reading with *burcad badeed* as method makes visible the ways *Crossbones* and “A dhow” locate the politics of contemporary Somalia within the context of translingual Indian Ocean space and its histories. First, doing so reframes conversations around contemporary maritime piracy away from a teleological temporality of barbarism and progress, nativism and civilization, and from an uncritical account of nation-state failure. It suggests that attempts to represent the ‘complex, multiscalar (unequal) power dynamics at work’ must understand the region on its own terms.<sup>14</sup> *Burcad badeed* evokes centuries of trade networks and kinship ties outside European hegemony, the contingent and deeply imperial history of definitions of piracy, and nonlinear narratives of migration and belonging. Second, the multiple meanings of *burcad badeed* highlight oceanic models of knowledge collection and production in *Crossbones* and “A dhow.” The Indian Ocean is a shared geographical space connecting nations, regions, and languages. As an analogy and aggregator of knowledge production, the ocean ‘makes visible a range of lateral networks...working beyond the templates of the nation-state and area studies’ that center ‘the postcolonial in the world of knowing.’<sup>15</sup> At the level of literary analysis, *burcad badeed* makes the case for putting texts in conversation across conventional disciplinary boundaries of generation, language, and form. At the level of the narratives themselves, *Crossbones* and “A dhow” perform a kind of polyvocality in which knowledge is constructed through a range of differently-situated informants in order to expose the limits of ‘any single form of witnessing and any single frame of reference’ and invite a dialogue of differing narratives.<sup>16</sup> Third, *burcad badeed* opens up space to complicate the land/sea binary and speak with more precision about the landscapes that structure Somali social and political life: the ecological devastation of the beach, and the relationship between hinterland pastoralists and coastal merchants.

#### ‘STRANDED LIKE FLOTSAM’: WRITING SOMALIA FROM THE DIASPORA

Born in Italian Somaliland in 1945, Nuruddin Farah is a prolific Somali writer in English. He has written several plays, nonfiction works, and at least twelve novels including the standalone *From a Crooked Rib* (1970) and *A Naked Needle* (1976), and three trilogies: the *Blood in the Sun*, *Variations on the Theme of an African Dictatorship*, and *Past Imperfect* cycles. Farah’s style is characterized by a highly realist mode that captures Somalia in the present at the time of writing. Critical scholarship often emphasizes the theme of exile in his works. In 1976 following the publication of *A Naked Needle*, Farah fell afoul

14. Byron Caminero-Santangelo, “Witnessing the Nature of Violence: Resource Extraction and Political Ecologies in the Contemporary African Novel,” in *Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities*, eds. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur, and Anthony Carrigan (New York: Routledge, 2015), 239.

15. Isabel Hofmeyr, “The Complicating Sea: The Indian Ocean as Method,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 32, 3 (2012), 584; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 55.

16. Caminero-Santangelo, “Witnessing Violence,” 238.



of the Siyad Barre regime and has since lived largely outside Somalia. 'I have dwelled in the dubious details of a territory I often refer to as the country of my imagination,' he writes, 'I have always considered countries to be no more than working hypotheses, portals opening on assumption of allegiance to an idea.'<sup>17</sup> One such idea, as critics have also noted, is the strong individualism displayed by his protagonists. Juliet Okonkwo notes that 'Farah's interest centers around the individual and [their] quest for personal and political freedom.' Said differently, Farah is concerned with the lack of rights of his characters, particularly women, whose individuality in terms of rationality, potential for self-development, and quest for freedom, is focalized.<sup>18</sup> Similarly Jacqueline Bardolph notes that the novels often challenge the traditional vertical relationships of fathers and sons integral to patriarchal, patrilineal, 'blood and bones' Somali kinship systems.<sup>19</sup> Rather, new bonds of kinship between siblings, adoptive families, divorcees and second spouses 'challenge the dominance of national, clan and gender identity from the sublimely absolute, unquestioned certainty of the self-reflexive individual.'<sup>20</sup>

Published in 2011, *Crossbones* concludes Farah's *Past Imperfect* series that began with *Links* (2005) and continued with *Knots* (2007). It is set in the brief period of relative stability between traditional political elites, the Union of Islamic Courts, and its minor splinter group al-Shabaab (referred to as Shabaab in the novel) before the U.S.-backed Ethiopian invasion of Somalia in late 2006. As later novels within Farah's corpus, the *Past Imperfect* cycle extends the 'unremitting focus on the individual' by paradoxically splitting and hybridizing its subjects to make visible 'the fissures rent in national and personal identity.'<sup>21</sup> All three novels focalize protagonists returning to Somalia from the diaspora and navigating relationships to homeland marked by the nonlinear time of trauma. For Jeebleh, the protagonist of *Links*, the traumatic rupture of his initial departure circles back in new forms whenever he returns. Cambara, the protagonist of *Knots*, returns to Somalia following trauma in the diaspora and stages repeated performances of a peace play. Malik and Ahl, the protagonists of *Crossbones*, are half-Somali brothers raised in the diaspora. Cut off from the traditional blood and bones culture that has structured Somali mobility in the Indian Ocean and beyond, they are 'stranded...like flotsam,' their relationship to homeland constructed aggregately, not through the vector of departure and return, but from media images, representations,

17. Nuruddin Farah, "Homing in on the Pigeon," *Index on Censorship*, 22, 5-6 (1993), 16-20. Rev. and rpt. as "Bastards of Empire: Writing and the Politics of Exile," *Transition*, 65 (1995), 26-35.

18. Juliet Okonkwo, "The Novelist as Artist: The Case of Nuruddin Farah," *Commonwealth Novel in English*, 5, 1 (1992): 49.

19. Jacqueline Bardolph, "Brothers and Sisters in Nuruddin Farah's Two Trilogies," *World Literature Today*, 72, 4 (1998), 727-732.

20. F. Fiona Moolla, *Reading Nuruddin Farah: The individual, the novel & the idea of home* (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), 10.

21. Moolla, *Reading*, 8. Simon Gikandi, "The Politics and Poetics of National Formation: Recent African Writing and Maps," *Emerging Perspectives on Nuruddin Farah*, ed. Derek Wright (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2002), 470.

and news stories.<sup>22</sup> The novel tells the story of their arrival in Somalia at the height of global fervor about the rise of Indian Ocean piracy. Their purpose is twofold: Malik, a journalist, aims to investigate and write a story that gets to ‘the bottom of the matter’ of Somali piracy, while Ahl is in search of his stepson, who he suspects has been recruited by Shabaab.<sup>23</sup> *Crossbones* follows both searches, which plot nonlinear, wandering, and disoriented trajectories. The novel concludes in limbo: Malik is hospitalized in a coma following a roadside bomb while Ahl and his stepson are reunited but stuck in a detention center in Djibouti. Harry Garuba suggests that the cycle’s *Past Imperfect* title is an intentional play on the ‘past perfect’ verb tense signifying completed action and conveys Farah’s ambivalence about whether Somalia can escape a repetitive temporality of trauma.<sup>24</sup> For F. Fiona Moolla, the novel’s ‘purgatorial’ conclusion suggests Farah’s own uncertainty about ‘the secular democratic project for Somalia of which the subject as individual is the heart’ and implies that ‘[t]hinking about the future [is] closed off.’<sup>25</sup>

If Farah represents a so-called first generation of Somali writers who came of age under colonialism and write in imperial languages, this paper puts him in conversation with a member of the second generation. Uxax Cristina Ali Farah was born in 1973 in Verona, Italy, to a Somali father and Italian mother.<sup>26</sup> She grew up in Mogadishu and left in 1991 at the start of the civil war that removed Siyad Barre from power. A poet, playwright, performer, teacher, and activist, she is also the author of two novels in Italian: *Madre piccola* (2006) and *Il comandante del fiume* (2014). Alongside writers like Igiaba Scego, Sirad Salad Hassan, and Shirin Ramzanali Fazel, Ali Farah is part of a cohort of female authors writing at the intersection of Italian and Somali identities. According to Simone Brioni, these writers’ peripheral or minor status within a major literary culture and language make visible the absence or fluidity of the boundaries nation-states, and their literatures, use to define themselves.<sup>27</sup> Their works center the condition of subjects typically resigned to the margins of Italian literature in terms of race, class, religion, and gender. At the same time, these writers insist that a Somali-Italian hyphenated identity does not link two comparable entities but rather defines a specific cultural encounter shaped by uneven power relations brought about Italian colonialism.

“A dhow is crossing the sea” (2011) was published by *Wasafiri* in its Summer 2011 Indian Oceans issue featuring pieces by Ananda Devi and Abdulrazak Gurnah. A

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22. Farah, *Crossbones*, 72.

23. Ibid., 365.

24. Harry Garuba, “Teacherly Texts: Imagining Futures in Nuruddin Farah’s *Past Imperfect* Trilogy,” *Boundary*, 2 (2017), 15–30.

25. Moolla, *Reading*, 184.

26. Uxax Cristina Ali Farah is referred to in the bibliography and in the text where relevant as Ali Farah, Uxax Cristina, since her middle name Uxax appears in the work under consideration, “A dhow is crossing the sea” (2011). However, it should be noted that in most of her literary works, including her first novel *Madre piccola* (2006), she is referred to as Cristina Ali Farah, and her middle name is sometimes spelled as “Ubah.”

27. Brioni, *Somali Within*.

blend of memoir, ethnography, and poetry, its ten sections are printed in side-by-side columns of Italian and English translation. “A dhow” weaves Ali Farah’s dreams, her memories of her grandmother, fragments of other people’s writing, and the stories of Somali migrant women in Italy into a mediation on female relationships with the sea and the constantly unfolding forms of (neo)colonialism and environmental disaster it witnesses. The piece concludes with a poem warning hopeful migrants that resettling in Italy may be more difficult than they imagine:

When you’ve crossed the sea, all you will find  
 is biscuits & fruit  
 where once your obelisk stood [...]  
 what’s left is a scar, gashed open in the concrete  
 traced and erased in front of the colonies  
 the memorial stone in the hold, the teeming sea

In what follows, I read *Crossbones* and “A dhow” as they unfold *burcad badeed* as a method for historicizing the Indian Ocean world, aggregating dispersed forms of knowledge, including the ecological, and theorizing geography as a means of structuring relation.

#### ‘A PEARL OF THE INDIAN OCEAN’

Both texts locate themselves within the Indian Ocean and are interested in Somalia’s place in it historically and in the present. The brothers in *Crossbones*, born in Yemen to a Somali father and Chinese Malayasian mother, possess a genealogical heritage that spans the Indian Ocean world. Malik’s name has resonances with Malik Ambar, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century sultan born in Ethiopia, transported by dhow to Yemen, Baghdad, and Mecca as a slave, before becoming a military general in the Indian Deccan.<sup>28</sup> In Malik’s freelance journalist coverage in present-day Afghanistan and the Middle East, he re-traverses much of the distance traveled by his ancient namesake and traces the ocean’s western littoral. The novel’s reference to ‘a Chinese female pirate, name of Mrs. Cheng’ (Ching Shih) inscribes his mother’s lineage and the ocean’s eastern half.<sup>29</sup>

In similar fashion, “A dhow” draws on the long history of trade in the Indian Ocean using ‘a song everybody knows.’ Ali Farah’s grandmother sings:

*doon bad mareysa, badda doon baa mareysa,*  
*mayddi bay sittaa, mayddi iyo malmal bay sittaa*

28. Omar H. Ali, *Malik Ambar: Power and Slavery across the Indian Ocean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

29. Farah, *Crossbones*, 73.



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 a dhow is crossing the sea, a dhow is crossing the sea,  
 carrying incense and perfumes, carrying incense and perfumes.<sup>30</sup>

The song evokes an Indian Ocean past when dhows ‘laden down with their cargo of hides and cattle’ sailed from Somalia to the Arabian Peninsula and ‘return[ed] full of dates and rice.’<sup>31</sup> Scholars of the pre-modern Indian Ocean have represented this world of ‘dense trade networks and kinship ties’ as not under the control of any single empire or sovereign and relatively peaceful with lucrative and unrestricted trade.<sup>32</sup> Recent scholarship has offered a corrective to this view, emphasizing the ‘historicity and constant slippage between piracy and other forms of commercial enterprise.’<sup>33</sup> For example, Sebastian Prange writes that the failure to recognize piracy in the premodern Indian Ocean world ‘is rooted in false preconceptions...derived from the history of Europe.’<sup>34</sup> The prevailing definition of piracy dated to Roman law and brought together acts of violence and predation with ‘the absence of political organization or affiliation.’<sup>35</sup> European sea bandits in the Indian Ocean almost always classed themselves as privateers, while ‘marauders with differing indigenous modes of political organization [were] classed as pirates.’<sup>36</sup> The key criterion by which piracy has been evaluated is organization...by this measure, historians have found Asian piracy wanting in comparison to the quality of maritime violence ascribed to the European interlopers.’ *Crossbones*’ reference to Ching Shih (who commanded over 300 junks in the China Sea and engaged in sea battles with the British, Portuguese, and the Qing empires) historicizes the long practice of empires calling those operating outside of their control ‘pirates,’ a practice Daniel Heller-Roazen traces to the turn of the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the Spanish and Portuguese denounced the arrival of the Dutch in the Indian Ocean ‘as pirates illegally sailing in Iberian waters.’<sup>37</sup> Grotius penned the *Mare Liberum* in response

30. Ali Farah, “A dhow,” 19.

31. Ibid.

32. Jatin Dua, “Dhow Encounters,” *Transition* 119 (2016), 52.

33. Jatin Dua, “A sea of trade and a sea of fish: piracy and protection in the Western Indian Ocean,” *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 7, 2 (2013), 354.

34. Sebastian Prange, “A Trade of No Dishonor: Piracy, Commerce, and Community in the Western Indian Ocean, Twelfth to Sixteenth Century,” *American Historical Review*, 116, 5 (2010), 1270.

35. Ibid. Specifically, Roman law referred to the pirate as *hostis humani generis* (enemies of humankind) and acts of piracy as ‘acts of violence done upon the ocean...by a body of men acting independently of any *politically organised society*.’ As Jody Green notes, those who are *hostis humani generis* are “not only at war with the whole world but...a monstrous collectivity lurking in the interstices of the global map, threatening and preying on their more properly human counterparts” (Jody Green, “*Hostis humani generis*,” *Critical Inquiry* 34, 4 [2006], 688). Media representations playing up the monstrous nature of piratical activity participate in the construction of Somalis as racial others, or further, as nonhumans.

36. Ibid., 1271.

37. Daniel Heller-Roazen, *The Enemy of All: Piracy and the Law of Nations* (New York: Zone Books, 2009), 120; Dua, “Dhow,” 52.

in 1609, drawing from the classical elemental opposition between land and sea to distinguish between waters in close proximity to and therefore defensible by the state (today called territorial waters) and the open oceans (common property).<sup>38</sup> Territorial waters, which can extend as far as 12 nautical miles from a given coastline, have been institutionalized in the United Nations Law of the Sea and are evoked by *Crossbones* to reframe maritime piracy as a ‘kind of a coastal guard to protect our sea resources.’<sup>39</sup>

In addition to this historical scholarship, scholars working on modern piracy in Somalia must contend with contemporary accounts that link the upsurge of piratical activity as ‘the maritime ripple effect of anarchy on land... stemming from the absence of a centralized government in Somalia.’<sup>40</sup> Abdi Ismail Samatar, Mark Lindberg, and Basil Mahayni contextualize Somali actions as defensive responses to the ‘resource piracy’ of illegal fishing and waste dumping by international ships, while Roland Marchal highlights the enterprise’s entrepreneurial nature and its links to shore-based political authorities.<sup>41</sup> Jatin Dua contextualizes this tension to the Barre regime, which as part of Scientific Socialism extended the Somali territorial sea from 12 to 200 nautical miles, launched a campaign to ‘transform nomads into fishermen and create a vibrant fishing sector,’ and established a licensing system to patrol overfishing.<sup>42</sup> Pastoralists who resisted their transformation into fishermen ‘loaned out fishing equipment and boats’ while licenses were policed by coastguards on armed skiffs.<sup>43</sup> The profits were divided among the crews, pastoralists, and authorities, underscoring ‘the close relationship between profits from the “sea of fish” and political authority on land.’<sup>44</sup>

“A dhow” registers these complexities by cataloguing the different ships visible from the offing, ‘the visible space of offshore waters beyond near shore navigational hazards’ where, Jennifer L. Gaynor notes, most maritime piracy occurs.<sup>45</sup> In addition to the historical dhows evoked by the song, there are the contemporary dhows ‘jam-packed...[with] people dressed up to the hilt, dripping jewelry’ which capsize ‘right next to the coast;’ the high-powered patrol boats that rescue them; the large fishing vessels; and international freighters.<sup>46</sup> The comparison of leaky overloaded dhows and high-powered patrol boats maps distinctions between those who can travel by sea with little danger (those aligned with nation-states and international coalitions) and

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38. Ibid., *Enemy*, 120.

39. Farah, *Crossbones*, 211.

40. Dua, “A sea,” 355.

41. Abdi Ismail Samatar, Mark Lindberg, and Basil Mahayni, “The Dialectics of Piracy in Somalia: The Rich Versus the Poor,” *Third World Quarterly*, 31, 8 (2010), 1377-1394.

42. Dia, *Captured*, 52.

43. Ibid., 53.

44. Ibid., 56.

45. Jennifer L. Gaynor, “Piracy in the Offing: The Law of Lands and The Limits of Sovereignty,” *Anthropological Quarterly*, 85, 3 (2012), 817.

46. Ali Farah, “A dhow,” 19, 23.

those who live a precarious existence at its edge. Similar distinctions apply to Somali sailors who joined the English navy as seaman and local fishermen. ‘Seamen were not real adventurers like fishermen,’ an informant tells Ali Farah, precisely because of their ability to cross the offing with ease, ‘on board very large ships there’s no need to know the sea.’<sup>47</sup> Indian Ocean literary scholar Tina Steiner draws on Paul Gilroy to theorize the ship as a chronotope that symbolizes the ‘moving to and fro between nations, the crossing of multiple borders...a linguistic, intellectual and political transnationalism [and] the site of slavery’ that characterizes the Indian Ocean world and its literature.<sup>48</sup> Critics have noted the ways Indian Ocean fiction employs travel itineraries, trade routes, and chronotopes like the ship or the beach to construct Indian Ocean space as an overlapping and co-constitutive palimpsest that ‘reflects and creates a particular set of relations’ between places formed and re-formed over time.<sup>49</sup> Zanzibari novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah writes of the effect of this multiplicity on the production of knowledge (learning from the British colonial school, the mosque, the streets, home):

With time, dealing with contradictory narratives in this way has come to me to seem a dynamic process...Out of it came the energy to refuse and reject, to learn to hold onto reservations that time and knowledge will sustain. Out of it came a way of accommodating and taking account of difference, and of affirming the possibility of more complex ways of knowing.<sup>50</sup>

Gurnah performs the spirit of *burcad badeed*, or a method of producing knowledge in which multiple perspectives, literary expressions, times, places, and languages are held in dialogue. The aim of *burcad badeed* is not to theorize a consolidated Indian Ocean world or to theorize a consolidated Indian Ocean or an ‘Indian Ocean literature,’ but rather to hold in tension the many literary expressions of the ocean in a constellation of relation that does not unify but is knit together by its very particularity and difference.<sup>51</sup> I will now turn to how *Crossbones* and “A dhow” think aggregately, indeed oceanically, about how they produce knowledge about piracy.

#### ‘THE BOTTOM OF THE MATTER’: INFORMANTS AND ABSENCE

Arriving in Mogadishu, Malik, the central character in *Crossbones*, is confident he can

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47. Ibid., 22.

48. Tina Steiner, “Navigating Multilingually: The Chronotope of the Ship in Contemporary East African Fiction,” *English Studies in Africa*, 51, 2 (2008), 51.

49. Charne Lavery, “White-washed Minarets and Slimy Gutters: Abdulrazak Gurnah, Narrative Form and Indian Ocean Space,” *English Studies in Africa*, 56, 1 (2013), 121.

50. Abdulrazak Gurnah, “Writing and Place,” *World Literature Today*, 78, 2 (2004), 28.

51. I am thinking here with Édouard Glissant’s idea of relation. Glissant theorizes the Caribbean as ‘a sea that diffracts’ and through subterranean flows ‘spaces itself out in the world.’ ‘Relation’ connects the oceans, their people, and their poetics to one another while maintaining their geographical and historical specificity. (Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, translated by Betsy Wing [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997], 33, 1).

navigate the city and ‘write articles about the ancestral land he has never seen’ in order to get to ‘the bottom of the matter’ of Somali piracy.<sup>52</sup> Reading through *burcad badeed* foregrounds piracy’s perspectival nature and its subterranean connections to global power. Malik develops a coterie of informants: a financier, a middleman, a human trafficker, a former pirate, and a money launderer who describe a global web of intertwined European, American, Arab, and African interests. According to Malik’s interlocutors, ‘unchecked robbery’ of illegal international fishing vessels ‘has caused joblessness among fishermen and led them to piracy. Somali fishermen appealed to the United Nations and the international community to help rid them of the large number of foreign vessels, estimated in 2005 at about seven hundred, engaged in unlicensed fishing off the country’s southern shores.’<sup>53</sup> Investigation by the UN revealed an additional factor: ‘Not only were these vessels plundering Somalia’s marine resources but many of them were also dumping rubbish—nuclear and chemical waste.’<sup>54</sup> This foreign meddling creates the conditions for Somali sea banditry and also shapes its afterlives. A middleman explains that when a ransom is paid:

First the negotiators of the insurers based in London, the middleman based in Abu Dhabi, and the intermediaries in Mombasa have each taken their huge cuts, so that the final payment is reduced to a pittance from which the funder financing the hijacking still has to pay the pirates holding the ship.<sup>55</sup>

A money launderer concurs that payments are staggered by ‘the banks in London where all the piracy funds ended up...so as to deflect attention from large amounts of money changing hands in the post-9/11 world.’<sup>56</sup> Reading through *burcad badeed* clarifies *Crossbones*’ linguistically-crafted claims about piracy: first, ‘there [are] no Somali pirates...only these *foreigner* sea bandits robbing our seas.’<sup>57</sup> Second, Somalia is plagued not only by foreign sea bandits but traditional bandits on land, the international insurers and financiers. *Burcad badeed* doubles back on itself, its function as analogy broadening the web of complicity to include land *and* sea actors, in and outside Somalia. Finally, this double displacement frees the so-called Somali pirate from the trap of this global narrative and helps explain the absence of (traditionally understood) pirate characters in the novel. The figure of the Somali pirate is present only in the title *Crossbones* as the figurative X, marking the spot of absence and negation.

Malik’s coterie of informants represents the polyvocal knowledge production the novel endorses. While none of his interlocutors are ocean-going, they represent

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52. Farah, *Crossbones*, 11, 365.

53. Ibid., 73.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid., 104.

56. Ibid., 360.

57. Ibid., 210, emphasis mine.

a kind of oceanic aggregation that brings ‘into conversation multiple perspectives based on differing frames of reference and kinds of expertise.’<sup>58</sup> *Crossbones* suggests that only this ‘democratic plurality’ of perspectives can shed any light on ‘the bottom of the matter.’<sup>59</sup> The novel afterward performs on the formal level what Malik’s informants do within the text: Farah includes a list of media accounts, organizational reports, and academic articles from around the world which he ‘read, consulted, or borrowed from.’<sup>60</sup> Byron Caminero-Santangelo writes that this acknowledgement represents Farah’s conviction that putting such a range of situational knowledges, ethical commitments, and perspectives in dialogue makes them a ‘collective means’ for bringing ‘into relief the complex, multiscalar (unequal) power dynamics at work, and [bringing] attention to the ways different kinds of discourses work to produce certain kinds of knowledge and suppress others.’<sup>61</sup>

Thinking with *burcad badeed*, this time in its meaning as butter, raises the things suppressed by the novel to the surface. At the level of the story, Malik’s knowledge collection makes clear to him the ways media narratives from the Global North are invested in suppressing the real ‘bottom of the matter,’ the networks of complicity beneath their surface. As Caminero-Santangelo quotes Pico Iyer, the novel is at one level ‘about “the limitations of journalism” and challenges “calm overviews and confident predictions we might expect from an expert.”’<sup>62</sup> Malik’s own participation in journalistic representation both convicts and immobilizes him. He is haunted by dreams, fatigue, and an over-extended sense of responsibility:

It has fallen to him to tell the world what has occurred...In his head, he drafts an obituary of ‘the unappreciated journalist’ on the move... A twinge of regret scratches inside Malik’s head, squeakily reminding him that he hasn’t yet published his piece about [his guide’s] murder. Then a portal of sorrow opens in the active side of his brain, and he worries that he, too, may die before he is able to write.<sup>63</sup>

He repeatedly expresses regret that his reporting is not deeper or more complex, and he treats the pieces he writes as fragmentary artifacts floating between the ‘hereness’ of the experience and the ‘thereness’ of publication, storing articles as drafts ‘and then [putting] them away for the time being.’<sup>64</sup> The novel concludes with Malik in a coma, his work largely unpublished. *Crossbones* functions in a similar fashion on

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58. Caminero-Santangelo, “Witnessing Violence,” 239.

59. Derek Wright, *The Novels of Nuruddin Farah*, rev. ed. (Bayreuth: Pia Thielman and Eckhard Breiting, 2004), xix.

60. Farah, *Crossbones*, 383-385.

61. Caminero-Santangelo, “Witnessing Violence,” 239.

62. *Ibid.*, 236.

63. Farah, *Crossbones*, 335.

64. *Ibid.*, 225.



the metanarrative level: the proliferation of witnesses speaking for the pirate renders him illegible within the discourses of nation, law, and individual in which global media, and the novel itself, traffics. Moolla writes that *Crossbones* returns to the origin of the realist novel in its ‘documentary or journalist forms’ in order to represent ‘a contemporary Somali reality...which so far outstrips the country of his imagination.’<sup>65</sup> But the documentary form runs up against its own limitations. As a novel firmly rooted in the present at the time of writing, *Crossbones* contains little temporal range to the past or future, thereby limiting its sources of knowledge and constraining its ability to represent the long histories of (neo)colonialism, capitalist expansion, and environmental disease that undergird contemporary realities.

#### ‘WAVES DON’T SWALLOW’: EMBODIED AND ENVIRONMENTAL TRAUMA

Although “A dhow” mentions piracy just twice (both in connection to contemporary pirate stronghold Eyl Badey), the story treats the ocean as analogy and as aggregator in at least two ways: the collection of informants who produce knowledge, and the entangled temporalities of ecological violence to which *Crossbones* gestures but cannot fully explore. Elizabeth DeLoughrey writes that the typically gendered nature of maritime narratives privileges ‘a shipload of male travelers [and] maritime fraternity’ in contrast to a ‘fluid, maternal sea.’<sup>66</sup> *Crossbones*, while not a traditional maritime narrative, is almost entirely male-voiced, with the few female characters hovering at the periphery. In contrast, “A dhow” collects the voices of Somali women living on or near the water: Ali Farah’s grandmother, the Somali women she works with on a memory-collecting project in Italy, and herself. What emerges within this female ensemble are different embodied and gendered modes of relating to the ocean. For those standing on the beach who ‘look out at the horizon and point at the passing sails or motorboats...[wondering] how big they might be, how many will fit in their holds,’ the sea has an aspirational quality, the possibility of a journey in the offing.<sup>67</sup> Such journeys are approached with caution – ‘is [it really] necessary to travel that far’ – within the context of long histories of loss and trauma at sea: Farah’s grandmother, for instance, ‘had always hated the sea,’ ever since her husband, ‘a young trader...had died at sea when she was pregnant with her first daughter.’<sup>68</sup> Dahabo, a woman from Baidoa, tells the story of her shipwreck and rescue by a patrol boat and patrol men who, ‘seeing that they were freezing, helped them out of their clothes’:

[Standing] by the sea with her hands on her breasts, she felt ashamed because

65. Moolla, *Reading*, 182

66. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, “Island writing, Creole cultures,” in *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature, Volume 2*, ed. Ato Quayson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 815.

67. Ali Farah, “A dhow,” 23.

68. *Ibid.*, 18, 19.

she wasn't wearing her bra...with her hands on her breasts, she says this to all the women, because she herself won't ever again enter the sea, but if any of them should decide, if any one of them should ever journey across the sea, whether on a dhow or otherwise, she'd better remember to put on her bra.<sup>69</sup>

Dahabo repeats the act of covering herself and the advice to wear a bra again and again, the exposure of her naked body under floodlights and a male gaze registering a deeper trauma than almost drowning within sight of land.

Even when rejecting it, these embodied relations to the sea suggest the impossibility of language to articulate the true depths of loss. The female asylum seekers Ali Farah works with reflect on 'how many Italian words did not have an equivalent in Somali and how, conversely, many Somali words existed that were impossible to translate into Italian.'<sup>70</sup> For *avventura* (Italian, 'adventure'):

In the Italian-Somali dictionary we find *sursuur*. *Sursuur baan galay* means 'I have been in danger'...Someone suggests *dalmar*, to journey across foreign lands, or better still, *badmar*, to journey across the sea...[A] young woman uses the word *burbur*, the shattering to name the reason that has pushed her to enter the journey.<sup>71</sup>

*Burcad badeed* as method has already alerted us to the multiplicity of translations, as well as the ways translation is always an approximation or analogy. Commenting on her first novel, Ali Farah says she included untranslated Somali words 'for their strong poetic potential and untranslatable meaning.'<sup>72</sup> The *avventura* problem pushes this further, suggesting that untranslatability can be the grounds for a powerful translation method: 'words that just touched the surface, taking us into directions we had not foreseen...[built] a sort of association of ideas starting from an untranslatable word.'<sup>73</sup> Rather than reducing meaning, *burcad badeed* as translation method multiplies signifiers and enriches connections, even as it accounts for the surface quality of language that is unable to articulate the fullness of meaning registered in the body. For instance, the woman who uses *burbur*, the shattering, walked to the sea with her feet wrapped in plastic bags filled with 'dried leaves and cloth.' Years later 'she can still feel [thorns and glass shards] lodged deep in the sole of her foot.'<sup>74</sup>

Reading the shattering through *burcad badeed* makes visible, or translates, the *longue durée* of ecological violence that has shaped contemporary realities in Somalia. "A dhow" makes use of histories, memories, and dreams to express the

69. Ibid., 24, italics mine.

70. Ibid., 21.

71. Ibid., 21, 23.

72. Brioni, *Somali Within*, 55.

73. Ali Farah, "A dhow," 21.

74. Ibid., 22.

continually unfolding forms of (neo)colonialism, extraction, and capitalist expansion, their entangled temporalities and human and non-human victims. The concluding poem mentions an obelisk, an Ethiopian artifact stolen by Italian colonial forces in East Africa in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and returned in pieces in 2005, suggesting the ways colonialism's afterlives have shaped the present. The obelisk is a symbol of the uneven history of commodity extraction and citizen repatriation between Italy and its former colonies, as well as of Italy and Ethiopia's founding amnesias as modern nation-states, while Somalia struggles to attain this status. Alongside colonial afterlives, in the 1980s, aid money gifted Mogadishu 'a hyper-modern automated slaughterhouse' and blasted 'a large part of the coral reef' to enlarge the harbor.<sup>75</sup> What was intended as a 'supposedly civilizing capitalist development' backfired on multiple scales.<sup>76</sup> The 'beheaded cattle and blood channeled off in the direction of Mecca' reordered economic relationships and polluted a rich fishing coastline, while Dua notes that following the civil war, large 'commercial shipping gradually abandoned the ports of Somalia, a process that accelerated with the rise of maritime piracy from 2007 onwards.'<sup>77</sup> Rob Nixon calls this the slow violence of environmental catastrophe, the layered attritional 'violence of delayed destruction...typically not viewed as violence at all.'<sup>78</sup> Slow violence takes place gradually and often invisibly and poses challenges for representation, since it is difficult to plot and give 'shape to formless threats whose fatal repercussions are dispersed across space and time.'<sup>79</sup>

While what exists below the surface of the sea is difficult for the narrative to access, "A dhow" uses nonhuman oceanic life to foreground the evolving nature of environmental disaster. What was before ascribed to *jinni* (spirits) and the 'cannibal mermaids of the cliffs' is today the work of 'the most terrible, the most voracious sharks,' thereby expanding the register of who is affected by ecological violence beyond the human to include *jinni*, mermaids, sharks, and a range of fish and shells.<sup>80</sup> With this exception, "A dhow" mostly represents environmental disaster on the beach, where the temporality of Ali Farah's childhood memories are juxtaposed with present-day realities to show how slow violence defamiliarizes the familiar. Ali Farah describes the Indian Ocean in relation and comparison to the Mediterranean:

[M]y love took me there, to Sabaudia, south of Rome, even though he was afraid I might be disappointed. The Tyrrhenian Sea is nothing like your ocean, he said to me again and again. I started running up and down the beach, whirling around in the air....Some laughed at me for thinking the tide would swell in a

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75. Ibid., 20.

76. Caminero-Santangelo, "Witnessing Violence," 226.

77. Dua, "Dhow," 57.

78. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 2.

79. Ibid., 10.

80. Ali Farah, "A dhow," 20.

matter of hours. Don't put your town near the water, or the sea will sweep it away. In Italy, they would say to me, waves don't swallow everything up. In Italy, the sea won't even recede.<sup>81</sup>

In a comparative analogy, the Tyrrhenian Sea (the part of the Mediterranean off the coast of western Italy) defamiliarizes the Indian Ocean beach, which then appears as the site of what the ocean expels: 'once swelling with sponges and shells, full of pools rainbowed with butterfly fish, [it] now only threw back amputated bodies and the smell of death.'<sup>82</sup> The familiar Mogadishu beach of Ali Farah's memory, full of 'red shells and saturated sponges, a secret hollow of jellyfish and sand dollars,' becomes an unfamiliar site of violence in the present in which 'children who had run into the sea chasing a beach ball... [were] swallowed up by the waves in a blink of an eye.'<sup>83</sup> Writing of Muizenberg Beach in South Africa, literary critic Meg Samuelson suggests that the beach is a space for thinking about 'the temporality of waste and ruination;' cultivated as an earthly paradise, the beach is also a harbinger of the extent to which the planet has been laid to waste and the futures of humans are tied up with the forms of life deemed 'nonhuman.'<sup>84</sup> While "A dhow" does not theorize the Anthropocene from the Somali beach *per se*, it registers the slippage between humans and nonhuman actors and environments. As the woman can still feel 'thorns and glass shards...lodged deep in her feet,' Ali Farah feels her own feet 'turn into roots and iodine, [her] bones [growing] from salt and silica.'<sup>85</sup> Human bones dissolve and become part of the ecology of the beach, knitting the human and nonhuman together in the collective chronotope of the beach's 'waste and ruination.'<sup>86</sup>

'What genre,' Samuelson wonders, 'might enable [us] to think *with* the beach and its intricate and imbricating modes of ruination?'<sup>87</sup> "A dhow" navigates the challenge of articulating the temporality of slow violence and the networks of neocolonial power that underpin it. It experiments with expressing and bearing witness at the level of form through language and untranslatability, fragments, and white space. The story's parallel Italian and English columns are intermixed with Somali words that remain untranslated in both versions, a choice that Ali Farah understands to trouble the 'relationship of power between languages.... By giving back to Italian these [Somali] words that have been chewed and destructured, I felt like I was suggesting an inversion of power.'<sup>88</sup> Hegemonic power is also undermined by the piece's organization into

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81. Ibid., 20-21.

82. Ibid., 20.

83. Ibid., 20.

84. Meg Samuelson, "Beach," *Somatosphere: Science, Medicine, Anthropology* (2018), 4.

85. Ali Farah, "A dhow," 20, 22.

86. Samuelson, "Beach," 1.

87. Ibid., 5.

88. Quoted in Brioni, *Somali Within*, 54.

numbered fragments (three sets of three sections plus a poem). What May Joseph calls ‘the fragments of cultures in transition, of peoples adrift...in the debris of trans-oceanic contact...and the ebb and flow of global social exchange’ create a rhythmic and nonlinear motion which works like the tide to erode consolidated structures like the harbor and the factory.<sup>89</sup> At the same time “A dhow” endeavors to ‘hold together...a range of competing affects’ and sources of knowledge in their multiple embodied and gendered forms.<sup>90</sup> *Burcad badeed* is thereby a double intervention that deconstructs hegemonies and creates relation through a multiplicity of female informants in order to express a richer sense of the temporality and embedded histories of Somali politics of the present.

In addition, the literary form that *burcad badeed* makes visible also suggests the voice of the ocean itself as a nonhuman actor bearing witness to and experiencing trauma. The rhythms and back-and-forth movements of the text evoke the tides. The sea has swallowed many bodies—human, plant, animal—in its long history, but now ‘[throws] back amputated bodies and the smell of death.’<sup>91</sup> If, as trauma theorists suggest, swallowing is the ultimate form of denial, the ocean’s introjection (refusal to swallow and literal throwing back) is the story’s method of claiming subjectivity for the ocean as a nonhuman actor with agency and of witnessing nonhuman responses to ecological violence.<sup>92</sup>

#### ‘AN ABUNDANCE OF MILK’: GEOGRAPHIES OF PIRACY

We have seen how “A dhow” constructs the particular location of the beach as a contact zone between land and sea and different times to represent ecological devastation. Finally, this article turns briefly to the ways *Crossbones* and “A dhow” further complicate the land/sea binary through attention to two regionally specific landscapes: the coast and the hinterland. On first read, *Crossbones* appears to maintain a simple land/sea binary inherited from the classical legal distinction of things over which humans had patrimony (land) and those outside that system (air, sea). Even what might be considered piratical activity in *Crossbones* is displaced from sea to land.<sup>93</sup> In the novel’s opening scene, a young Shabaab recruit commandeers a house like a pirate might a ship: leaping over the fence, he corrals crew members (an elderly man whom he imprisons in the bathroom) and establishes control of all levels before radioing his superior BigBeard, a Black Beard figure whose ‘purple keffiyeh...folded almost in quarters, and wound around his forehead’ and the red and black versions

89. May Joseph, “Old Routes, Mnemonic Traces,” in *Cultures of Trade: Indian Ocean Exchanges*, eds. Devleena Ghosh and Stephen Muecke (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 62.

90. Samuelson, “Beach,” 5.

91. Ali Farah, “A dhow,” 20.

92. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis, volume 1*, ed. and trans. by Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 127-128.

93. Margaret Cohen, writing of the Anglo-American literary tradition, refers to this impulse to treat oceanic and maritime themes as allegories of processes back on land “hydrophasia.”



of his underlings are analogs for the flags a pirate ship uses to deceive victims.<sup>94</sup> The spectacle concludes when BigBeard extracts the contact information of the old man's wealthy son to demand a ransom and oversees a shipboard execution:

YoungThing shoots, using the silencer. As the bullet strikes Dhoorre in the forehead, YoungThing is certain that he hears a seabird cawing, only he cannot interpret what it is saying, or whether it is foretelling his own imminent death. Dhoorre falls off his chair, dropping to the floor...From this posture alone, you can't tell if the old man is dead. He lies on his back, head to one side, eyes not wholly closed, his position suggesting sleep.<sup>95</sup>

The screeching seabird and the motion of Dhoorre's falling body are land-based echoes of maritime executions represented in global media stories of Somali piracy. *Crossbones'* persistent focalization of action on land demonstrates what Jennifer L. Gaynor calls the 'unevenly rigged' relation between 'those aboard ship and those on shore...[that] define[s] what counts as piracy and [weighs] in on who may be called a pirate.'<sup>96</sup> Designations of piracy apply equally to those on land, as one of Dua's informants suggests when he likens his 'motorized sailing vessel (MSV)-class dhow...to a camel.'<sup>97</sup> Boats are the camels of the sea, and 'the sea, as pastoral commons, is a set of desert paths traversed on boats.'<sup>98</sup> Camels function as an analogy for bandits at sea: 'Raiding communities built around capture and systems of redistribution and incorporation' reframe maritime piracy as a transposition of 'pastoral logic' to a new element.<sup>99</sup>

*Burcad badeed*, the foamy butter on the top of camel's milk, helpfully structures this relationship between the coast and hinterland. Like the term itself, pastoralists have migrated from the hinterland to the coast under Scientific Socialism and were resettled in 'coastal fishing cooperatives along the coast...at 'Eel Haamed, Eyl, Adale, and Barawa.'<sup>100</sup> The fisheries were short-lived, not least because fishermen 'traditionally occupied the lowest rungs of Somali society' and pastoralists loaned out equipment rather than working it themselves.<sup>101</sup> The workforce migrated fluidly into the protection economy as 'entrepreneur, coast guard, protector and pirate.'<sup>102</sup> YoungThing's choice to pursue land-based raiding with BigBeard rather than piracy, to which his older brother recruited him 'without success,' might be chalked up to the relatively positive

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94. Farah, *Crossbones*, 63.

95. *Ibid.*, 67.

96. Gaynor, "Piracy," 821.

97. Dua, *Captured*, 37.

98. *Ibid.*, 39.

99. *Ibid.*

100. Dua, "A se of trade," 363.

101. *Ibid.*, 362.

102. *Ibid.*, 366.

class position of land-based raiders *vis-à-vis* herdsmen-turned-fishers-turned-pirates.<sup>103</sup>

Alternatively, YoungThing may have internalized the coastal urban prejudice that defines itself in opposition to both pastoralists and coastal working communities. In an essay on Tamarind Market in Mogadishu, Farah writes of the ‘vexed’ relationship between the urban cosmopolitans of the capital city and the rural pastoralists outside it.<sup>104</sup> As early as the 10th century, Mogadishu was a small, prosperous city-state filled with people ‘from elsewhere: Iran, India, and Arabia.’<sup>105</sup> Tamarind Market, which takes its name from the Arabic words ‘timir and Hind, meaning “dates” and “India,”’ was the symbol of this cosmopolitanism and Mogadishu’s place in the Indian Ocean world.<sup>106</sup> Parallel to the city resided ‘a pastoralist community made up entirely of Somalis...peripheral to the city’s residents and their cosmopolitan way of life’ who were twice responsible for sacking the market and the city, once between 1530 and 1580 and once in 1991.<sup>107</sup> Farah’s attitude toward the ‘disenfranchised herdsmen’ who ‘demolish[ed] the idea of cosmopolitanism’ is representative of the disdain with which multiracial urbanites regard the black Africans ‘native’ to the hinterland. In *Crossbones*, Malik and Ahl’s father leaves the city after his cosmopolitan romance with their mother for the ‘rangelands of the North, tending hundreds of camels he had bought with the help of the herdsmen in his employ.’<sup>108</sup> Malik’s scorn for the ‘bizarre’ actions of an old man going ‘totally native’ suggests he has adopted the views of coastal elites.<sup>109</sup> Farah’s sorrow over the replacement of Tamarind Market with Bakhaaraha Market, a site of ‘[m]ilitarized capitalism’ which features prominently in *Crossbones*, suggests that on this point Malik communicates Farah’s identity and views.<sup>110</sup>

Dua’s informant admits there are limits to the analogy comparing boats and camels for explaining the complex social position of *burcad badeed* in contemporary Somalia. The analogy relies on a distinction between dust-coated herders on land and fishermen immersed in the saltiness of the sea. Those like himself who move between hinterland and coast, between ‘fresh- and saltwater,’ are irreducible to distinctions between land and sea affinities.<sup>111</sup> They fly both flags, and in so doing the flags appear false, just like the crossbones of Farah’s novel. *Burcad badeed* as method, by contrast, is a flag that holds both hinterland and coast environments and moves discursively

103. Farah, *Crossbones*, 67.

104. Nuruddin Farah, “Of tamarind and cosmopolitanism,” *Halabuur: Journal of Somali Literature and Culture*, 2, 1-2 (2007), 37

105. Farah, “Of tamarind,” 35.

106. Ibid.

107. Ibid.

108. Farah, *Crossbones*, 38

109. Ibid.

110. Farah, “Of tamarind,” 37. An further charge against Malik’s father is his desire to “produce additional offspring, in hope of making sure that his bloodline would not die out” (Farah, *Crossbones*, 38).

111. Dua, *Captured*, 39.

between them. As a way of envisioning the relationship between coast and hinterland, *burcad badeed* frames tensions of race, class, and belonging in Somalia within the *longue durée* of the Indian Ocean world and regional migration. *Burcad badeed* conveys the banditry that occurs at sea and ties predation to land-based networks and histories of national and international intervention. It accounts for the raiders' sense of belonging to the hinterland and the ways 'pastoral logic' are transposed to the sea. It connects these tensions to their fraught iterations in Kenya, where Swahili-speaking Somalis, Arabs, and Indians are conceptualized differently from those who live in the hinterland.<sup>112</sup> A term that tracks the move from pastoralist to pirate, *burcad badeed* also moves the opposite direction, as when Ali-Farah's grandmother

walked away from the sea...to Eyl Dawaad, a hidden deep in the valleys, not far from Eyl Badey on the coast, where today's pirates sail from.... Her village, up in the mountains, had nothing to do with the sea... a stream was flowing across it, and there was cattle and an abundance of milk.<sup>113</sup>

In Eyl Dawaad, in the mountains, she distances herself from *burcad badeed* as sea bandits, and from the sea as a place of capture and loss. But she is intimate with *burcad* as butter, churned from an abundance of milk in the pastoral valleys of her kin. The thread of the phrase, like the thread of the stream, connects fresh- and saltwater in entangled and mutually constituted relations. Beneath its surface, *burcad badeed* connects dreams, memories of ecological life, and the untranslatability of trauma. Perhaps it even soothes the losses and shattering of the sea.

## Notes

A shorter version of this paper was presented at the Pirates, Brigands, and Smugglers in the Indian Ocean World Conference at the Indian Ocean World Centre, McGill University, 17-18 May 2018, under the title "There are no pirates in Somalia: performance, gaps, and Indian Ocean Worlds in Nuruddin Farah's *Crossbones*." Thank you to the Indian Ocean World Centre, anonymous reviewers, Vilashini Cooppan, Nidhi Mahajan, and Shuchi Kapila's pirates class at Grinnell College for their comments at various stages of this work.

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112. In Kenya, dynamics between coast and hinterland are even more fraught in ways that link race to claims of political representation, citizenship, rights to land, indigeneity, and autochthony. See especially the work of Jeremy Prestholdt, Prita Meier, Andrew Eisenberg, Justin Willis, Ngala Chome, and George Gona. For example, Jeremy Prestholdt, "Politics of the Soil: Separatism, Autochthony, and Decolonization at the Kenyan Coast," *The Journal of African History*, 55, 2 (2014), 249–70; Justin Willis and George Gona, "Pwani C Kenya? Memory, Documents and Secessionist Politics in Coastal Kenya," *African Affairs*, 112, 446 (2012), 48–71.

113. Ali Farah, "A dhow," 19.