

“Nothing in Common, Except the Indian Ocean’: *Glocalization* and the Representation of Lascars in Maritime Fiction”

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In her volume *The Invisible Empire: White Discourse, Tolerance and Belonging* (2009), Georgie Wemyss has discussed lascars as a case study of what she calls the ‘Invisible Empire’ (2009: 3). Unacknowledged and unremembered for decades in colonial historiography, lascars populated English vessels since the early days of imperialism until the Second World War. This singular maritime figure of the Indian Ocean is being belatedly incorporated into historiography as well as into contemporary maritime fiction. This paper will analyse the representation of lascars in a selection of recent sea narratives set in the nineteenth century, namely Amitav Ghosh’s *Ibis* trilogy (2008-2015) and Shahida Rahman’s *Lascar* (2012). I argue that lascars, as represented in those sea narratives, reveal the potential of transoceanic mobility to destabilise land-locked parameters of culture and nationality in the nineteenth century and are exemplary of the cosmopolitanism that characterised the Indian Ocean waterworlds. Additionally, I aim at demonstrating that lascars are an apt case study to rethink globalization as *glocalization*, enabling a reading of the global as “plural versions of the local” (Beyer 2007: 98). In this sense, I contend that lascars’ multifarious identities constituted a negotiation between the global and the local that translated in strategies of resistance against the violence of imperialism. This *glocal* take on identity challenged, I argue, imperial codes of nationality, religion, and culture as fixed categories, prevalent in an unfolding globalization which, far from being a twentieth-century phenomenon, was already spreading and in full activity in the nineteenth century.

References:

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Bionote:

Juan-José Martín-González holds a PhD in English literature from the University of Málaga, where he is currently research fellow and lecturer. He was visiting researcher at Liverpool John Moores University (UK) during his PhD programme. He has published articles, book chapters and contributions to conference proceedings about neo-Victorian fiction, postcolonialism and maritime and migration studies, and has delivered papers about these

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