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Oceanic Imaginaries and Postcolonial Belonging: A Blue Humanities Reading of Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* and Abdulrazak Gurnah's *By the Sea*

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Abstract: The sea has emerged as a single point of investigation in modern literary and cultural criticism, especially in the context where individuals discuss the interdisciplinary field commonly referred to as the Blue Humanities. Instead of merely assuming the sea as a sort of dull geographic backdrop, Blue Humanities is more inclined to view the ocean as an animated space, one that continues to define past and present cultures, identities, memories, and even human relationships, most directly. The article considers the way the ocean is depicted in Amitav Ghosh's (2008) and Abdulrazak Gurnah's (2001) books, *Sea of Poppies* and *By the Sea*, respectively. They do so by aligning Blue Humanities concepts and postcolonial studies, sort of side by side, not as two parallel tracks. Both novels are closely connected to the Indian Ocean, and to the more ancient and more recent histories that flow through it: colonialism, migration, displacement, trade, exile and permanent cultural contact. The ocean in *Sea of Poppies* resembles a colonial space, shaped by the opium economy, indenture labour, oceanic exchange, and the flux of daily migration of vastly different communities sharing the same vessel on the Ibis. *By the Sea*, in the mean, looks out to exile. It seems possible that the state of being a refugee is one of memory, of division or breach between home and belonging. In general, the article maintains that the ocean in both novels serves as a dynamic cultural and political element and not necessarily as a travelling phase. It is a pathway of displacement, a storehouse of colonial memory, a place of contact with cultures continuing to come into contact, and a place where new identities are negotiated. When Blue Humanities is then introduced into the discussion with postcolonial theory, the analysis indicates that oceanic mobility disrupts the established notions of nation, home, identity and belonging.

Keywords: Blue Humanities; Oceanic Imaginaries; Postcolonialism; Migration; Displacement; Belonging; Indian Ocean; Exile; Maritime Studies

Introduction

The sea has always held a significant role in the literary imagination in modern literature and culture studies. Literary studies traditionally focused on spaces of land, nation, city, village, border and landscape when it came to issues of identity, culture, history and belonging. Nevertheless, more recent literature has attempted to highlight the actual role of oceans and waterways in the development of human pasts, and the types of cultural connections that people develop. The ocean is not just a physical backdrop but an active stage, a home, which drives people to migrate, colonial growth, trade, recollection, individuality and cultural interaction. And this seafaring mode of thought has been effectively postcolonial and diasporic literature, in which the passage between seas and oceans has frequently turned out to determine the experience of displacement, and what belonging even is, for those who have been forced to move. The traditional conceptions of identity accentuated mostly land, nation, territory and a sort of rootedness that is stable sounding. Belonging as well, became associated over and over once again with a particular homeland, a geographical location, lineage, or national place. The construction of identity by colonial and nationalistic histories- draws boundaries, and there is a distinct separation between the self and the other. Nonetheless, such land-oriented lenses may turn to overlook the quotidian realities of communities whose histories have been crafted by migration, exile, trade, slavery, indenture, and diaspora. To the subjects of a postcolonial identity, identity cannot be very much confined within a geographical boundary, as their history has been authored by traveling across the geographical and cultural borders.

The emergence of the Blue Humanities is a notable shift, a shift off of land-based modes of thought, to viewing oceans, seas, rivers, and other waterways. It is mostly interdisciplinary, so this Blue Humanities thing is a collection of literary studies, environmental humanities, maritime history, cultural studies, geography and postcolonial studies, to excavate the cultural and physical meanings of water. Individuals such as Steve Mentz, Hester Blum, and Elizabeth DeLoughrey have contributed to the development of ocean-centered strategies that are a response to the tendency of viewing the sea as a mere backdrop to the activities of humans. Instead, Blue Humanities view the ocean as an animate, dynamic place, a space that assists in the formation of human histories, cultures and identities. This is of great importance to postcolonial literature as well because oceans were directly at the center of the way colonial empires expanded, the way maritime trade increased, how indentured labour circulated, and how migration and cultural exchange actually became a reality.

The ocean becomes a complex zone of movement, contact, trace, violence, cross-cultural exchange in a Blue Humanities perspective. It allows people, goods, languages, religions, and ideas to travel over big distances, crossing geographical boundaries, but it also “ships” along earlier accounts of

colonial plunder, slavery, indenture, forced relocation, and exile. Meanwhile, oceanic spaces have the ability to squeeze several cultures in contact and trigger more recent trends of hybridity and self-awareness. Thus, the sea simultaneously has the power to separate individuals out of their own motherlands, and be a pathway that connects people who are separated by miles. It might even be interpreted more figuratively, as an archive of memories and histories that are transported across generations and re-emerge later.

From Postcolonial Land to Postcolonial Ocean

The maritime expansion was actually connected to colonialism, and the oceans had a fundamental role in the European imperial construction and maintenance. Colonial expansion of Europeans was based on ships and sea routes, not only to access distant lands, but to transport armies, administrators, goods and labour, and subsequently to exercise economic as well as political control over colonized states. Thus, the ocean was not just a sort of geography that divides colonies and imperial centers; it was something of a mechanism of the empire. The reason why European colonialism extended to include Asia, Africa and the Americas was due to the existence of big maritime networks, networks that transformed the oceans into imperial highways and value extraction mechanisms. In the description of the ocean, Philip E. Steinberg refers to it as, “an arena where social conflicts take place and a space that has been formed by the social conflicts” (Steinberg 20). Due to it, the view of colonialism is moving beyond the tidy lines of territories and listening to the sea-lanes that connected the sections of the colonial world.

Ocean trade, slavery, indenture, migration and imperial transport were all directly, and dependent upon ocean routes. Goods such as spice, textile, tea, sugar and opium were transported through trading networks using ships, and indentured slaves were also transported across oceans to serve within colonial economies. Simultaneously, the transport of soldiers, missionaries, and officials, as well as settlers, was facilitated by maritime transport. The ocean was in effect a circulating space, in which wealth and human beings circulated one another, in unequal configurations of colonial power. History of indentured labour especially reveals how the sea became a sort of displacement vehicle, isolating people off their countries and subsequently transporting them to areas they had no idea of. Meanwhile, these sea movements united disparate communities as well, hence new cultural formations and languages, new identities, and entire diasporic communities, too. Thus, the ocean is not only the venue where colonial exploitation occurred but also a sort of a melting pot of culture.

Due to the ocean between these historical processes, it is significant to comprehend both the colonial and postcolonial histories. The formation of postcolonial identities did not happen solely within the territories but also in journeys, crossings, migrations, and in those encounters that occur

across the seas. The difference between the roots and routes as outlined by Elizabeth DeLoughrey is particularly helpful, in that it actually points to the way in which the diasporic and postcolonial identities are formed in the course of movement, along with the way in which the geographical belonging shapes them (DeLoughrey 1-5). In a similar manner, the Black Atlantic concept by Paul Gilroy reveals how the movement of the ocean can create transnational cultural identities which cannot be confined within the boundaries of a single nation. Gilroy refers to the ships traveling between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organizing symbol to his work (4). With this in mind, the ocean will become this important space to read about aftereffects of colonialism such as displacement, diaspora, hybridity, memory, and even the persistent quest of belonging. By doing so, the postcolonial literature can be seen as one of the key paths towards the restoration of the experience of people whose past was shaped, or twisted, by the journeys made by the sea.

Ghosh and Gurnah: Two Oceanic Narratives

The Sea of Poppies by Amitav Ghosh (2008) offers a distinct image of the ocean as it was in the case of colonial India and imperial expansion of the nineteenth century. Written in the historical background of the British opium trade, the novel analyses the economic and social implications of colonialism and migration via the Indian Ocean. The opium trade demonstrates how the colonial capitalist economy and the sea routes were interconnected and that was a mode of transporting the people. Another instance of the use of sea as the route of forced mobility by the colonial capitalist economy is indentured labour. You see people of different social and cultural origins are brought on board of the ship *Ibis* which proves to be the miniature of the colonial world. The *Ibis* is not only the vessel which transports migrants; it becomes the floating ground of social and cultural relations where caste, class, race, language and nationality must be negotiated. Even the ship itself bears the memory of previous maritime violence as it was constructed as a type of a blackbirder, i.e. to carry slaves (Ghosh 11). So, the sea voyage suggests the displacement of characters and contact with other cultures and the sea becomes the migratory space, the space of cultural contact, identity formation.

Unlike in the story by Ghosh, in the novel *By the Sea* by Abdulrazak Gurnah (2001), the ocean assumes a significant part. The novel is narrated based on the experience of exile, migration, displacement and memory based on the story of the migration of Saleh Omar of Zanzibar to Britain. This is significant to the Indian Ocean since Zanzibar has a history of maritime commerce and cultural interactions with Africa, Arabia, India and Europe. The family background of Saleh Omar is also connected with the trade of the Indian Ocean by itself: his grandfather, Jafar Musa, is said to be a merchant whose business ventured into “Malaya, India and China” (Gurnah 23). Meanwhile, in the story by Gurnah, the sea is linked with the feelings pertaining to the sense of exile. The physical

separation of the protagonist from his native place is realized through crossing the ocean, but the memory preserves the link with Zanzibar. So, the sea is the symbol of the distance to home and the closeness to the home by the memory. Gurnah, through the journey of exile and migration, is able to criticize the rigid notions of national identity and belonging and demonstrates that, through memories, narratives, and identification with culture, home does not disappear but remains intact.

As we talk about various experiences of the ocean by two authors, who belong to two different historical and geographical locations, it is evident that in both instances the ocean is the most important part of the postcolonial narration of movement and belongingness. Unlike Ghosh, who gives significant attention to colonial India, opium economy, indenture and collective experience of displaced people on the Ibis, Gurnah is interested in Zanzibar, exile experience and refugee experience, memory and home search. However, in both novels, the ocean becomes more than just a geographical space. It transforms into the realm of colonial past, immigration, cultural confrontations, memories, and identities. The novels demonstrate that postcolonial belonging is not to be perceived in the context of established territorial and national borders, it is instead an outcome of paths, memories, experiences, and migrations through the oceanic space.

Objectives of the Study

The current paper will analyze the depiction of the ocean in Amitav Ghosh in *Sea of Poppies*, and in Abdulrazak Gurnah in *By the Sea* and then subject the two texts to the Blue Humanities framework. The aim of it is predominantly to examine the connection between oceanic space and postcolonial identity and to observe how the ocean functions as a route of migration, displacement, and for cultural encounters. It further examines how maritime journeys somehow dislodge the traditional, fixed conceptions of home, nation, territory, and belongings. The way the ocean relates to memory and the protracted, unsuccessful effort to reconnect with belonging are also highlighted. In general, the analysis demonstrates that oceanic narratives have the potential to expand the spectrum of postcolonial literary analysis, since they shift the most critical attention off land, borders, and nation-based identities, into oceans, seafaring pasts, movement, and those transnational forms of belonging that do not necessarily fit.

Research Gap

Despite the fact that Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies* and Abdulrazak Gurnah, *By the Sea*, these novels have mostly been exposed to independent critical discussion. Criticism that has been devoted to *Sea of Poppies* has largely focused on colonialism, indenture, the opium trade, diaspora, subalternity, globalization, linguistic hybridity, and cultural encounters. Conversely, most studies on *By the Sea*

have also been based on exile, identity of refugees, migration, memory, colonialism, diaspora and belonging. The critical approaches provide thought-provoking insight into the analysis of the two novels; however, comparative studies of Ghosh and Gurnah in the context of Blue Humanities should also be carried out. More importantly, the role of the ocean must also be discussed not only as a geographical territory, which can be used by characters to navigate through it, but also as the agent of culture and history, as well as politics, which takes part in the process of forming postcolonial identities.

Blue Humanities

The Blue Humanities is the initial theoretical model of this paper. Whereas literary criticism tends to anticipate land, nation, and territory, Blue Humanities focuses on the sea, the space of the sea, water, and movement, and the connection between humanity and waters. Steve Mentz adds that an oceanic view ought to exist that recognizes the sea as an important location of cultural imagination and material history. In *Ocean*, Mentz suggests that human history should be retold in an oceanic perspective as opposed to a terrestrial perspective (Mentz). The significance of maritime spaces to literature and cultural history is also evidence in the scholarship of Hester Blum. Through her work, she illustrates the significance of maritime experience and narratives of the sea to the history of the development of literature and culture (Blum). The difference between the routes and roots expressed by Elizabeth DeLoughrey is applicable to this research. The concept of postcolonial identity cannot be addressed as rooted in geographical location since colonialism resulted in numerous routes and connectivity, thus causing movement and displacement (DeLoughrey 1–5). The sea therefore becomes a place of identities which are repeatedly constructed.

Postcolonial Theory

Another critical interpretive framework in this analysis is the postcolonial theory. The concept of Third Space by Homi K. Bhabha can be of great help in the analysis of the ship and the ocean as the spaces of cultural identity formation. Bhabha highlights the importance of the interstitial space among established identifications (Bhabha 4) indicating that cultural meanings are produced by a negotiation process, not by some set cultural categories. He also defines the Third Space as the place of negotiating cultural differences, and creating new cultural meanings (Bhabha 53-56).

In a very similar vein, Stuart Hall defines cultural identity as becoming and not essence. He maintains that cultural identities can be said to be subject to the ongoing play of history, culture, and power (Hall 225). This interpretation is especially applicable to characters in the *Sea of Poppies* and *By the Sea* who develop their identities in migration, displacement, memories and culture coming into

contact. Their identities cannot be perceived as static or stable but should be rather seen as in a constant evolution based on their experiences.

Another instance of how oceanic circulation brings about cultural identities that are not national is presented in *The Black Atlantic* by Paul Gilroy. Gilroy questions nation-based understandings of culture by addressing the issue of movement, traveling, and intercultural exchange across the Atlantic. He termed ships in motion between Europe, America, Africa and the Caribbean to be one of the main organizing symbols of his analysis (Gilroy 4). His oceanic vision comes in handy in comprehending how cultural identity may arise out of circulation and intercultural interplay, as opposed to being tied down to a specific geography. In this way, the concept of Gilroy offers a good theoretical point of contact to the analysis of the Indian Ocean travels and transnational identities in Ghosh and Gurnah, who depict them in *Sea of Poppies* and *By the Sea* respectively.

The Indian Ocean as a Colonial Space

The Indian Ocean has traditionally been used as an important channel of exchange of culture and economy. Colonization has transformed these channels to imperialism and exploitation. According to Sugata Bose, the Indian Ocean is to be viewed as a historical space of flows and interactions and not just as a geographical boundary between regions (Bose 4).

In *Sea of Poppies*, the Indian Ocean proves to be the location where the British opium economy operates. The movement of the commodities produced in India to other imperial markets is made evident in the novel by Ghosh through the maritime routes. The production of opium in India is linked to the ocean and its ultimate circulation in the broader imperial economy, which is the subject of the novel. The depiction of this maritime network by Ghosh shows how the sea made the passage of colonial products and the relationship between local production and international interventions easier (Ghosh 30–31, 106).

Thus, the Indian Ocean acquires the significance of the integral part of the colonial economy. The sea is not only a geographical area dividing India and the rest of the world but a vital channel, in which the colonial economic power runs. The sea-system in the novel depicts the reliance of the British Empire on the transportation of goods across the ocean. It is also possible to see the link between ocean and colonial capitalism in the context of the movement of people. Not only do people move with the commodities but labor and generate to the colonial economy. In *Sea of Poppies*, indentured labourers being transported to the Ibis illustrates how human mobility was tied to colonial economic interests. The migration of workers across the ocean is a mirror image of the greater system in which the colonial power restructured human labour based on the imperial economic needs (Ghosh 74). So,

here we can observe the interrelation between mobility and colonial power, which demonstrates the significance of the sea in the context of the material processes of creation of empire.

The ship *Ibis*, oh, it is like more or less right in the middle of *Sea of Poppies* of Amitav Ghosh, and it does that thing where it is not merely a mode of motion. It somehow brings together individuals of every type of caste, classes, races, religious circumstances and cultural orientations and in a manner; it becomes a floating colonial world, but not a nice, clean one. Those who would otherwise remain apart in terms of social regulations as well as physical distance are now forced to be in far closer proximity on the ship. Thus, as you travel between the land and the sea, this entire social clock is shifted, and relationships between the passengers alter, which also demonstrates how these identities that seem fixed within a colonial society are precarious and unstable. In that the *Ibis* is a little colonial unit, where injustice of power is not completely eliminated but in the same breath new interactions and some form of solidarity may begin to develop. The weird circumstances of the journey challenge the existing identities of the passengers and gradually, their encounters with one another contribute towards the formation of new social and cultural bonds (Ghosh 328). And that reading makes the *Ibis* a part of the Third Space of Homi K. Bhabha wherein identities are not simply inherited: they are negotiating, fundamentally, by meeting and interacting (Bhabha 53-56).

The ocean serves as the channel, as the pathway, in which the indentured labourers are torn out of their normal geographical locations, their social environment, and cultural ways and traditions, and then transported to the unknown. So, the sea crossing is not just physical movement. It is a literal dislocation between home and displacement, between the past and the present and between what has been and what is yet coming, between what is an old self and a self that is yet to be formed. The workers who cross the Indian Ocean are also a reflection of the larger colonial process, as the human movement is organized in line with the economic requirements of the British Empire. Due to that, the ocean becomes the place, where the violence of this colonial mobility can be seen, as individuals are torn apart and placed into new, unknown structures of labour and regulating (Ghosh 74). Nevertheless, new relationships can be accommodated by the same displacement, as individuals of various social and cultural worlds come into contact and have to react to each other. Thus the ocean operates both as an instrument of colonial exploitation, and as an arena in which displaced individuals begin to haggle with new forms of identity and community, bit by bit, although unevenly.

And the *Ibis* is a kind of contact zone too, as it continues to bring together people who do not share language, culture, religion and social location, and it compels continued interaction. It is a form of social space that can be termed a contact zone, where cultures can meet, interact, and negotiate, usually in the stress of unequal power (Pratt 7). The *Ibis* fits into such a concept since the passengers

are not merely riding side by side as though nothing will alter; they are forced to run into the differences in culture and to negotiate new relations within a closed, claustrophobic space. There is tension and cooperation in their interactions and the common journey gradually relaxes some identities and boundaries they brought with them on land. Language, food, customs, beliefs, caste differences, and even personal pasts are the items which get discussed, argued over, bought and sold, as well as being negotiated. Due to that, the passage through the sea makes the spaces which allow the cultural identities not to be discarded completely and remain in their original form. Rather, they move, mix, and remodel due to the influence of interacting with others. This is why the Ibis can be regarded as the ocean as a cultural contact zone, demonstrating how the movement of people by sea can lead to the creation of new cultural consciousness, hybridity, and a certain kind of collective belonging, which are not always created without any complications.

Ocean, exile, and memory in *By the Sea*

By the Sea by Abdulrazak Gurnah seems connected with the sea routes which influenced Zanzibar. Zanzibar is located on the coast of East Africa. It has long been a trading hub. There was transport of goods and news by ships. People also migrated and cultures mixed at the ports. Due to this reason the ocean does not form an aspect in the book. It is an element of Zanzibar remembrance.

The island does not remain isolated in the world in the novel. It is not an isolation story, but a travel and return story. Trade within Indian Ocean led to the close contact of new groups of people. With people came languages, beliefs and objects of commerce. With time, everyday life in Zanzibar acquired hybrid forms, influenced by these meetings. But such sea connections did not remain. The colonial rule transformed the formula of power. It also moved those who became rich and who turned into the losers. Thus, Zanzibar by Gurnah is read as a place that is linked to East Africa, and beyond. The Indian Ocean is the place of congruence of various histories. There is the overlap of commerce, colonial systems and migration, and cultural mixing. This is important to what the book musings about identity and belonging (Gurnah 23).

In *By the Sea*, the crossing of Saleh Omar is correlated with exile. His trip from Zanzibar to Britain is more than a change of place. It occurs due to pressures in his life and in politics. Those are forces that drive him out of home. The sea turns into the way of compelled movement. It is the place where displacement is formed, and where memory continues to come back. The crossing of Saleh is like a home and exile. It alters him out of what he is familiar with to what he cannot foresee. It modifies his relative safety too, until he is revealed and in doubt. Meanwhile, the journey compels him to create a new identity. He has to compare himself to the present with what he was.

In *By the Sea*, memory is bound to the water. It brings back a vanished homeland. To Saleh Omar, the ocean is not merely the distance that exists between him and Zanzibar. It also has childhood memories. It preserves images of family, friends, and life of a community. His past continues to come to the present even when he moves away. This is why culture is not always lost when one moves out of place. The sea is a storehouse to be read, not to one individual only, but to a common book as well.

The sea preserves the impressions of personal happenings. It also maintains broader accounts that determine Zanzibar. Here, colonial rule is a factor. So does migration. The story also has cultural contact. What would have been lost is preserved by way of memory and by telling. In such a manner, Gurnah makes the sea a symbol of perseverance. It is these links to the homeland that make the displaced subject still cling to it. The sea indicates two things simultaneously. It demonstrates isolation in a sense. It also maintains an emotional line that links the past and present. Experiences that may have been forgotten are retained in stories and memories. This is what Gurnah does to the sea; he makes it a safe haven of memories. To the people who were displaced, the ocean brings them back home. It is not only a question of distance. The sea contains all the emotions that are bridged between what is lost and what is present.

In *By the Sea*, Gurnah exploits the sea to reflect how unpredictable the life of refugees is. This is what happens to Saleh Omar who finds himself in a predicament between worlds, not only between countries and cultures but also between various versions of himself. It is unclear where he fits, or even whether he fits at all. The sea narrates that story just right: it is always between two places, always floating between the life he lived and the place he has set down. Physically, he's in Britain. But the memories of Zanzibar won't let go. That is what belonging is all about. It has nothing to do with your real residence or documents. Refugees may establish their roots in a place they are new, yet their hearts remain bound up in the places they left. The ocean is used as a symbol since it is all about living in that in-between place- struggling to hold on to memories, connections and trying to figure out who you are.

Oceanic Belonging and the Postcolonial Subject

It is the oceanic voyages in *Sea of Poppies* and *By the Sea* that sort of send you out of the ordinary that discusses roots and rather than that, routes. In the vast majority of cases, when people describe identity, they attach to something that is solid, such as an established homeland, family, a territory and even the actual cultural origin, period. In both novels, however, the characters demonstrate that postcolonial identities are not necessarily found, but they are created in the process of movement by being moved around, by encountering other people, and then by varying in cultural terms as they go. *Black Atlantic* by Paul Gilroy is not the least helpful in this regard as it makes you consider culture as a place, yet, as a circulation (Gilroy 3-4). And, no, he is preoccupied with the Atlantic, yet again, that sort of reasoning

comes to a pleasant rest in the Indian Ocean environs that Ghosh and Gurnah introduce. In *Sea of Poppies*, it is the Ibis journey that brings together individuals displaced by colonial economic apparatus, and in *By the Sea*, Saleh Omar relocates out of Zanzibar to Britain forming an identity that is made up of exile, memory as well as continuous cultural bargaining. Thus the books continue to insist on the fact that identity is not just what happens to begin you, but what happens to you at various points of passage, what faces you, what you bump into and what happens to you as a result of these encounters (Ghosh 328; Gurnah 23).

In these novels also, the ocean is a sort of hybrid identity space. The interpretation of the *Third Space* by Homi K. Bhabha, and of cultural hybridity, is important in that, in essence, they claim that cultural identities are not pure and fixed entities. Rather, they develop via interaction and negotiation, such as social in between place. According to Bhabha, cultural meaning is manifested in the interstitial space where groups converge, intersect and reconfigure their meanings against each other (Bhabha 53-56). In *Sea of Poppies*, the ship could be interpreted as that Third Space as well, since the shut in Ibis is a mixture of people of various castes, classes, religions, and cultural backgrounds. Not only does their everyday interaction confuse identities, it destabilizes what previously appeared to be firm and it creates new social and cultural knots (Ghosh 328). Similarly, in *By the Sea*, Saleh Omar remains in the in-between status: he continues having his connections with Zanzibar as long as he is residing in Britain. His identity cannot be easily divided into two parts: homeland and host country. Due to it, the ocean turns into a symbolic Third Space, in which identities continue to be recreated in the process of cultural negotiation, remembered life, dislocation, and face to face contact.

In the meantime, the ocean also complicates the manner in which people tend to discuss the concept of nation, boundaries, territorial identity, and even citizenship. Geographical boundaries are a big part of how national identity is constructed; the lines that divide one region of the world, and another, that makes the world appear well organized. But the sea will not acquiesce in such a neat reasoning; it does not separate but connects. In *Sea of Poppies*, Indian Ocean links India and Mauritius and also other parts of the colonial world through the trade routes and indenture systems. The Ibis goes imperial and national boundaries which demonstrate how colonial flow may be faster than the boundaries of a single land. In *By the Sea*, the act of translocation between Zanzibar and Britain results in a transnational space in which belonging cannot be conceived solely in the form of national membership. The attachment that Saleh Omar has to Zanzibar continues to play in the background upon his return to Britain and so his experience is what occurs when you attempt to define identity solely in terms of citizenship or land ownership. Thus, the sea basically brings locations nearer to each other, and it erodes the notion that cultures and identities are confined in a national boundary in a

simple manner. Postcolonial identities are formed, as Elizabeth DeLoughrey puts it, via networks of movement across geography, by the emphasis she places on routes and roots (DeLoughrey 1-5).

Finally, *Sea of Poppies* and *By the Sea* are more concerned with belonging through an inheritance that is not fixed but is instead a process that is subject to change. Being a member does not simply matter based on place of birth, ancestry or citizenship, rather it is compiled over and over again through movement, memory, relationships, encounters with cultures and narratives. The displaced passengers on the Ibis in the novel by Ghosh gradually develop new solidarities and community based on the experience of an oceanic experience (Ghosh 328). Saleh Omar, in his novel, recreates his association with home through the memories of Zanzibar, autobiographical stories, and an ongoing dialogue with the past (Gurnah 23). The concept of cultural identity as something that is acquired, rather than possessed as a sort of essence described by Stuart Hall is useful in interpreting these experiences (Hall 225-26). The ocean is counting here in a special sense since it heralds constant motion and constant change. It drags people out of their traditional homes, however on the other hand it also brings about new relationships and new cultural openings. Taken together in such a way, the two novels imply that belonging may be mobile and be transported across borders and re-crafted in new contexts. Postcolonial identity becomes fluid, relational and transnational, not firmly rooted to either territory, and not completely fixed by borders either.

Sea of Poppies by Amitav Ghosh continues to believe that Indian Ocean is still retaining that history of indenture and colonial trade; it is not merely history or beautiful waves. The Ibis movement is left to be associated with these larger economic nets which British imperialism had constructed in a way, primarily the opium trade, and the ferrying, shuttling of indentured labourers. So, the sea, as it were, has its own record of people, whose daily lives were reshaped according to the demands of the colonial authority. And frankly the voyage is not just a physical crossing but a sort of tear in the family bonds, social connections and sense of cultural home. Their journey through the sea is more of a reminder of the price of colonial capitalism (Ghosh 74). Ghosh pulls labour histories and displacement into literary focus through that sea travel, the stuff that might remain submerged under, beneath the much noisier narrative of imperial economic growth.

Similarly, the *By the Sea* by Abdulrazak Gurnah is an ocean as a repository of exile, migration, colonial past, and individual pain. To Saleh Omar the sea can never be purely disconnected to Zanzibar and the pressure situation which causes him to depart. His journey through the Indian Ocean creates a physical distance between him and his native land, yet the memories that adhesively stick to the sea keep him sewn to what has already taken place. Thus, the sea then turns into this warehouse of memories that cannot be erased by geographical cleansing. As Saleh recalls and narrates his tale, those

intimate experiences are woven into the broader Zanzibar history and its colonial history (Gurnah 23). Then the sea possesses, both, the memories of a single individual, but, too, the memories of a community, and that makes the novel work in a more grounded, lived-in manner, through the psychological implications of exile.

Moreover, the ocean also serves as an archival store of cultural exchange, and in a non-neat manner yet. Sea routes brought various groups together and it facilitated the spread of languages, religions, practices, goods and cultural practices. In *Sea of Poppies*, the Ibis finds himself congregating people who are inhabitants of very different social and cultural realms. In *By the Sea*, the older African, Arab, Indian, and European connections in Zanzibar are more evident. What those experiences imply is that the ocean does not only cut geography on a map; it constructs networks on the intersections of cultures, which exchange influence, as well as transform in the middle of the movement. Those transnational identities (oceanic) are heavily read through the prism of transnational movement and cultural circulation by Paul Gilroy (Gilroy 3-4). Eventually, the ocean turns into a place whereby cultural memories are stored, re-shared and remodeled once more.

The angle of the ocean as an archive is even more important when historical violence and trauma are on the front stage. The sea has been associated with the ugliest aspects of colonial history of slavery, indenture, forced migration, exploitation and displacement. However, they are not always featured in official archives, or when they are, they do not have the emotional force they truly have. By voicing people whose lives were formed by historical mechanisms, literary writing can recuperate the affective and psychological aspects of those experiences. In that regard, the sea can be considered as a figurative storage of memories which may be forgotten by the official histories. It doesn't only move people and goods. It retains the traces of pain, loss, uprooting, and survival as well.

The viewing of the ocean as an archive makes the input of the Blue Humanities to this current research more powerful. The histories given by official colonial authorities tend to favor land-based political histories; oceanic literature tends to draw interest to histories created through maritime movement. Ghosh and Gurnah do not focus on definite territories but on the paths which unite them, and not on imperial institutions but on the experience of those people who crossed the sea. In their novels, it is evident that the sea is not simply a blank period between the countries. It is a historical place, replete with memories of colonial experiences, and replete with aftereffects that continue to play out. Due to it, the ocean performs simultaneously functions as a route, an archive, a memory-space, and a sort of witness of history. By reading it that way, postcolonial literary studies can think of the sea as an important location where displacement, trauma, cultural exchange and survival histories are stored, and they are constantly rewritten.

Findings

The paper concludes that the sea plays an active role in identity construction in *Sea of Poppies* and *By the Sea*. It is not merely a setting or an inanimate location at which things occur. It affects the characters and their voyage and their passage through the water alters their self-perception, their culture, and their connection to home. The paper also indicates that colonialism is also closely related to maritime movement. The ocean in *Sea of Poppies* is linked to opium economy, indenture and colonial migration whereas in *By the Sea* it is linked with exile, migration and the experience of refugees. Thus, the ocean has become a significant area of knowledge of colonial and postcolonial past.

The paper goes on to suggest that the sea symbolizes displacement as well as potential. It isolates individuals beyond their houses, yet it makes other cultures and communities interact. Ghosh stresses on the similarities of indenture, colonial trade, and migration, and Gurnah deals more with exile, memory, life of refugees, and personal displacement. In spite of these distinctions the two authors introduce identity as fluid, shifting and transnational and not entrenched by nationality or space. Movement, cultural experiences and interactions with others help them to acquire new identities.

The other significant conclusion is that the sea serves as a repository of culture and history. It has a hint of colonialism, immigration, indenture, expulsion, violence, and cultural interchange. The interaction of individuals with dissimilar backgrounds also presents opportunities of hybrid identities. In both novels, the sense of belonging is recreated by means of memory, narrative, relations, culture ties, and movement. On the whole, the research paper proves that Blue Humanities can be an applicable framework to postcolonial literary studies as it does not focus on land and national borders but on oceans, routes, and maritime histories.

Future Scope of the Study

Further research into this theme could be done by considering additional writers of the Indian Ocean such as Amitav Ghosh, Abdulrazak Gurnah, M. G. Vassanji, and Lindsey Collen. The correlation between Blue Humanities and gender can also be addressed in future research that would concentrate on the experiences and feelings of women in maritime migration, displacement, violence, exile, and oceanic belonging. The practice can also be associated with the current environmental concerns including climate migration, rising sea levels, ocean pollution, environmental injustice, and climate refugees. The ocean as a repository of slavery, indenture, colonial violence, migration, and diaspora is another potential field of research. Other oceans, such as the Atlantic, Caribbean, Pacific,

Mediterranean, and Indian Ocean can as well be considered using the Blue Humanities framework. Besides this, the connection between Blue Humanities and Digital Humanities may be investigated with references to digital mapping of the migration paths, colonial trade paths, diaspora movements and the maritime networks. These kinds of studies have the potential to expand our knowledge on the role of oceans in forming identity, memory, history, migration, ecology, and belonging within postcolonial literature.

Conclusion

Sea of Poppies and *By the Sea* emphasize the necessity to change a land-based approach to postcolonial identity to an ocean-based one. The sea in both novels turns out to be a moveable, a remembering, a colonial violence, an encounter of culture, an exile, and a transformation. Ghosh puts into the limelight maritime pasts of indenture, colonial trade and group migration, whereas Gurnah puts greater emphasis on exile, refugees, memory and impact of displacement. Nevertheless, in spite of these distinctions, both authors show how the concept of identity and belonging is not defined only by the land or a nationality. The sea defies geographical and national frontiers and provides arenas of negotiation and change of culture. A Blue Humanities reading thus introduces the ocean as an archive, route, border, contact zone, and imaginative space to negotiate identity, memory, and belonging through which postcolonial subjects negotiate identity, memory, and belonging.

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