Coastal World Literature: Encounters at the Shores of Europe

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Abstract

Shorelines are at the forefront when it comes to the effects of climate change. They are equally a preferred leisure destination for global northerners to seek respite and ecological connectedness. This article argues that the coast likewise offers valuable insight as a literary site of disruptive encounters. At the coast, economic, ecological, and cultural disparity interweave, and can therefore carry manifold connotations, emotions, and prospects dependent on your situation. To exemplify this point, the article examines contemporary literary representations of the southernmost European shore in the wake of the so-called migrant crisis that occurred as the Arab Spring revolutions were met by autocratic pushbacks. Furthermore, the article presents the term "coastal world literature" as a methodology of interpreting literature at the dynamic littoral zone between land and sea. Readings of the novel *What Strange Paradise* (2021) by Egyptian-Canadian author Omar El Akkad, the collection of poems *Mare Nostrum* (2019) by Libyan-American author Khaled Mattawa, the novel *Til stranden* (2017; *To the Beach*) by Danish author Peter Højrup, and the collection of poems titled *Bag bakkerne, kysten* (2017; *Behind the Dunes, the Coast*) by Danish author Peter Clement-Woetmann support the assertion that coastal texts are informed by their position within the world-system. In effect, coastal world literature reveals valuable first encounters of disparity, unevenness, and the range of accompanied affective responses. Consequently, what happens at the shore and how we tell it matters immensely.

Keywords: Coastal, world literature, migration fiction, climate, world-ecology.

Resumen

Las costas están en primera línea en lo que respecta a los efectos del cambio climático. También son uno de los destinos de ocio preferidos de los habitantes del norte global en busca de descanso y conexión ecológica. Este artículo sostiene que la costa también ofrece una valiosa perspectiva como lugar literario de encuentros disruptivos. En la costa, las disparidades económicas, ecológicas y culturales se entrelazan y, por tanto, pueden acarrear múltiples connotaciones, emociones y perspectivas según la situación de la persona. Para ejemplificar este punto, el artículo examina las representaciones literarias contemporáneas de la costa más al sur de Europa a raíz de la llamada crisis migratoria que se produjo cuando las revoluciones de la Primavera Árabe se confrontaron con retrocesos autocráticos. Además, el artículo presenta el término "literatura del mundo costero" como metodología de interpretación de la literatura en la dinámica zona litoral entre la tierra y el mar. Lecturas de la novela *What Strange Paradise* (2021) del autor egipcio-canadiense Omar El Akkad, el poemario *Mare Nostrum* (2019) del autor libio-estadounidense Khaled Mattawa, la novela *Til stranden* (2017; *To the Beach*) del autor danés Peter Højrup, y la colección de poemas titulada *Bag bakkerne, kysten* (2017; *Behind the Dunes, the Coast*) del autor danés Peter Clement-Woetmann apoyan la afirmación de que los textos costeros están informados por su posición dentro del sistema-mundo. En efecto, la literatura del mundo costero revela valiosos primeros encuentros de disparidad, desnivel y la gama de respuestas afectivas acompañadas. En consecuencia, lo que ocurre en la costa y cómo lo contamos importa enormemente.

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Palabras clave: Costero, literatura mundial, ficción migratoria, clima, ecología mundial.

What does it entail to explore coastal literature as world literature? Can shorelines reveal otherwise overlooked details of contemporary uneven and combined development? Coasts are cardinal "contact zones" where florae, more-than-human creatures and critters as well as "disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone" 34).[1] Moreover, the coast is often the first site of encounter between distinct beings—be they humans and/or more-than-humans. Thus, as it is a spatiotemporal zone both ecologically and culturally defined by heterogenous entanglements, I argue that coastal imaginaries offer valuable insight into a varied range of encounters. At the coast, economic, ecological, and cultural disparity interweave comprehensively, and the same stretch of shore can therefore carry manifold connotations, emotions, and prospects dependent on your vantage point. Meg Samuelson has astutely proposed the term "littoral literature" as a descriptor for this liminal literary site (Samuelson). Though, to more firmly situate the methodology within the resurfaced field of world literature studies, I favour the term "coastal world literature" as designator for this literary method of interpreting literature at the dynamic littoral zone between land and sea.[2] To exemplify the critical value of "coastal world literature," this article examines contemporary literary registrations of the southernmost European shore in the wake of the so-called migrant crisis that occurred as the Arab Spring revolutions were met by autocratic pushbacks. The novel *What Strange Paradise* (2021) by Egyptian-Canadian author Omar El Akkad as well as the collection of poems *Mare Nostrum* (2019) by Libyan-American author Khaled Mattawa tell complex stories of longing, while Danish texts, a novel called *Til stranden* (2017; *To the Beach*) by Peter Højrup and a collection of poems titled *Bag bakkerne, kysten* (2017; *Behind the Dunes, the Coast*) by Peter Clement-Woetmann, express sudden encounters with "strangers" in the form of refugees coming ashore. As such, the coastal site offers fundamentally different temporalities and experiences depending on the vantage point.

These contemporary coastal fictions, I argue, can be read as cautionary tales of how an affluent yet ill-prepared continent might respond when pushed by environmental and sociopolitical encounters. At once, these tales then present a didactic opportunity—that is, a chance to learn from and deviate from recent encounters—and a lamentable testimony of the capitalist world-system. Moreover, as the "migrant crisis" is portrayed from different point of views, the literary

[1] Lately, Mary Louise Pratt has resurfaced her concept of "contact zones" to include more-than-human interactions and intersections occurring at these sites (Pratt, "Mutations of the Contact Zone").

[2] The subject of coastal literature has been developed by scholars within the field of blue humanities. The works of Elizabeth DeLoughrey needs special mentioning but others such as Ursula Kluwick and Virginia Richter has also inspired this article (DeLoughrey; Kluwick and Richter *The Beach in Anglophone Literatures and Cultures*; Kluwick and Richter "Of Tourists and Refugees").

treatment of this recent European shoreline encounter also foregrounds the usefulness of comparativism in reading coastal fiction as the language, ethos, worldview, and sentiments expressed in these coastal texts are clearly informed by their positions within the world-system. Significantly then, coastal world literature reveals valuable first encounters of disparity, unevenness, and the range of accompanied affective responses seemingly destined to magnify in the future. Consequently, what happens at the shore and how we tell it matters immensely.

Shorelines: For Dwelling and For Landing

As *homo sapiens* migrated from the African interior, shoreline dwelling became a cradle for all sorts of sociocultural development. People, as John R. Gillis writes, "settled on the coasts not for what the interior lacked but because of the abundance that the seashore provided" (Gillis 20). Ecologically, shorelines indeed constitute a generative ecotone of disruptive encounters with a huge body of biological diversity as a result. Constant disruption and entanglement of miscellaneous entities is what makes the seaside flourish. While this might not be best for, say, the singular straw of leymus that is eaten by a Zabulon skipper caterpillar, in the grand scheme of things, biodiversity assures ecological resilience, wildlife thriving, and a sheer variety of beautiful, living things.

Given the beauty, sublimity, and both the visceral sense and empirical understanding of coastal biodiversity's importance for a sustainable lifeworld, it is logical that tourism to shoreline places of unknown flora and animal life is flourishing. Yet, as the capitalist world-system has negatively impacted ecology in diverse ways—including through tourism-related issues such as increased mobility and tropical forest loss due to construction of leisure facilities—tourism to "edens" of biodiversity is also highly paradoxical in nature.[3] Nonetheless, the paradisiacal idea(l) of a "garden of earthly delights" seems to proliferate even as the garden itself is experiencing a sixth extinction (Kolbert). According to Sharae Deckard, despite the general disenchantment that followed with the Age of Enlightenment, "paradise" as myth and performative fantasy continues to be relevant in our age (Deckard). Crystalising her point, she writes that "Paradise is inextricably linked to the 'long' modernity of the capitalist world-system, implicated in the discourses of material exploitation and colonisation that originated in the fifteenth century and developed throughout the Enlightenment into the present" (Deckard 2).

Materially, it was however a more practical matter that drove the European colonialists to the shores of foreign lands: The need for more resources to supply the homeland's industrial ambitions. As Karl Marx succinctly phrases it, "one part of the globe [was turned] into a chiefly agricultural field of production for supplying the other part, which remains a pre-eminently industrial field" (Marx 580). Yet, upon

[3] For a general overview of impacts on the Earth system, see the well-known graphs of the development of "global indicators" from 1750-2100, also known as the "great acceleration" graphs: https://www.anthropocene.info/great-acceleration.php.

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landing what revealed itself for the Europeans were exactly paradisiacal—and exotic—worlds of plenty. Sugar, cotton, ore of different kinds, spices, grains, cacao, subalterns, and fossil fuels. Thus, an abundance of new "commodity frontiers," came to light (Moore, "Sugar and the Expansion of the Early Modern World-Economy"). Shores were instrumental sites in shipping these novel commodities to the European continent. They were often also the first contact zone between settlers and natives. One continent's paradisiacal experience of fertile land, it however quickly turned out, became the native populaces' devastating disruption.

Here, some 400-500 years down the line, we know that colonialism has carried all sorts of violence in its wake, from enduring racial discrimination to connected issues such as toxification, sacrifice zones, and global economic inequality. As Jason Moore writes, this comes down to the fact that historical capitalism—rapidly developed and spread throughout the colonial era—"is not only a social formation but an ontological one" ("The Capitalocene, Part I: On the Nature and Origins of Our Ecological Crisis" 600). He goes on to argue that,

> Capitalism's first great remaking of planetary life […] was scarcely possible without a revolution in ways of thinking and seeing the world. The capitalist revolution, far from a narrowly economic process, was an epochal shift in the ways of earth-moving (mining, farming), state-making, mechanization and symbolic praxis. Not for nothing, the first thing every great European empire set about doing was not merely "exploring," but mapping and cataloguing the globe as a potential storehouse of wealth. ("The Capitalocene, Part I: On the Nature and Origins of Our Ecological Crisis" 605)

Furthermore, the ontological formation brought on by early colonial, commodity-frontier capitalism is also what Moore and a growing cadre of scholars designate as the root cause for the currently unfolding—in Moore's term "world-ecological"—tragedy that is climate change (see for instance Murphy and Schroering; Niblett; Wenzel).

In summary, the colonial contact zones obviously began at the shores of the so-called new world. And now, because of the climate changes brought on by capitalism's ontological formation of society and nature, shorelines are fatally disrupted once again. By the year 2100, anthropogenic sea level rises are predicted to a global average of 43-84 centimetres—depending on how close the international community comes to meeting the Paris Agreement goals (IPCC 324). As such, we are inevitably to prepare for a wetter world to come. Further accentuating this exposure to watery disruption, currently about "1 billion people [live] within 10 km of the coastline," and "more than one-third (2.75 billion) of the world's population lives within 100 km from the coast" (Reimann et al. 3). Over the last thirty years, the United States along with "Australia, South America, Asia, and Europe have been turned inside out. Only Africa has not been hollowed out, and even there, coastal populations, particularly urban ones, are exploding. We are all now creatures of the edge, mentally as well as physically," John Gillis writes (Gillis 1).

So, it is fair to say, that throughout history shorelines have been instrumental in the global development of societies, ecologies, and economies. And shorelines

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especially occupy a particular place of significance in the history of the capitalist world-system/world-ecology. The shores were sites of colonial contact that facilitated socio-ecological plunder—the shores of the "new worlds" in effect realised the *globalisation* of a capitalist world-system—and now, shores are sites of particular risk from the cumulative of this history of extraction and exploitation. Consequently, in the coming years, the dynamic of the recent decades' rush to reside at the seashore will reverse itself. The inevitable rise of water levels, the increase in saltwater intrusions, shoreline retractions, floodings, and other disturbances to the global coastline will reverse this littoral influx. Anticipating the massive migration—both internally and externally—that will follow from this, coastal literature becomes especially significant, as a source of insights into former shoreline *co*-habitations, adaptations, and mitigations. Further, such fictions may also offer valuable speculative renderings of current and future wetter-world scenarios.

As this short presentation of coastal encounters shows—the characteristics of encounters at the shore are a consequence of the material circumstances in which such encounters take place, whether we are talking about ecosystems' entangled biodiversity, early human seaside habitation, or the much later coastal contact zones of colonialism. The absence of human activity is often preferable when it comes to the flourishing of coastal ecologies. Here, the material context rather consists of decomposition, tidal waves, microorganisms' metabolism, seasonal change, the rhythm of the day, and so much more. Colonialism, by contrast, is foundationally connected to the shore by way of structures such as harbors and other loading sites that contributed to the realisation of imperialists' material exploitation of various resources intrinsic to the rise of capitalism as world-system (Moore, "The Modern World-System as Environmental History?"; Wallerstein 23-41).

Both ecologically and socially, then, the long draining of resources undertaken by the Global North has left the countries of the Global South radically less resilient to absorb the climatic consequences of greenhouse gasses they are the least responsible for having emitted in the first place (on the matter of emission-responsibility, see for instance Hickel). As Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg laconically made clear in their early critique of "the Anthropocene narrative," humanity writ large is not confronting the planetary emergency without lifeboats: "For the foreseeable future—indeed, as long as there are human societies on Earth—there *will* be lifeboats for the rich and privileged. If climate change represents a form of apocalypse, it is not universal, but uneven and combined" (Malm and Hornborg 66-67). This, argues the currently growing cadre of world-ecological thinkers, is not a failure of capitalism but rather its *raison d'être*. The Warwick Research Collective (WReC), for instance, writes that, "capitalist development does not smooth away but rather produces unevenness, systematically and as a matter of course [. …] Capitalist modernisation entails development, yes—but this 'development' takes the form also of the development of underdevelopment, of maldevelopment and dependent development" (12-13).

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Coastal World Literature

Parallel with and complementing the materialistic world-ecology/world-economy-analysis that Jason Moore and others are developing, a re-formulation of Karl Marx' concept of world literature is likewise being proposed. In the words of the Warwick Research Collective, the ambition here is "to define 'world literature' as *the literature of the world-system*—of the modern capitalist world-system, that is" (WReC: Warwick Research Collective 8). Thus, the "single culture of capitalism," as Nicholas Brown describes the current world-system (6), "will *necessarily* be discernible in any modern literary work, since the world-system exists unforgoably as the matrix within which all modern literature takes shape and comes into being" (WReC: Warwick Research Collective 20). Following this line of thought, "coastal world literature" as a genre can be understood as the literary transfiguration of the shoreline encounters that have played and continue to play such a crucial part in the capitalist world-system. This means that "coastal world fiction" encompasses disparate texts such as Jules Verne's *Sans dessus dessous* (1889; *The Purchase of the North Pole*, 1890), Kim Stanley Robinson's *New York 2140* (2017), J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* (1962), Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004), Chen Qiufan's *荒潮* (2013; *Waste Tide*, 2019), Wu Ming-Yi's *複眼* (2011; *The Man with the Compound Eye*, 2013), Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* (2006), David Dabydeen's *Disappearance* (1993), Ben Smith's *Doggerland* (2019), Hans Kirk's *Fiskerne* (1928; *The Fishermen*, 2000) and Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* (2014), to name but a few.

World literature is not, however, simply a descriptor for literature produced since the colonial era.[4] It is also a methodology, which enables—if not actually *requests*—comparative readings. This comparativism entails reading fiction across regions that occupy analogous positions within the capitalist world-system. As such, this article proposes to approach the shore as a site for comparison, since shorelines have been materially instrumental in the development of colonialism and capitalism in the defining ways described above. As shorelines function as contact zones, coastal comparativism further centres the importance of reading from different angles and degrees of integration into the world-system, meaning that such an approach illuminates both core and periphery perspectives (Moretti; Niblett). Integration, for some, may be profitable and preferable, while for others it may be violent and utterly unwanted. Moreover, these positions are multiscalar—the core within the periphery, for instance—as well as interchangeable depending on the context in which they occur. One example of this multiscalarity could be Nairobi which is both to be understood as an urban capital widely connected to other core sites but also as an

[4] Although WReC periodically defines the "modern literature" of the capitalist world-system as primarily relating to the past 200 years, they write that "its formal conditions of possibility would have begun to be established some three centuries earlier" (WReC: Warwick Research Collective 15). Here, I employ this broader interpretation of world literature coinciding with the colonial age in line with the conceptualisation presented by Niblett.

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integral part of the world-systemic peripheral status of Kenya (and Africa more widely).

In this vein, literary fiction of coastal encounters is no exception. Simply to propose that Robinson's *New York 2140* or Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* are world literary texts does not really say that much. The critical impetus is to excavate *how* the given literature aesthetically registers the world-system from the vantage in which it is written, and what that in turn allows us to say of the capitalist structure that guides contemporary life. Coastal world literature offers a method to read sediments of capitalism as it washes ashore at different sites—again and again. Centuries ago, the inclination was to travel East and South and encounter 'new land' to feed the industrial machine. Recently, North and West has become the lodestar for people seeking to escape the lasting residue of colonial extraction and violence and seeking new opportunities in "the Old World" (on the aspect of lingering effects of colonialism, see for instance Koram; See also UNHCR).

In *What Strange Paradise* (2021) by Egyptian-Canadian author Omar El Akkad, a migrant smuggler tells the two Eritreans whom he arbitrarily selects to pilot a ragged, small dinghy destined to carry a cramped bunch of paying passengers across the Mediterranean: "Come storms, come police, come military, come God Himself, I don't care. You stay in the direction of *N*. Your whole future is *N*" (Akkad 60). North, we are to understand, holds the future of the refugees. A similar appraisal and elevation of this cardinal point can be found in the poem "Psalm on the Road to Agadez" in the collection *Mare Nostrum* (2019) by Libyan-American author Khaled Mattawa. It reads, in full length:

> Day and night traveled
> to reach these shores
> West to North
>
> East to North
> North to North
> to North to North
>
> your country,
> your savage country
> where you are free! (10)

A clear sense of desperation, of anxiety and exhaustion, seems to emanate from these lines. The people in the poem—undoubtedly boat refugees fleeing their homeland—relentlessly travel to reach the shores of salvation. Furthermore, the repetitive invocation of the destiny—North… North… North…—produces an image of decisiveness—of wanting to start anew whatever the costs.

The recent migratory spike towards Europe, that Mattawa's collection of poems is a registration of, is in many ways a response to the Old World's centuries long exploitation of land and people, as Kojo Koram so succinctly describes it (Koram). Moreover, speaking to the uneven and combined *interrelation* of world-ecology/world-economy, the North African and Middle Eastern states of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain were in many respects primed to erupt into

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a state of revolution, through a combination of ecological and social precarity, as well as the authoritarian rule. According to a volume of essays from 2013 published by the liberal think tank *Center for American Progress*, climate change incidents played a decisive role tipping the scales towards popular revolt: Drought in China led to global wheat shortage in the years prior to the Arab Spring revolutions in the early 2010's. Moreover, ongoing desertification across the Sahel-region had undermined and continues to undermine agricultural livelihoods, leading to urbanisation, internal migration, and general food insecurity. As efforts to contain the revolution intensified, these factors contributed to the massive exodus of refugees to neighbouring countries and to the comparatively small number of people attempting the sea-crossing to Europe (E. Werrell and Femia; on the comparably small number of refugees reaching Europe, see Mixed Migration Centre; UNHCR). With climate change as a social and political "stressor" at peripheral sites within the world-system, European core nations became the refuge sought when possible.

Coastal world literature, I posit, holds a key to understanding how world-ecology/world-economy reveal itself and often intensify at coastal contact zones. One example of this, is the literary registration of the European "refugee crisis" in 2015.

Beachside Encounters at the Borders of Europe

For the affluent population, the shoreline in general is mostly synonymous with white beaches, soft dunes, hovering seagulls, and the happenstance appearance of amber in a small patch of washed-up seaweed. Essentially, the beach shoreline constitutes a leisure site of selfcare that offers respite from daily routines, a washing off of all the contaminating and exhausting concerns of reality. In a European context, the islands of the Mediterranean and Aegean Sea—Lampedusa, Linosa, Lesbos, Kos, and Bozcaada, with others—are among the first to encounter the consequences of world-systemic climate change in the form of rising waters.[5] At the same time, these island's shorelines are often publicly valorised for their aura of tranquillity and/or their manifestation as sites for selfcare (and as "party islands" for youths), making them a preferred leisure destination for global northerners seeking respite and ecological reconnection.

In the Danish novel *Til stranden* (2017, *To the Beach*) by Peter Højrup, the understanding of the coast as washing away all the regular distinctions that help one compartmentalising life is metaphorically present from the very first page: "It is impossible to see where the sea ends and the sky begins, one could sail right into

[5] However, as exemplified in Christina Gerhardt's book *Sea Change: An Atlas of Islands in a Rising Ocean*, the "first wave" of impacts from the rising sea-level befall low-lying islands such as the Republic of Mauritius, the Republic of Maldives, the Republic of Singapore, Guam, the Solomon Islands, Grenada, Haiti, the Republic of Cuba and more, predominantly located at the Indian Ocean, the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea. "[T]hese low-lying islands," Gerhardt wires, "are a harbinger of the future that awaits the residents of coastal cities and shorelines" (1).

Paradise" (Højrup 11).[6] Here we see the myth of paradise applied again, this time to differentiate the beach's time and place from mundane reality. Throughout the novel, this imagery of a blurred horizontal line recurs (e.g. 22, 38, 70), but its valorisation and metaphorical meaning shift. In the beginning, the portrayal of beachside leisure expresses a circular state where nothing substantial happens. The hustle and bustle of everyday life evaporates in the blurring bliss of relaxation as a group of friends who used to live in a flat-sharing community are on holiday on the Turkish island Bozcaada. From this privileged position of non-productivity, we however quickly learn, the absence of any real meaning in life haunts the characters rather than liberates them. The character Ib, for instance, constantly hears this deep rumble disturbing his attempt to relax (12, 69, 96, 142, 170). A never disclosed anxiety clearly troubles him, but formally the rumble also works to alert the reader of a disturbing event to come.

Equally, the photographer Ernst's career is in the decline making him irritable and unable to relax with his new girlfriend Betty. So, when an opportunity to visit a factory fabricating fake life vests for boat migrants seemingly reveals itself, Ernst is eager to leave the island and all the friends and seek it out. Filled with this newfound purpose, Ernst suddenly lashes out at his friends over dinner, accusing them of not doing anything of real value in relation to all the troubles of the world. In a scolding raptus, he mentions everything from Islamic terrorism to Nestlé's procurement of water resources to child labour to populist politics to pollution to self-absorption by staring at screens to migrants drowning in the Mediterranean (180, 173-178). Later, however, we learn that there was no factory, and the episode was really just a desperate and egoistic attempt to salvage his own career and return to more serious photojournalism so he would not have to do portraits and commercials for a living (212-13, 221).

Devastated by Ernst's sudden departure, Betty goes for a swim alone. We have earlier learned that she is a very skilled swimmer, yet this time the current carries her further and further away from the cliff she jumped off from. The watery element that she felt at ease in earlier, now appears hostile and contaminated with the residue of mass tourism: "There is trash everywhere being dragged back and forth across the seabed: Plastic bags and water bottles, trashed fish boxes, a page from a newspaper with a picture of a burning skyscraper, mooring ropes and nets, containers, a chair without legs" (205).[7] Eventually she begins to hallucinate and goes under (206-08, 210-211).

In superficial and habitual middle-class, leftist manner, the friends have discussed politics throughout the novel. And though they acknowledge that their petty problems are miniscule in comparison, they desperately long for a cognitive

[6] "Det er umuligt at se, hvor havet slutter, og himlen begynder, man kan sejle lige ind i paradis."(all translations are those of the author).

[7] "Det flyder med skrald, der trækkes frem og tilbage over bunden: plastikposer of vandflasker, smadrede fiskekasser, en avisside med et billede af et højhus i brand, tovværk og net, dunke, en stol uden ben."

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break. That is part of the reason they are at Bozcaada in the first place, as this conversation between Betty and another one of the friends, Linn, exemplifies: "It never stops, there is always another war, spudding. It is the same old evil, the pettiness, that hatred, it just makes you want to give up, it is like the misery is bottomless, like you have to close your eyes if you want to be able to live. We, who are so privileged and so miserable, Linn says" (103-04).[8] The political issues contemplated and discussed are all more structural and abstract in size; global injustice and poverty (111, 203), war and evilness (116, 121), ecocide (102, 182, 202-203), the world moving backwards "towards extermination camps and genocide" (38)[9]. Apart from Ernst's sudden rupture, they seem to agree on the tragic state of the world but also on their own incapacity to really do anything about it. This is part of what Ernst tells himself as he leaves the others: "the world has gone out of joint, he has to do something, at least feel that he is doing something" (186).[10] That last part of the sentence is crucial as it discloses a more real cause for his actions: his own complacency, his *feeling* of doing good. Equally revealing, we also get a glimpse of a more ugly and complex relation regarding the influx of Mediterranean migration that takes place at the time of the novel. Herman, Linn's husband, thinks to himself how he would love to return to Lesbos,

> but that is not possible now with alle those refugees. He cannot be on holiday while others suffer, not while he can see it, anyhow. Of course, he sees it on the cell phone and gives fifty or a hundred kroners to Doctors Without Borders or the Red Cross before he scrolls down in the stream of cats and children, and misery and death, but to sit in the shoreline, exactly, as the rubber dinghies arrive, and the bodies wash ashore, he cannot do that, he does not want to do that. (25)[11]

When they speak in abstract terms, they all agree the world is heading in a terrible direction. But as these examples show, there is equally a reluctance to jeopardize their own core, middle-class, complacent position in the capitalist world-system. They would like to *feel* they are doing right, yet they would also very much like to avoid real confrontation with the structural injustice of the world.

A particular world event lucidly reveals this discrepancy. At some point on their vacation, the devastating picture of the two-year old boy Alan Kurdi washing ashore on another Turkish beach begins to pop up in their newsfeed.[12] Utterly

[8] "Det stopper jo aldrig, der er altid en ny krig, der vokser frem. Det er den samme gamle ondskab, den smålighed, det had, man bliver helt opgivende, det er, som om elendigheden er bundløs, som om vi bliver nødt til at lukke øjnene, hvis vi skal kunne holde ud at leve. Vi, der er så privilegerede og så ulykkelige, siger Linn."

[9] "i disse dage synes verden at bevæge sig baglæns mod onde tider, mod udryddelseslejre og folkemord."

[10] "verden er gået af led, han bliver nødt til at gøre noget, i det mindste føle, at han gør noget."

[11] "Han vil gerne tilbage til Lesbos, men det går ikke nu med alle de flygtninge. Han kan ikke holde ferie, mens andre lider, ikke mens han ser på det i hvert fald. Han ser det selvfølgelig på mobilen og giver en halvtredser eller hundrede kroner til Læger uden Grænser eller Røde Kors, inden han bladrer videre i strømmen af katte og børn, og nød og død, men ligefrem at sidde i strandkanten, mens gummibådene kommer ind, og ligene skyller i land, det kan han ikke, det har han ikke lyst til."

[12] There are numerous analyses of the photo's circulation and reception, see for instance this short news analysis: Sinclair, Kirstine. "The Dead Boy & the Aftermath."

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distressed with the image, they "do not know what to say" (131) while they tell themselves that they "cannot save the whole world" (151).[13] After this, each time the picture emerges in conversation between the friends it generates commotion, with accusations of being insensitive and inconsiderate being levelled at the one who brought it up (see 155-157, 180). Their first exposure to the picture takes place as the friends are attending a wine tasting event. This juxtaposition clearly registers the utter ridiculousness of the world's structural unevenness as the novel jumps seamlessly from their chock of seeing the picture of Alan Kurdi to their concentrated attention towards wine. Here is just a small sample to show the absurdity of the event when set in relation to what they have just learned:

> Hermann has chosen three wines for them to taste, two white and a rosé because that is what Linn likes the most.
>
> 1. Bottle, white, grape: Çavuş
>
> Linn: Very bitter just as it hits the tongue.
> Ernst: It has fatness and fruit.
> Betty: No, neither-or, I am thinking more like juice or …
> Linn: Apple, bitter almonds, the peaches or the apricots.
> Hermann: Give it some time in the glass.
> Betty: … dessert wine!
> Ernst: Yeah, right.
> Linn: A tiny bit sparkling, that is nice (131).[14]

However, despite their clear compartmentalisation of different events—the abstract relation to the tragic drowning of refugees, the submersion in wine tasting indulgence—the friends to their dismay eventually encounter a dinghy stuffed with refugees reaching shore. "Oh no […] what do they want here," the friends exclaim, only to discover that the refugees carry the body of an unconscious Betty with them: "There is a body hanging down one of the sides of the dinghy, some try to hold on to the arms, others have the hair by a grip trying to keep the dangling head above waters" (213).[15] The mass of refugees that the friends sympathise with in more abstract, political conversations, but shy away from when they become more tangible—as the picture of Alan Kurdi and the arrival of the boat show—is now responsible for the rescue of Betty. As such, the novel registers a lurking xenophobic anxiety that reveals itself as their self-conceived political position meet up with reality. As such, the novel mirrors how the beachside encounter of refugees on the European borders has turned the humanistic good intentions—emblematically represented by then-chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel's oath "wir schaffen das"—into Frontex and a comprehensive paradigm shift on immigration politics.

[13] "Hermann ved ikke hvad han skal sige" (131). "[M]an kan jo ikke redde hele verden"(151).
[14] "Hermann har valgt tre vine, de skal smage på, to hvide og en rosé, fordi det er det, Linn holder mest af. // 1. flaske, hvid, drue: Çavuş// Linn: Meget bitter, lige når den rammer tungen. / Ernst: Den har fedme og frugt. / Betty: Nej, hverken-eller, jeg tænker mere sådan most eller … / Linn: Æble, bitter mandler, fersken- eller abrikoserne. / Hermann: Giv den lidt tid i glasset. / Betty: … dessertvin! / Ernst: Den er god med dig. / Linn: En lille smule perlende, det er lækkert."
[15] "Åh nej […] hvad vil de dog her. Der hænger en krop langs den ene side af gummibåden, nogle holder fast i armene, andre har fat i håret og forsøger at holde det dinglende hoved oven vande."

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Also registering the shoreline encounter from this angle, the Danish author and playwright Peter-Clement Woetmann's collection of poems *Bag bakkerne, kysten* (2017; *Behind the Dunes, the Coast*) formally display a sense of beachside tranquillity being slowly disrupted. It begins serenely with metaphorical entanglements of body and environment:

> My body is blue eyes white skin.
>
> My body is corn yellow fields and the mild breeze
> in the trees in a clearing in the woods.
>
> My body is the hills and behind the hills, the coast.
>
> My body is birds fleeing around with
> each other dizzying high up somewhere in the sky.
>
> My body is rows of dunes, leymus, hot
> sand blue sky. (5)[16]

But slowly, the collection shifts attention to all the things "my body" is not. "My body is not a sea" (9) or "My body is not the rusty containers heading from / somewhere to somewhere else" (13), until, finally, the text reaches a pinnacle of difference: "My body not the body of the nomad. // My body is not the body of the poor. // My body is not the body of wars" (21). More and more, it seems that the pressures of the outside world rattle the speaker to such a degree that his/her recurring phrase of serenity—"My body is blue eyes white skin. // My body is corn yellow fields and the mild breeze / in the trees in a clearing in the woods. // My body is the hills and behind the hills, the coast," morphs into a chauvinistic and self-defensive stance. Ontologically demarking one body—the body of the affluent, blue eyed, white skinned global northerner—from the body of nomads, the poor, the ones running away from war. Seemingly creeping in from the corners, the migratory reality begins to take control of the book even as the speaker does his/her utmost to uphold the ontological difference: "My body is not the dinghies' rocking rocking, / my body is not the boats crossing the / Mediterranean now." And "My body is not six Somalians died of / dehydration on a rubber dingy with 58 others // My body is not four from Eritrea died of / dehydration on a rubber dingy with 58 others" (37, 45).[17] And:

> My body is not the body that sits up against another
> body that sits up against another body that sits up against
> another body that sits up against another body that sits up
> against another body that sits up against another body that sits
> up against another body that sits up against another body that

[16] "Min krop er blå øjne hvid hud. // Min krop er korngule marker og den milde vind / i træerne i en lysning i skoven. // Min krop er bakkerne og bag bakkerne, kysten. // Min krop er fugle der flygter omkring med / hinanden højt svimlende et sted i himlen. // Min krop er klitrækkerne, marehalmen, varmt / sand blå himmel."

[17] "Min krop er ikke bådenes vuggende vuggende, / min krop er ikke de både på vej over / middelhavet nu."
"Min krop er ikke seks somaliere døde af / dehydrering på en gummibåd med 58 andre. // Min krop er ikke fire fra Eritrea døde af / dehydrering på en gummibåd med 58 andre."

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sits up against another body. (25)[18]

Woetmann's book just as Højrup's registers how the European shoreline is at the vanguard when it comes to encountering the contemporary migratory reality of world-systemic capitalism.

Sitting Tight and Running Fast

From the precarious (and peripheral) side of the migratory route, the before quoted experience of sitting tight is represented in another register altogether. Rather than the lurking experience of world-systemic realisation that we saw in the Danish texts, the vocabulary in El Akkad's and Mattawa's books sharply distinguishes between these two conditions: That of sitting tight in cramped positions, and that of running for one's life. It seems, seen from the perspective of the refugee these are the primary states (of being).

In his analysis of Ghassan Kanafani's novella *Men in the Sun* (1962), Andreas Malm has already shown the morbidly ironic horrors of sitting tight in an empty water tank exposed to the burning sun waiting to be smuggled across the border to Kuwait to work in the oil boom—the primary contributor to climate change's scorching of the Earth (Malm). In Omar El Akkad's *What Strange Paradise*, the passage to a new life situation goes across the water but the outcome is just as tragic. In a scene that clearly echoes the landing of Alan Kurdi, the novel opens with the line, "The child lies on the shore" (3). Washed ashore on a nondisclosed Greek island (possibly Kos), the child, a boy, comes to himself only to see that some men whose "baggy white containment suits cover their bodies and white gloves their hands and white masks their faces" are approaching him. And so, "he runs" (6, 7). The novel goes on to display the boy's struggle to keep himself out of the coastal guard's way and avoid being encamped. Quickly he bumps in to a fifteen-year-old local girl, Vänna, who keeps him hidden and later helps him cross the island until they reach a lighthouse at the other side from where a ferry waits to transport him off the island and away to "a community near the port [where] his people [will] take care of [him]" (232). This, we are to believe, is the happy ending of the book. Yet, the closing two pages let us know that it has all been a mirage, a fantasy of salvage aimed at pleasing and then disturbing the reader as we are exposed to the gruesome reality of dead children washing ashore on the beaches of Europe with the very first sentence reoccurring to conclude the book: "The child lies on the shore" (235). All that running, we are to understand, is for nothing. Given the reality of the capitalist world-system, you can run but you cannot escape the uneven and combined configuration of the world.

The novel of course contains more nuance than this short recap might give it credit for. For instance, just as in Højrup's novel, fake lifejackets also play a part in

[18] "Min krop er ikke den krop der sidder tæt på en / krop der sidder tæt på en krop der sidder tæt på / en krop der sidder tæt på en krop der sidder tæt / på en krop der sidder tæt på en krop der sidder / tæt på en krop der sidder tæt på en krop der / sidder tæt på en krop."

Akkad's novel pointing to the fact that the core-periphery, or suppressor-suppressed, distinction is in fact multiscalar. The migrant smugglers are clearly superior in their relation to the migrants and therefore in a position to cheat and deceive their victims (see 47, 56, 148). Equally interesting, the coastal guards and other people involved in managing the migration are also themselves subjected to a system that burdens their close society, as the woman running the refugee camp on the island says: "I've got six hundred people in a camp made for three hundred, and all of them are owed a day's drinking water" (114). Yet, they also work hard to sustain "the system" as there is also a principal understanding present that it is exactly the implied proper, orderly structure of Europe that distinguishes it from other parts of the world. As the main antagonist, the coast guard Kethos, laconically and discriminatingly says at one point: "That we are in a position to be fled to and not fled from is because we have systems, rules, proper ways of doing things. You want to see what it's like without systems? Hop on the next one of those boats that runs aground here and take it in the opposite direction" (116, see also 82-83, 231). Kethos here clearly distinguishes between a modern Europe with clear and proper rules and an underdeveloped world outside of Europe. What he does not seem to recognise, however, is the point made by WReC that modernity "is not something that happens—or even happens *first*—in 'the West' and to which others can subsequently gain access" (WReC: Warwick Research Collective 13, Original italics). Modernity is the principal result of world-systemic uneven and combined development. Modernity is just as much the nationalist politicians "capitalizing on the migrant crisis and the humiliating economic malaise" (Akkad 151-152) as it is the celebrated progressive politics coming out of the suffragettes, the civil rights movements, and the labour struggles.

Kethos is not the only one in the novel subscribing to an idea of Europe existing on some higher level of development. The same idea is what seems to create the migratory pressure on its borders in the first place. However, the "Shangri-La" image of Europe is suddenly exposed by the very smuggler who benefits from this image as he exclaims to the boat migrants:

> "You sad, stupid people," he [the smuggler] said. "Look what you've done to yourselves. The West you talk about doesn't exist. It's a fairy tale, a fantasy you sell yourself. […] You invent an entire world because your conscience demands it, you invent good people and bad people and you draw a neat line between them because your simplistic morality demands it. But the two kinds of people in this world aren't good and bad—they're engines and fuel. Go ahead, change your country, change your name, change your accent, pull the skin right off your bones, but in their eyes they will always be engines and you will always be fuel." (179)

With his phrasing, the smuggler is referencing the centuries old inequalities of colonialism, suggesting that no matter the name—modernity, rationalism, properly ordered—the structure of the world still basically comes down to some being the resource on which others' wellbeing depends. Equally brutal in his depiction of this structure, at one point the same smuggler also says: "You think the black market is bad? Brother, wait till you see the white market" (163).

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Throughout the novel, disruptive encounters with climate change also make their presence known as a reason for migration—both the internal and external sort. "It started with a drought [. …] Don't call it a conflict, Amir's [the boy's] father said. There's no such thing as conflict. There's only scarcity, there's only need" (48). It is hard not to read these lines as referencing exactly the earlier mentioned drought in China that led up to the Middle Eastern uprisings. Likewise, more general desertification leading to unwanted urbanisation and the loss of shoreline livelihoods is also brought up as the father explains that "although drought had forced the Utus [the family name] to abandon their orange groves and leave the coast for the cities inland, they'd always be seaside people" (74. See also 88). Moving inland was a choice pushed upon the Utus by the climate suddenly acting up, we learn. And now, ones again, the natural and *political* climate, urges the Utus to leave their home and travel for new cities. Suddenly, being "seaside people," by no choice of their own, is beginning to turn into an identity of constant mobility, of flux. The novel, thus, clearly illustrates how climate change works as a stressor that only seems to increase the uneven development further. Once again, a morbid irony reveal itself in the novel's registration of the migration to Europe. Residents of the Global South are driven away from their land by greenhouse gas emissions in the Global North only to encounter suspicion, discrimination, Kafkaesque "systems [and] rules," and a strict regime of border control at the southernmost coastal regions of said nations.

Conclusion: The Trills and Horrors of Shoreline Encounters

Registering the present atmosphere of nationalism and unwanted encounters with foreigners, Khaled Mattawa's collection of poems fittingly bears the Roman name for the Mediterranean Sea: *Mare Nostrum*, "Our Sea". Rivalry, ownership, and a sense of entitlement over common seaways has of course been an integral ingredient in maritime geopolitical struggles for centuries. As Søren Frank writes, "the maritime world played a key role in the development of mercantilism, capitalism, and colonial expansion" (20). And it continues to play a crucial part today, as Laleh Khalili succinctly shows: "Ninety per cent of the world's goods travel by ship. Crude oil, carried in tankers, constitutes nearly 30 per cent of all maritime cargo; almost 60 per cent of world trade in oil is transported by sea" (1). In recent history, however, "Mare Nostrum" is also the name of an Italian search and rescue operation launched in "October 2013 [after] a boat carrying hundreds of refugees and migrants from Libya to Italy sank near the island of Lampedusa, killing 368 refugees" (UNHCR 8). As the operations of Mare Nostrum ended a year later, the EU border agency Frontex's mandate was extended to take over the operations as the official EU Coast Guard. Where Mare Nostrum had an explicit emphasis on the aspect of rescuing migrants at sea, the operations of Frontex are mainly aimed at securing the outer borders of Europe. This important difference, notwithstanding, "Mare Nostrum" initiated the structural and organisational attention directed towards the southernmost borders from the European nations. "Mare Nostrum," then, reads as the signifier and

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metaphor for a larger political turn, the contemporary securitisation of the European border zone, which is also what the title of Mattawa's book refers to. His poem "Song for Amadou" concisely depicts the opposing struggles taking place at European ground:

> Have you made it
> To Sicily, Amadou?
> Are you deep
>
> in the woods of Denmark?
> learned a new language,
> Writing your book?
>
> Have they put you on
> a plane home, Amadou?
> Kidnapped you, sent you back
>
> to that camp in Bani Walid,
> slaving day and night
> on a farm for some crook. (24)

A constant dialectic of wanting to disappear and fearing to be discovered is present here. Always, Amadou must be wary of his surroundings. From the deathly seafare across the Mediterranean, Amadou must now seek shelter in the "woods of Denmark" where he can hopefully escape the constant fear of being sent to Bani Walid, a secret detention camp in Libya.

As shown, Højrup's and Woetmann's more *thrilling* sensations of an external force disrupting the peace and luring an unconscious xenophobia to the surface in many ways differ from the direct *horrors* depicted in Akkad and Mattawa's texts.[19] Yet, all of the texts register disruptive shoreline encounters of world-systemic inequality. Not as flaws in the capitalist machinery but as its inevitable outcome. In effect, the coastal world literature that I have brought forward here read as part of a collective archive that tells the story of combined and uneven encounters at the shores of Europe.

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[19] This distinction between an "immediate horror" and "a looming if still unrealised terror" (what I refer to as a thrilling sensation) is in debt to the analysis presented in Höglund's "Alligators in the Living Room: Terror and Horror in the Capitalocene."

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