Introduction: Thinking Comparison with the Politics of Storytelling

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> But my main reason for writing is to develop a personal style that echoes the sounds of the spoken word in the islands.
> —Epeli Hau'ofa, 1984

> Although we do not choose the webs [of interlocution] in whose nets we are initially caught or select those with whom we wish to converse, our agency consists in our capacity to weave out of those narratives and fragments of narratives a life story that makes sense for us, as unique individual selves.
> —Seyla Ben-Habib, 1999

"This is our ocean," said Kavita, when describing the communal learning spaces he and other Pacific Island college students created to navigate through and counter the assimilationist forces of the US higher education system they inhabit. In Rick Bonus's contribution to this special issue, "Navigating

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the Ocean in the School," the students invoke an ocean that signifies a different form of knowing and a different way of being, both at odds with an invisible norm embodied by the organization and practices of our knowledge institutions. They seem to be locked within a comparative order that perpetually casts them as lacking, out of place, and out of time. In the recollections of their experiences, the students inadvertently reveal how it was through their stories about the ocean, even when far from the island homes of their ancestors, that they often recognized one another and forged communities in otherwise inhospitable spaces. The stories, narratives of ancient and more recent pasts as well as possible futures, and their tellings of them constitute their vessels to navigate life—vessels that transcend space and time as we conventionally know them. These students' critiques and counter-practices echo the matters and goals at the heart of this special issue. At a moment of emerging and expanding new empiricisms and the shrinking of humanities-related academic spaces dedicated to the elaboration and implementation of critiques of Western epistemologies, we focus on island worlds and the stories and storytelling that form them as a means to learn of other ways of being in the world.[1] In sum, we want to explore simultaneous, competing, and overlapping storied worlds.

With these collaborative world-making projects in mind, this special issue elaborates methodological and theoretical concepts about the form and function of storytelling in imperial island formations in the Pacific, Indian, and Atlantic Oceans. Our focus on storytellers and storytelling across islands and their diasporas to reimagine space-making also advances new methods of comparison in the expansion of global knowledge. Our project reconceptualizes island worlds as situated historical places (i.e., islands and their networks as spaces that come to life through the multiple and competing meanings constantly attached to them) formed in the milieu of overlapping and competing European, US, and Southeast Asian empires and diasporas.[2] Moving away from the conventional practice of compare and contrast, we focus, instead, on how different storytelling networks within and across empires are mutually constituted through uneven networks of exchange. We are particularly attentive to the specificities of local and regional community formations and languages as well as to the global dynamics that shape them. By investigating the forms and politics of storytelling in island South and

Southeast Asian worlds, along with their parallel and intersecting formations in the Caribbean and diasporic Asian America, this special issue makes two scholarly interventions in our studies about world making: (1) we refashion the notion of comparison, to move away from the project of "knowing"—habitually constituted through a top-down gaze aimed at assessment and measuring, which consequently leads to the formation of hierarchies, categories of containment, and reductionism—to unearth forms of comparison emerging from local environments and local knowledges; and (2) in thinking of storytelling events or inscriptions as situated testimonies (i.e., identifying the politics of location of a telling), we center affect and emotion as a means for unraveling and connecting different, contesting registers of experience. We refer to the imperial as projects of expansion and subjugation of "others" and to the colonial as the actual relationship, the symbolic and material practice, of illegitimate subordination. Neither are totalizing phenomena, but their effects and affects are pervasive and persistent.[3] Our focus on islands and storytelling allows us to bring together forms of indigeneity from the Pacific, the Indian Ocean, and the South China Sea in approximation, entanglement, and struggle with the travels of maritime missions. Ronit Ricci's article, for instance, brings to light these multiple journeys: Malay exiles and soldiers reinvented themselves as they traversed the Indian Ocean to arrive in Ceylon, an unfamiliar land; they crossed from Dutch to British rule as imperial power structures shifted in the late eighteenth century; and they were Muslims in a predominantly Buddhist and Hindu region.

Historically, practices of comparison have relied on what Jacques Rancière (2013: 1) has called the *distribution of the sensible,* "a set of relations between the perceptible, the thinkable and the doable that defines a common world" but is always dependent on what class of human beings takes part in that common world. The contemporary distribution of the sensible affirms and constructs West European and US forms of the nation-state as the horizon of legitimate and durable social experience. In our current moment, we see more clearly than ever the persistence of nonnational, subnational, and antinationalist groups, and we are firsthand witnesses to the rise and the consolidation of "new" regional space economies.[4] The displacement of state sovereignty by private capital, the limits of US imperial power,

and the deeper incorporation of local geographies and cultures by a complex of multinational organizations forces a radical reevaluation of the methods, practices, and goals of conventional comparative thinking. At this junction, we believe that scholars working in and on island worlds—as a way of rethinking area studies against Western epistemic norms—are particularly suited to address this intellectual crisis and to offer examples of new practices of comparison. To that degree, we see in the practices of storytelling something beyond the act of narrating and accounting: to us, storytelling is also imbricated in regimes of hidden knowledge and hegemony, and we are interested in approaching and learning from these hidden regimes.

One way to understand these hidden regimes is via the example of an oceanic worldview that this special issue offers. The ocean is commonly thematized as a powerful connective force, but in this special issue our authors invite us to take one step further and think of the ocean as providing a different epistemology, a tool to subvert the hidden logics of domination. Pacific Islander scholar Epeli Hau'ofa (2008) prompts us to embrace a different geographic sense, moving away from the imperial cartography of islands in the sea toward a "sea of islands." Speaking particularly about the Pacific Islands, Hau'ofa's proposal means to counter land-based narratives and, in so doing, subvert the colonial logic of islands as fragmentary, isolated, too small to overcome underdevelopment, and always outside of modernity because of either their simplicity or their barbaric behaviors. The oceanic produces other ways of thinking about both time and space. Hau'ofa explores the ocean as a constitutive force not only as a metaphor but also as a form and practice of storytelling. Hau'ofa, as stated in the opening quote, wants to capture the sounds of those islands in the oceans, and he teaches us how to do this through different metaphors of comparison.

The ensemble of articles gathered here draw together scholars from American ethnic studies, anthropology, comparative literature, history, political theory, and Asian studies to rethink comparison in storied island worlds. The articles are not meant to address all themes equally and with the same intentionality because the concern is not to emulate a well-structured, one-on-one dialogue but to re-create a *tertulia* (informal gathering) effect, with many overlapping conversations at once, which produces a different cartography of space, in this case of Southeast Asian, Pacific, and Caribbean

island worlds (Roberts 2015). In so doing, we satisfy one of our main aims: to offer other means to register the inequality of global capital flows through a common language that can avow and necessarily elucidate the unevenness among these islands when they are seen in approximation to one another, not with the purpose to posit only one as the norm and essence of colonial and postcolonial modernity but to advance various kinds of societies with a range of possible futures.

In this special issue, comparison emerges as a process, not a project of collecting and organizing. Seeing comparison as a process, according to comparative political theorist Carlo Bonura, can allow us to explore a variety of relationships and effects (for more on problems of "knowing," see Bonura and Sears 2007). This method focuses on processes of mutual constitution, requiring a variety of approaches: for example, Benedict Anderson's (1998: 2) doubled-vision telescope shows the colonized looking back at her homeland from the metropole, and, in this special issue, Ileana Rodríguez-Silva's reading of the Caribbean basin as a "house of mirrors" allows us to conceive of a region with and without boundaries, a dynamic emerging out of the struggles produced in centuries-long colonial relationships under multiple imperial formations. The dynamics of imperial formation demand the constant doing, undoing, and repositioning of place, suggesting that stories might lead us to think of imperial formations in new ways. It is imperative to ask how the imperial field shifts and continues to exist among uneven and competing power relations. For Rodríguez-Silva (pers. comm., November 10, 2017), the imperial field refers to the dynamic and fraught entanglement of intersecting, multidirectional orbits of struggle, negotiation, and exchange and the textured fabric among these orbits. Thinking about the imperial field instead of empire is useful to deemphasize the old center-periphery frame that privileges metropolitan centers as sole repositories of power and allows us to explore the forces organized under the rubrics of empire and nation not as opposite forms but as two sides of the same coin, mutually constituted.

Storytelling, Theory, Testimony

In this special issue, we address several storytelling forms—oral, written, and visual—and engage them as situated testimonies. For contributor Laurie

Sears (2013), situated testimonies are eyewitness accounts that do not aim merely to explain and describe but strive to activate other senses and provide nonlinear voices, whether in oral or written narratives and poetry or film in which past memories are lodged. Similarly, in her exploration of oral stories in Hindu religious teaching, anthropologist Kirin Narayan (1989) conceives of narratives as expressions of symbolic truths and as a means of organizing experiences that are relatable or recognizable by others, despite variation in time and multiplicity in form. They are stories that have "spun a fabric that extends through time and space without clear edges." In reference to the Caribbean plantation and the experiences of transatlantic slavery, Martiniquan writer Eduard Glissant (2000: 68–69) describes storytelling as a "symbolic evocation of situations," which takes the form of tales, proverbs, sayings, and songs, among other forms. Storytelling is a disguise, a saying without saying, and the storyteller is a handyman, "a djobbeur of the collective soul." Through this special issue's articles, storytelling emerges as an infinite practice of assembling/reassembling diverse knowledges for which there is no single interpretation, meaning, or closure. Thus, the aim of these articles is to continue communicating experiences, but, in elucidating the politics at the time of reassembling, we hope to grasp some of the multiple meanings these experiences enfold.

In his book *Oral Tradition as History* (1985), Jan Vansina made the case that oral traditions, as a form of storytelling, are legitimate articulations of knowledge that historians and other scholars should consider seriously. To Vansina, oral tradition is a form of testimony, sometimes eyewitness testimony, and Vansina shows an awareness of the contingency of all historical sources: "Thus a testimony is a tradition as interpreted through the personality of the informant and is colored by this personality" (64–65). Whether written or oral, all testimonies are statements interpreted through the personalities of their authors and inevitably marked by their social positionality, a critique of objectivity feminist theorist Donna Haraway (1988) articulated best through her concept of "situated knowledges." Sears's notion of situated testimonies expands Haraway's focus on science as well as Vansina's focus on oral tradition to consider *fictional and nonfictional written* testimonies (novels, diaries, short stories, newspapers, essays, etc.) in the vernaculars of Southeast Asia and its colonizers as forms of knowledge that can

reveal unexpected truths. Sears invites historians and other scholars to see in fiction as well as nonfiction a form of eyewitness testimony that can be approached by a wide variety of methods—close reading, postcolonial critique, affect theory, or psychoanalytic theory, among others—to unlock the mysteries and/or traumatic memories layered in the testimonies. The various articles in this special issue offer a wide array of situated testimonies, whether stylized or nonstylized, whether written or oral, to unearth the truths and workings of storytelling in imperial island worlds.[5]

Our encounters with situated testimonies also unveil the multiple movements of things, peoples, beliefs, and practices within and across imperial fields as stories are intricately embedded in webs of interlocution, a concept coined by Charles Taylor (1989) in *Sources of the Self*, but which Seyla Ben-Habib (1999) expands on by bringing in a dialogical viewpoint. Part of Ben-Habib's discussion of webs of interlocution formed our second epigraph:

> The dialogic narrative view, which I share with Taylor and which I shall distinguish from the more essentialist model of "strong evaluative commitments," is the following: To be and to become a self is to insert oneself into webs of interlocution; it is to know how to answer when one is addressed; in turn, it is learning how to address others. Of course, we never really "insert" ourselves but rather are thrown into these webs of interlocution in the Heideggerian sense of *Geworfenheit* [thrownness]. We are born into webs of interlocution or into webs of narrative—from the familial and gender narratives to the linguistic one to the macronarrative of one's collective identity. We become who we are by learning to be a conversation partner in these narratives. Although we do not choose the webs in whose nets we are initially caught or select those with whom we wish to converse, our agency consists in our capacity to weave out of those narratives and fragments of narratives a life story that makes sense for us, as unique individual selves. (344)[6]

We see this special issue of articles as a particular web of interlocutions that spring from similar theoretical concerns with narrative, stories, race, affect, and politics in different imperial locations. Storytellers, through their time-and-place-specific practices, share with us "their sixth sense about the moral affective heart of capitalism and colonialism as an analysis" (Million

2009: 54). Indigenous feminist scholar Dian Million (2009) rightfully points out that histories are felt as well as thought about. That is, these stories are not mere artifacts for scholars to mine for clues about a so-called past and present, nor are they failed/unfinished attempts at art: they constitute affective analysis about worlds and experiences that defy our empirical explanatory power. It is this affective analysis that this special issue seeks to explore to register the echoes, reverberations, reflections, and refractions of the multiple worlds that surround us but that often escape us. Immersion in the world of affect is always an unnerving endeavor for the disciplinary scholar as it challenges our desire for certainty. But our authors embrace what philosopher Édouard Glissant calls a "right to opacity." That is, difference, as Vicente Rafael (1988) often discusses in his scholarly *oeuvre*, is never completely translatable (thereby its subversive character). For Glissant, a demand for absolute transparency is a fiction constitutive of Western thought, and the lack of such transparency legitimizes marginality, if not erasure. Thus, our efforts at other forms of being-in-community require relishing opacity and finding satisfaction in just our close approximation (Diawara, Glissant, and Winks 2011).

As situated testimonies, each telling of our stories is unique, a theme stressed by Hendrik Maier in his article here on the revolutionary poetry of the new nation of Indonesia's Chairil Anwar. Thus, storytelling is never a pure endeavor because a wide variety of power relations shape the assembling of stories and choose which voices are allowed to be heard. We remain attentive to the politics of storytelling as an approach, but we also avoid reinscribing the pervasive epistemological Eurocentrism that exists within and outside of the particularity of Europe as a sociogeographic formation. At the same time, through storytelling, these articles hope to offer alternative narratives that account for imperialism and colonialism in their multiple contexts and forms but that do not reduce experiences to them. In other words, we hope to see the world, in its conflicts and solidarities, *in relation* ("many things to be one and multiple at the same time," as Glissant proposes; Diawara, Glissant, and Winks 2011: 5–44).[7] Our immersion in the realm of affective analysis through storytelling has led us to uncover unpredictable ways of imagining, building, and re-creating place, ways beyond imperial and nationalist designs and the constraints of physical geographies. Thus,

these articles and the stories interwoven in them offer a critique of colonial and neocolonial epistemologies and practices that constrain our being "in relation" with South and Southeast Asian, Caribbean, Pacific Islander, and other possible worlds. Above all, this is a true collaborative endeavor—producing new entanglements—as none of us could ever alone aspire to achieve the cultural, linguistic, and geographic fluencies necessary to build this assemblage.

Unsettling Articles

Working on island worlds long under colonial rule, some of us find it evident that the affective worlds of colonial modernity are not homogeneous; they are uneven and fractured, producing simultaneously a universe of "dissenting affects"—intensities not completely outside of the socially constructed affective regimes of its historical moment, but ones that can never be contained by them and that, in such disjuncture, can offer glimpses of the unequal power relations at play (on the constitution of affective communities, see Rosenwein 2002). Some of our articles account for these dissenting affects as the storytelling they examine unsettles the seeming certainty of capital flows, colonial rule, and/or the colonial mentalities in the new nation-states. Such unsettledness produces a disorienting effect.

Francisco Benitez and Carlo Bonura make use of Walter Benjamin's (2006) concept of "dialectics at a standstill" to register some of those dissenting affects and, in the process, partially uncover the conditions of contestation that generate them. For Benitez, the concept of unmoving dialectics allows him to elucidate the unresolved class distinctions in the stories of Philippine writer Macario Pineda, who wrote in Tagalog during and after World War II. Benitez also looks at the rural/urban divide, the patron/client system of the nineteenth century as it changes in capitalist modernity, and their overlapping or failure to overlap in Pineda's stories. Benitez sees in Benjaminian dialectics a connection between ethics, alternative readings, and dialectics: "One may also consider ethical ways of reading that might keep alive the unresolved dialectic relationship between the text and the reader and that can enjoin them to potential outcomes and actions after and beyond the formal ending of the text." Drawing on Walter Benjamin's

"The Storyteller," Benitez asks "whether the ethical modes of reading that Macario Pineda offers might be where 'the righteous man encounters himself.'" Benitez also points to the inability of these class distinctions to be erased in the time of postcolonial capitalist modernities, and thus again his use of the "dialectics at a standstill."

For Carlo Bonura, in his article on Malaysian film, "this term *image* is shorthand for Benjamin's notion of a 'dialectical image,' in which what-has-been and the now come together in an image that allows us to recognize the now for what it is (namely, an ideological creation that is inextricably linked to the past). The what-has-been is a truth that erupts through the image and, according to Benjamin, becomes recognizable in a flash." With this concept, Benjamin makes the present pregnant with possibilities for movement, insight, and even agency. The site of Bonura's article is Malaysia and Muslim Malay communities in southern Thailand. Bonura uses the films of noted filmmaker Amir Muhammad to explore the hidden discourse of Malaysia's long buried communist past. Through innovative filmic techniques, Muhammad is able to hide the subversiveness of his subject matter in a combination of older Malay stories; Shakespearian tales; and an uneven fitting together of text, story, and multiple meanings. Like Benitez, Bonura finds the ideas of Benjamin useful for their playfulness and their profundity. In his analysis, Bonura both critiques and finds an excess of meaning in Benjaminian dialectics.

Probing the politics of storytelling requires embracing the growing critique of the conventions (among them, the hierarchies of aesthetic value) that constitute the study of literature, particularly the areas of comparative and world literatures as they encounter the close readings of scholars in area studies, who are simultaneously questioning the logics and contours of area studies' academic formation. For example, storytelling traditions and practices in island worlds, long studied by folklorists and anthropologists, were often discounted in literary studies (for important instantiations of this critique, see Damrosch 2014, especially chapters 24 and 25; Spivak 2003, 2009). Second, this exploratory endeavor also demands a more expansive definition of that which counts as storytelling, crafted by a wide array of peoples in multiple forms and executed in different sites of social life. For example, in her article on the haunting beauty of an unfinished novella by the Dutch

mixed-race writer Maria Dermoût, Laurie Sears brings to light Dermoût's documentation of the economies of affect (see Ahmed 2015), specifically the complex and unsettled intimacies in the domestic sphere, produced in and simultaneously producing the transcontinental colonial spaces of the Dutch Indies empire in the early decades of the twentieth century.[8] Sears tracks the subtle transmission of racial slurs and whispered hatreds in a novella set on the island of Sumatra, illuminating how racialized difference (color, religion, ethnicity) serves to index both the inequities and the affections that organized the Dutch East Indies. Sears argues that Dermoût's work should not be dismissed as just a narrative about liberal patriarchal harmony because Dermoût's heroine, the Indo or Native nursemaid Toetie, does not fit the role of subservient woman to her white husband, nor does she easily embrace the colonial structures of politics and capitalism that he represents. For Dermoût, transgressive love across racial lines was a way to account for a world in which Indos (mixed-race Eurasians from the Indies) could either have Native status and remain unseen or have European status like Dermoût and be visible. It was a world that no longer existed at the moment of her writing in the mid-twentieth century because of decolonization struggles and the Japanese subjugation of the Indies during World War II. For this Indo author, love is a means of reconstructing that past world, one that can partially "diminish the phantoms of the past" (see Abraham and Torok 1994). Love is also a way of recapturing the affects of the colonial past in the Indies, a past whose sepia tones are only evident to those with white skin and European status. But again, the silences in the stories, such as the one surrounding the sacrifices Toetie's Native servant may have had to endure to fulfill Toetie's needs, speak to the violent undercurrents that made Dermoût's Indies world possible, a world she could no longer recognize from her European privileged position. For many in and of Dutch Indies culture, the phantoms have not been diminished.

Our focus on storytelling—and the dissenting affects that generated them, that are in them, and/or that they produced—is guided by an effort to disturb what appear to be neatly packaged, well-structured narratives with clear explanations of forging place and community. In such tales, the "big house" (see Benitez's article in this special issue) is a broadly recognizable architectural symbol of wealth and power. In the stories presented

here, versions of the big house emerge as representations of institutions of domination, such as the rural hacienda, the school, language, the post-independence nation-state, and the hetero-patriarchal family. However, the stories counter the fixed and naturalized character of these institutions. Instead of a well-cemented big house that transcends time, we inhabit in these pages a multidimensional, labyrinthic, and illusory house of mirrors. Ileana Rodríguez-Silva's article introduces this heuristic device to describe how early twentieth-century Creole politicians in the US colony of Puerto Rico, haunted by the specter of black revolutionary Haiti, conceived and produced a sense of the local, the regional, and the world based on the endless interplay of reflections, refractions, diffractions, and dispersions. These political leaders forged solidarities as well as differences with other communities—particularly, but not exclusively, Cuba—in their own struggles to navigate long histories of colonial rule and racism. Through their storytelling, in content and form epitomized by the newspaper, Rodríguez-Silva unveils the complex politics shaping the nation-building project, which consists of numerous illusory acts forged through multiple comparative maneuvers among different reference points, with disorienting, while also very material, effects.

Blending newspaper articles and fiction in discussing the famous Filipino writer Nick Joaquin, Vicente Rafael's piece further troubles the conventions of the comparative method and defies the sense of continuous time and space to shake off any false sense readers could ever hold about the existence of a pure or untouched state. Introducing a Tagalog Philippine world rendered in English-language short stories, Rafael questions whether such a world could be recovered and/or whether such a recovery through the nation form could ever completely overcome the deep, historical cleavages arising from Filipino pasts. More specifically, Rafael teases out the complex meanings in the written work in English of Joaquin, unveiling the many gendered, racialized, generational, and geographic crisscrossings that simultaneously make and unmake national projects. Rafael juxtaposes Joaquin's narrations about his own intellectual formation—in the tradition of anti-imperialist and nationalist thought—with Joaquin's moving short stories and essays, in which the writer seeks to reveal the vernacular logic of cosmopolitan Filipino politics. Ironically, in this case, we observe instances of a complex

process of national formation in which the foreign and the imperial become lenses to produce meanings, which can be identified as the vernacular, the local, and the national. In many ways, the stories speak to how colony and empire are not easily discernable entities but are tightly bound together, one becoming partially visible through the other.

The storytellings explored, reassembled, and once again mobilized in these articles allow these area studies and literary specialists to register the fractures, partiality, and incompleteness that make the construction and apprehension of the world a fraught project. But, like the tide and currents of the sea, disjointedness is also productive of many, simultaneous worlds: new mappings of place, communities, and affinities. Methodologically, our authors' alternative mode of comparison, the loose juxtaposition and overlaying of cross-temporal, cross-spatial stories, is reminiscent of the unpredictable but constant movements of seawaters.

Articles of Reconstitution

Hau'ofa's (2008) invitation to epistemological subversion—embedded in his concept of a sea of islands—requires an assault on notions of stillness, solidity, permanence, and boundaries. The ocean not only helps us think (and act) through unsettledness and unevenness but also prompts us to think about storytelling as an oceanic force of reconstitution and, again, reassembling in the midst of constant unsettledness. For two of the articles, the oceanic force is a key referent from which we can make sense of the reconstitution processes of community, while for the last two pieces in this special issue, the oceanic constitutes the narrative means itself through which reassembling is possible.

The islands in these pages are also parts of archipelagoes, like those defined by Mohamed Munavvar (1995: 187) in his classic work on ocean states. Munavvar mentions Malaysia and Indonesia as unique in their relations as adjacent archipelagic states. Munavvar's focus was the legal status of ocean states rather than their stories, but one of our authors shows how stories help to clarify the nation as it comes into focus, both legally and conceptually. As Hendrik Maier's article suggests, the ocean is one meaningful way in which we can experience the work of Indonesia's famous revolution-

ary poet Chairil Anwar. In his poetry, Anwar gives voice to the contrary sentiments unleashed by living through war, occupation, and decolonization struggles in 1940s urban Djakarta under the Dutch, then the Japanese, and finally their own rulers. Indonesia declared independence in 1945 and then fought for and won its full independence from the Dutch in late 1949. For Maier, our attention, however, should center not on dissecting what Anwar said but on *feeling* how he said it: his storytelling practice and how it captures the sounds of the sea, in Hau'ofa's words above. Maier gathers together four of Anwar's poems that literary critics insist on reading as versions of the same poem because of their similarities. He invites us to resist the impulse of close reading practices that tend to freeze art in time and space. For Maier, each poem is its own world of rhythms and rhymes; maybe they echo one another but, in every instance, the words are never the same. Maier notes words are "seized and escaping," lines "seized and breaking" like an archipelago of islands. As a member of a generation seeking to forge a new language, a new culture, a new literature, Anwar channeled in his poems those many voices, in spite of his own desire to construct the one poem that could stand as a monument for Indonesia. But voices like words in Anwar's poems are like pieces floating in the water, following the slow swaying of the sea, coming together and apart, not completely disintegrated but never the same. Like other authors in this special issue, Maier calls for an affective analysis of Anwar's storytelling, which offers us a small window into the history of a generation inhabiting the turbulent political and economic processes of midcentury urban modernity in the newly postcolonial world of Southeast Asia. The many-in-one nature of the ocean helps us grasp the experiences Anwar's poetry tries to communicate in both content and form. Anwar's poems evoke estrangement even as they capture the major trope of Malay storytelling: a journey on the seas.

Oceanic thinking allows us to make sense of the different kinds of relations indigenous communities forge with the lands they occupy, relations that do not entail individual ownership and commercial extraction. The coauthored piece by Zawawi Ibrahim and Lin Hongxuan centers on the storytelling of Penghulu (village head) James, the head of the Penan village of Long Lamai in Ulu Baram, Sarawak, Malaysia, part of the Malaysian state that is on the island of Borneo. They capture Penghulu James's words

spoken during a village festival in which he instructed the audience about their history and their struggles for continued rights to forage in forestlands at the turn of the twenty-first century. Through this oral narrative, part of a long-lived oral tradition transmitting ideas of stewardship over their lands, Penghulu James teaches readers and listeners all about the Penan way of life in the forest and denounces the ongoing colonial relationship of his people to the Malaysian state. The Penan, as foragers, were constantly on the move, navigating through a vast forest they shared with other communities. Different groups' claims over particular resources and areas did not constitute clear boundaries of exclusion. However, such freedom of movement did not mean disorientation or disaffiliation from the land they traversed, as the Malaysian government would argue. The Penan nomadic and nonfarming lifestyle counters the forms of politics, sociality, and economic organization that the modern nation-state recognizes as civilized. In this context, James's storytelling not only constitutes a didactic act but also becomes a practice of reterritorialization of the forests stolen from them—that is, to reinhabit and once again traverse those areas. Storytelling is also a means of intervention to seek redress from the injustices suffered. In this story, the Penan forest resembles the ocean Bonus's and Ricci's pieces speak of, even if in disparate forms: a reservoir of indigenous knowledge, a repository of values and traditions, and a force of continuing struggle.

For Pacific Island students collaborating with Bonus on a critique of the colonial epistemologies and practices within US higher education, the ocean is the means through which they reconstitute a sense of island indigeneity and articulate their struggles with and strategies of resistance to the worlds they encounter at school and at home. In their narratives, the students teach us that the ocean is also an embodied practice. In their gathering in solidarity through their mentorship program, students weave old and new wisdom and practices (a collective sense of being), which constitute the vessel to row together in the ocean that is the school. However, it is crucial to note that for them, the vessel is part of and draws its meaning from the ocean. In the process, students embody the force and strength of the sea.

In "Telling Stories of Seas, Islands, and Ships," Ricci brings to the fore two distinct sets of overlapping storytelling forms and contexts in British Ceylon (today's Sri Lanka). Both sets, one based on the oral retelling of the

Qur'anic story of Nabi Nuh (the prophet Noah) and his preparations for his sea journey, and the other grounded in a newspaper report, appeared in the nineteenth century and were produced by a minority community of Malay Muslims, a community anchored to those serving in the imperial army, first for the Dutch in the 1700s and later, in the 1800s, for the British. The use of language and literary conventions throughout time highlights these communities' continued immersion in larger Malay worlds, in spite of the fractures sparked by European imperialism. In these stories, the sea emerges as an important symbol (ships, sea travel, water) and a force to reckon with, which serves to convey their difficult life experiences. The island appears as the vessel, in community, with which the inhabitants navigate challenging forces. Simultaneously, storytelling in these communities appears to function as oceanic tides and ripples, unevenly circulating among different points and times, bringing in elements (newspapers and oral traditions) and all but reconfiguring them into unique forms.

Most of the articles here focus on island Southeast Asia and its diaspora communities because we believe them to be privileged sites from which to rethink what is storytelling in relation to (and in excess of) the literary. We bring together Malay traditional poetry written in Arabic by Muslim Malay soldiers in the British army stationed in Ceylon/Sri Lanka, post–World War II film production in peninsular Malaysia, a Dutch novella about affect and race in the Indies, historical and more personal writings in English by a well-established anticolonial Filipino intellectual, Tagalog short stories written during the process of the Philippines' gaining political independence, revolutionary Indonesian poetry, and an oral history by an indigenous Penan leader in island Malaysia. We connect these Southeast Asia tales with ethnographic work done with Pacific Island college students in the United States and newspaper writings by Creole politicians in Puerto Rico as they struggle with the new US colonial regime. Ties of colonialism, racism, revolution, and domestic intimacies link these stories. In these islands and the seas that connect them, stories are passed along and constantly reinvented—defying concerns in late modernity about originality and intellectual property—through theater, music, dance, oral traditions, novels, short stories, films, and digital media. This multitude of storytelling forms and the overlapping/multilayered stories produced, all of which the

articles approach, speak to the formation of multiple genres, which the predominant concept of the literary struggles to comprehend, even as scholars of world literature and translation studies are eager to embrace them.

These pieces force us to destabilize conventional notions of progressive and coherent time and space. Thus, we can register that there are many ways of producing the local, the regional, and the global, which are configured through multiple and often contrary crossings. With these stories, this special issue pushes against a focus on written literary practices that have defined certain schools of comparative literature, especially in Europe and Euro-America, since at least the nineteenth century and that still retain legitimacy in the contemporary moment.[9] In the island worlds of Southeast Asia, storytellers weave their magic through written poetry, oral shadow plays, dance, and music. These performative practices have never been supplanted by the written literary practices associated with forms of European modernity but have instead coalesced and coexisted with them. The oral changed the written even as it was being recorded, first on tree bark and stone and then in manuscript and print. The stories in our articles are often tellings that have emerged through, or are related to, long chains of oral traditions, in a host of vernacular languages that appear in multiple genres and mediums. We would have never been able to do this work without the collaborative spirit of the contributors to this special issue of *positions*. They bring an ample and diverse array of theoretical and methodological approaches as well as multiple languages and cultural fluencies. These articles seek to cultivate the kind of reader who would listen and join our conversations, what we call a reader who is always listening to the sea of stories.

Notes

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1 The descriptive term *Western* refers to forms and practices of rule, economics, and sociality deeply rooted in West European and Euroamerican philosophies that have become hege-

monic through different means, such as military conquest, colonial rule, and/or capitalist economies. The "we" in this introduction refers to a diverse group of scholars from the United States, the Caribbean, the Middle East, and Asia who came together at two scholarly gatherings in Seattle to share ideas about storytelling in imperial island worlds. The Euroamerican epistemologies of concern here are well entrenched in the historical development of the political and economic structures of our contemporary capitalist world. Furthermore, we believe the critiques and methods in this special issue can help trouble other orthodoxies and the exclusions fostered through them.

2 Prompted by Carlo Bonura's article on peninsular Malaya and its present statehood as Malaysia, we employ the term *island worlds* as a capacious one that prompts us to reconceptualize islands as dynamic nodes in a larger fabric of relations in which multiple and changing geographic, digital, and demographic worlds intersect.

3 Our thinking on the imperial and the colonial derives from our own individual research as well as from longtime ongoing conversations with scholars such as Stoler, McGranahan, and Perdue (2007).

4 The terms *Global South* and *Global North* try to capture this economic reconfiguration. For example, the *Global North* refers not only to the industrialized countries of Europe and the United States but also to Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and what are called the Asian tigers of Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan. The term *Global South* refers to most of what was formerly called the Third World (for an example of this usage, see Kaul 2013).

5 See Sweeney (1987) for his distinction between stylized and nonstylized language in both oral and written texts.

6 Charles Taylor's (1989) metaphor of "webs of interlocution" describes "the sense in which one cannot be a self on one's own. . . . I am a self only in relation to certain interlocutors: in one way in relation to those conversation partners who were essential to my achieving self-definition; in another in relation to those who are now crucial to my continuing grasp of languages of self-understanding—and, of course, these classes may overlap. A self exists only within what I call 'webs of interlocution.' The answer to the question of who I am always involves reference to 'where' I am speaking from and to whom or with whom" (36).

7 Through the concept of relation, Glissant aims to highlight the simultaneity of particularity within universality: "It is possible to be one and multiple at the same time; that you can be yourself and the other; that you can be the same and different" (Diawara, Glissant, and Winks 2011: 7).

8 See Stoler (2001: 832), who explains her project through the use of Foucauldian biopolitics: "The examples sketch ways intimate matters and narratives about them figured in defining the racial coordinates and social discriminations of empire. Common to all was a fashioning of moral policies that shaped the boundaries of race. Each one points to strategies of exclusion on the basis of social credentials, sensibility, and cultural knowledge." Stoler has been

an exemplary model in the exploration of race, colonized bodies, and the ethnography of archives in much of her work, and our investigation of affect, storytelling, and the legitimation of fiction as a primary source is a complementary project to hers.

9 For other critiques of, or conversations with, ideas of world literature and translation studies, see, for example, Emily Apter (2013) and Pheng Cheah (2016).

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