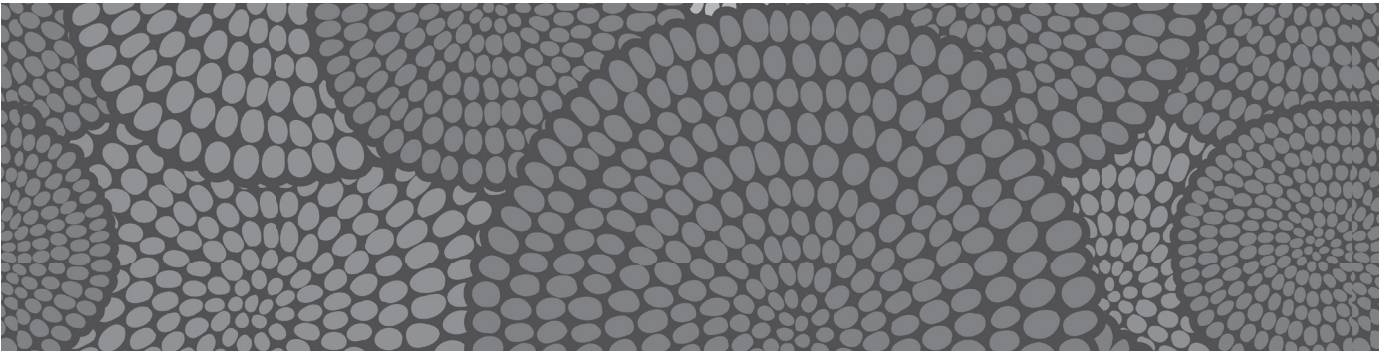


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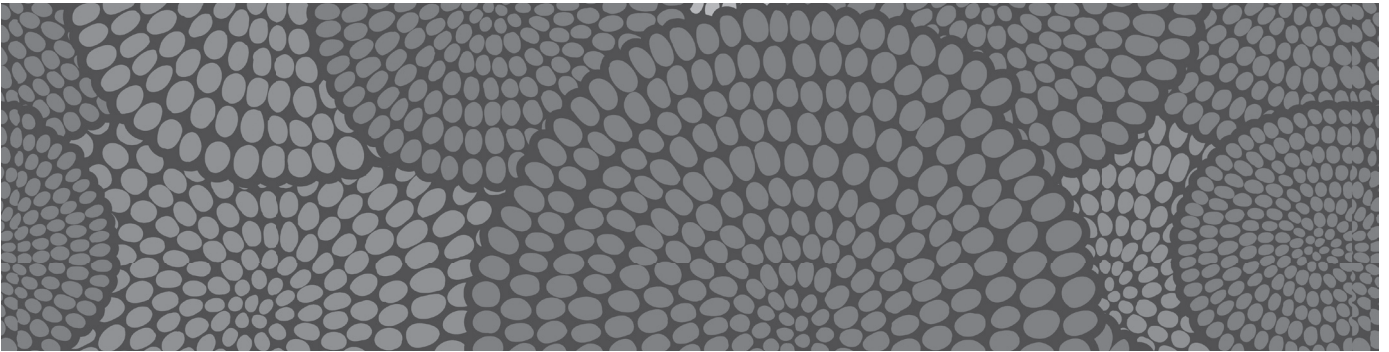
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**Michelle Munyikwa** is an MD candidate at the University of Pennsylvania, where she earned her PhD in anthropology in 2019. Working at the intersection of political and medical anthropology, she has conducted fieldwork across the United States on migration, politics, and belonging. Her dissertation, 'Up from the Dirt: Racializing Refuge, Rupture, and Repair in Philadelphia,' integrated archival research, ethnographic participant observation, and contemporary media analysis to examine the challenges that institutions face in resettling refugees in Philadelphia. Her work has been published in *Academic Medicine*, *Science, Technology, and Human Values*, and the *Western Journal of Emergency Medicine*. She is currently a contributing writer for *Synopsis: A Health Humanities Journal*.

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**Julia L. Offen** is a practicing cultural anthropologist, writer, educator, and editor. Her interests center within ethnography: the research methodology and the many evocative and expressive ways we can effectively communicate the insights we learn via this perspective. She focuses on the crafting of story in ethnographic genres. Her creative ethnographic prose has been published in both literary and academic journals, and she has two books forthcoming: a creative writing manual, and her ethnography of European traveling circuses. Since 2015, she has served as the ethnographic fiction and creative nonfiction editor for the journal *Anthropology and Humanism*, where she works closely with authors to help them develop the full potential of their ethnographic prose. Active with the Society for Humanistic Anthropology, Offen coordinated the annual Victor Turner Prize in Ethnographic Writing contest for several of the recent competition years. She works as a research analyst for Topos Partnership.

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**William Schlesinger** is an MD/PhD candidate in the David Geffen School of Medicine and UCLA Department of Anthropology. Before starting school in Los Angeles, William graduated from Yale University with a degree in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and conducted ethnographic research in Berlin supported by the Fulbright Program. His dissertation centers on pre-exposure prophylaxis to HIV (PrEP), a promising yet controversial new technology in the biomedical HIV prevention toolkit. Despite PrEP's demonstrated efficacy in significantly reducing the risk of HIV acquisition, uptake remains low overall and distributed in patterns that directly contradict epidemiological data regarding greatest need and most significant potential benefit. At the intersection of critical medical anthropology and sexuality

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**Rob Thorne's** combined musical and academic experience and skills are multitudinal. With over thirty years' experience, he is a diverse and original explorer in the evolving journey of taonga puoro (traditional Māori instruments), fusing these ancient practices intelligently and sensitively within modern perspectives. His career has taken him to museums, universities and venues around the world, teaching and lecturing, presenting keynotes, collaborating and performing. His Post Graduate Diploma research became a commissioned museum exhibition which woke many to the natural ease the instruments can be made and played, as too did his

Masters thesis, while his debut album *Whāia te Māramatanga* (Rattle Records, 2013) remains a stunning and very personal exploration of the spiritually healing and sonic qualities of a customary art. His ongoing commitment to decolonizing indigenous through his professional and personal practice is a life responsibility he takes very seriously.

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# Maritime Anthropology

Edyta Roszko

## **THE PLACE AND ROLE OF THE OCEANS IN THE WORLD'S HISTORY AND IN ANTHROPOLOGY**

The oceans play an important role in the world's cosmologies as a space where human life began, a narrative that is supported by the biological sciences (DeLoughrey, 2007: 20). Environmental historian John Gillis wrote that 'the shore was not the last resort of humankind but the starting point of modern Homo sapiens' (2012: 16). Archaeological and anthropological research provides further evidence that fisher-hunter-gatherer economies were not limited to anatomically modern people, but extended at least as far back as the Neanderthals, who made extensive use of coastal environments. As much as the ocean was a provider of essential nutrition for humankind's development, it was also a contact zone, not a barrier (Gillis, 2012: 16). From the crumbs of extant genetic and botanical evidence we have learned that transoceanic voyages did not start with the

15th-century European explorations, but with the ancient mariners whose canoes and kayaks sailed by the stars in the open ocean (Pretes, 2018: 134–45; Reid, 2015).

The pioneers of long-distance navigation were Southeast Asian, known as Austronesian speakers, who more than 2,000 years ago made the most remarkable voyages of discovery and settlement in all human history (Denning, 2007). Much less is known about the pre-Columbian seafarers who settled by multiple arrivals in the Caribbean islands about 4000 BCE (Fitzpatrick, 2013). One thing, however, is certain: long before the Ming admiral Zhen He would reach the East African coast and Christopher Columbus would venture into the Atlantic Ocean, the Austronesian speakers had sailed as far as Easter Island in the Pacific Ocean and Madagascar in the Indian Ocean (Reid, 2015: 63–4), and groups of Amerindian mariners had ventured far beyond the continental lands to reach the Antilles. In Europe, the great navigators were the Vikings, who from

the 8th to the 11th century sailed across the North Atlantic, reaching as far south as North Africa and east to Russia, Constantinople, and the Middle East (Brink, 2008).

The examples above illustrate that from the earliest recorded history, seas and oceans served humankind as resource providers, navigation and transport surfaces, spaces for military adventures, and as 'home' to seafaring nomadic groups (Dening, 2007; Gillis, 2012; Stacey, 2007). In the modern era, which conventionally begins with European maritime seafaring across the Atlantic, seas and oceans have emerged as political, economic, and legal spaces shaped by new shipping technologies (see Khaili, 2020). In the longer run, these emergent technologies accelerated the extraction of living and non-living resources from marine areas and the ocean floor. This development was first facilitated by the rise of the continental nation-state in the 19th century, which defined the coast as one of its most significant boundaries (Gillis, 2018: 110). Once treated as if it were land and projected as a discrete line on the cartographic grid, the coast and its diverse landforms – harbours, estuaries, peninsulas, islands, and the like – became the property of the state and, subsequently, of private owners (Gillis, 2018: 109–12).

Environmental studies scholars have warned us that 'anthropocentric notions that draw lines too sharply obscure the interconnectivity of land and sea' (Gillis, 2018: 111), and thereby falsely perpetuate the view that the ocean is immutable and immune to human activities. In the 21st century, rising sea levels, plastic pollution, depletion of fish stocks, and ocean acidification are being recorded at an unprecedented scale, pushing thousands of people who depend on marine resources for their livelihoods out of the coastal areas. These environmental and societal processes are aggravated by maritime disputes, militarization, illegal fishing, and deep-sea mining, which turn seas and oceans from zones of connection into zones of conflict. More than ever before, anthropologists

are addressing these multiple challenges, which call for a better understanding of the connections, motivations, and patterns behind human actions and their impact on the ocean spaces.

As recognition grows of the sea as a geopolitical and economic arena and a space sustaining *marine* life and *maritime* livelihoods, a subfield of maritime anthropology is taking shape which considers not only the political, economic and cultural arrangements surrounding seas and oceans, but also their bio-physical conditions and the agency of human and non-human species and objects in oceanic spaces. *Maritime* refers here to human seaborne activities and practices (e.g., seafaring, seaborne trade, and coastal dwelling) that usually take place *on* the sea surface but of course involve connections with the land. *Marine* denotes the organic life and inorganic materials and movements under the sea surface (on which maritime objects float, drift, and move), involving non-human life *in* and maritime extraction of resources *from* the sea. This chapter explores the ongoing tension between the *marine* and *maritime* dimensions in the subdiscipline of maritime anthropology and the emerging conceptualization of the ocean as a site and subject of scientific investigation and theorization. It does so by covering old and new approaches to fishing societies; phenomenologies of the sea and human–nature relations; and conceptualizations of the ocean as a unit of analysis and a methodological tool to think beyond the landlocked nation-state and beyond terra firma, or as a zone of transregional and transnational connections. The last section of the chapter addresses the pressing issue of the so-called 'blue economies' and its interrelation with the notion of *mare liberum*. I conclude the chapter by pointing toward future research directions in maritime anthropology and the potential of the subdiscipline to shape and intervene in theoretical debates across the social sciences, not *despite* but *because of* anthropology's ethnographically and historically grounded qualitative approach. I show

that by investigating competing political and economic interests at play in ocean governance and the construction of ocean knowledge, the newly emerging field of maritime anthropology can productively contribute to ‘ocean literacy,’ briefly defined by UNESCO (2020) as ‘the understanding of human influence on the ocean and the ocean influence on humans.’ Thus, an anthropology of the marine environment can be combined with a focus on maritime connections and movements of humans and their interactions with the ocean, conceiving of the marine ecology as a space of anthropogenic interference with natural processes. The chapter shows that maritime anthropology is an important vector in global connections and globalization, both historically and in the present day.

### **HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF MARITIME ANTHROPOLOGY**

Historically, *maritime* anthropology was defined as the study of human groups and their seaborne practices, primarily of fishing settlements that entirely or partly derived their livelihoods from the coastal environment (Prieto, 2016). Apart from fishing, these groups could engage in part-time farming, trading, and crafting, depending on the available technology and resources on both land and sea (Prieto, 2016: 19). We could say that maritime anthropology, with its strong emphasis on the exploitation of the coastal environment, emerged as a separate subfield of anthropology in response to the inability of land-oriented studies to grasp analytically the distinctive seaborne and sea-oriented human experience. Yet, the study of the sea and its role in coastal societies has been modest since the foundation of anthropology as an academic discipline. This was because anthropology – more than any other social science – tends to localize societies by imagining them in terms of specific places and cultures. From this perspective, the

uninhabitable (for humans) oceans and seas appeared as empty spaces, external to the static land territories, states, and societies (Steinberg, 2017).

While it is true that early anthropological investigations outside of Europe were enabled by sea voyages, the seas and oceans were seen almost exclusively through the lens of the land (e.g., Firth, 1936, 1946; Malinowski, 1922, 1935; Mead, 1975[1928]). In this initial stage, Western explorers’ and ethnographers’ romantic fascination with nomadic sea cultures in the 19th and early 20th century went hand in hand with nostalgia for innocent natives and disdain for corrupt ‘white civilization’ (Gaynor, 2016: 157). It comes as no surprise that the founding fathers and mothers of maritime anthropology and especially its oceanic branch – Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942), Raymond Firth (1901–2000), and Margaret Mead (1901–78) – sought to describe indigenous peoples in their ‘natural environment.’ Despite the fact that these ethnographic endeavors provided intimate details of everyday life, the early anthropological depictions relegated indigenous maritime peoples to the primitive past, contributing to the view of islands and their inhabitants as isolated and remote.

While the ensuing generations of maritime anthropologists were trained in the themes favored by British functionalists or North American evolutionary anthropologists, some of them started to include maritime history, material culture, and cultural ecology (Denning, 1980, 2004; Prins, 1965), power and agency (Sahlins, 1985), or networks (Barnes, 1954) in their studies of kinship and social structure. Still, maritime anthropology functioned mainly as a comparative study of fishing communities and coast dwellers whose cultures and social organization were shaped by their familiarity with the marine environment, differentiating them from exclusively land-oriented societies such as farmers and hunter-gatherers (Firth, 1936, 1946; Hewes, 1948; Serjeant, 1995; Yesner, 1980).

The full-fledged institutionalization of maritime anthropology as a subdiscipline took place in the 1970s through the development of maritime research groups across North America and Europe and with the founding of specialist journals, with *MAST* (now *Maritime Studies*) at the forefront (Pauwelussen, 2017: 20). This trend was followed by a new emphasis on ecological and environmental factors. The distinctive experience of life at sea was extended to the marine dimension, particularly to the way coastal people deal practically with the biological and physical conditions of the sea. By proposing *marine* ethnology – at times called marine anthropology and loosely defined as ‘the study of all biological, biocultural, and cultural phenomena or facts concerning human activities directly or indirectly connected with the sea’ (Kishigami and Savelle, 2005: 2) – its main protagonist, Asahitarō Nishimura, hoped to foreground a cultural ecology approach in the examination of fishing communities (Chiaramonte, 1975). If maritime anthropology was interested in a wide range of topics, including navigation, vernacular knowledge, seafood culture, trade, customary law related to fishing, and resource management and values, marine ethnology sought to narrow its focus to the environment and its connection with the technological development of fishing techniques and equipment, and with property rights to fishing gear and grounds.

It was not until the 2000s that Oxford-trained anthropologist Akifumi Iwabuchi tried once again to clarify marine anthropology. Iwabuchi (2012) proposed marine anthropology as a subfield composed of ‘maritime anthropology,’ which denoted a discipline more oriented to land and nautical history, and ‘marine culturology,’ which focused on human adaptation to the marine environment. From this perspective, marine anthropology represented a more holistic or transdisciplinary approach that included new themes such as underwater cultural heritage, maritime art, and shipwrecks and

human remains from the First and Second World Wars. Despite gaining some legitimacy in Japan, marine anthropology never really materialized as a globally recognized field independent of maritime anthropology (Nishimura, 1975: 365). Nevertheless, what becomes clear in the process is that whatever research developments we might identify in ‘non-terrestrial’ anthropology tend to revolve around the dialectical relationship between *maritime* and *marine*, while alternately contesting, rejecting, or reaffirming the empirical and analytical connection or division between the binary pairs of *land–sea* and *nature–culture*.

### THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF FISHERIES: SUBSISTENCE, THE ‘MANAGERIAL’ TURN, AND MOBILITY

Early anthropological literature on fisheries was primarily concerned with how humans make a living by adapting to the coastal environment (Barth, 1966; Firth, 1936, 1946; Hewes, 1948; Leap, 1977; Löfgren, 1979; Sather, 1997; Smith, 1977). Anthropologists noted long ago that ‘the most common strategy used by fishermen to adapt to uncertainty [of the sea environment] is to combine occupations’ or ‘to switch between different fisheries over the course of the annual round’ (Acheson, 1981: 292). This was mainly in reference to subsistence economies such as farming or inshore and offshore forms of fishing, and was usually analysed as separate from other domains.

With the industrialization of commercial fisheries in the 1970s, maritime anthropologists shifted their focus from subsistence economies to fishing rights, fisheries management, and markets (see, e.g., McCay, 1978; Poggie, 1978). These interests were partly initiated by the growing concern among marine scientists about the depletion of fish stocks and the deteriorating oceanic ecosystems, both of which were believed

to be a direct consequence of the open and unregulated commons, the so-called ‘tragedy of the commons’ (Hardin, 1968). The perception of the seas and oceans as an unregulated, free-for-all commons and, thus, at risk of abuse, prompted economists to view the fishery sector as in urgent need of a market-based solution to ensure proper control over access, sustainability, and governance (Pálsson, 2015; Roberts, 2007).

A major turning point in the relationship between humans and oceans was 1982, when the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea established the 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), which allowed states to nationalize and subsequently privatize marine resources under various ocean management schemes. The creation of a new legal framework to govern oceans led to the development of a more policy-oriented maritime scholarship that was largely dominated by insights from the natural sciences and economic theory, with the aim of more efficiently managing national fisheries. For instance, first introduced in New Zealand in 1986 as a national policy, the Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ) system became a widely accepted mode of fishery management globally (McCormack and Barclay, 2013). In a nutshell, ITQ stands for an allowable harvest level set to achieve maximum sustainable yield in fisheries (Young et al., 2018). A species-specific catch share of the total yield is allocated to the individual, who can buy, sell, or lease it in various types of markets. This transferability is the main characteristic of ITQs (Young et al., 2018: 9066).

Like many other managerial innovations in the fishing industry, the ITQ system was founded on ‘an innate optimism and trust in experts’ ability to translate unruly fish, fisher folk and technologies into abstract objects that could be ordered and managed through the application of economic rationality and mathematical models’ (Smith and Basurto, 2019: 2; see also Johnsen et al., 2009). Most of these techniques, however, were designed for industrial fisheries, and it soon became

apparent that any attempt to extend them to so-called small-scale fisheries (SSF) resulted in ‘repeated failures both in terms of ecological and social outcomes’ (Smith and Basurto, 2019: 2). One of the reasons was that many of the fishery management modes ignored the longstanding local institutions of fisheries governance and sea tenure in SSF, which were considered non-scientific, backwards practices with ‘no place in the modern reconfiguration of fisheries science and management’ (Smith and Basurto, 2019: 3).

In that changing context another approach emerged, leading maritime anthropologists to bring the importance and value of social science insights into the formulation of marine policy. Marine policy was loosely defined as institutional arrangements for conflict resolution, as well as for the management and regulation of marine activities and conservation and use of marine resources (Acheson et al., 2015; Barclay et al., 2017; Bavinck, 2001; Jentoft and McCay, 1995). By focusing on property rights and resource management rather than on self-contained fishing communities, anthropologists ‘carved an important professional niche for themselves in administration, development and governance’ (Pálsson, 2015: 229). For example, in the United States, a number of anthropologists were involved in fisheries work in the National Marine Fisheries Service, National Park Service, or National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, just to mention a few relevant agencies (Parades, 2012: 179). While anthropological analyses and ethnographic insights demonstrated their usefulness in charting alternative regimes of resource use or settling disputes related to rights and access (Pálsson, 2015: 229), this managerial turn in maritime anthropology spurred a growing criticism within the discipline itself, namely that most of the debates on marine issues were ‘framed primarily through a policy-oriented lens,’ treating fishing communities as homogeneous and undifferentiated (Campling et al., 2012: 178; see also Bavinck et al., 2018; De Alessi, 2012;

McCay, 1978; McGoodwin, 1990). While the previous cohort of maritime anthropologists exclusively interrogated the implementation of natural resource and fishery management models that marine scientists and policy-makers advocated, a new generation of anthropologists went one step further by questioning the models and policies themselves (Delaney and Hastie, 2007; Fabinyi et al., 2017; Moore, 2012). Their critiques opened the debate on the perceived ‘inevitability’ of privatization and neoliberal policies with regard to oceans and fisheries that were largely propagated and initiated by economists and politicians (Fabinyi, 2012; Fabinyi et al., 2014; McCormack, 2017).

Meanwhile, another strand of maritime anthropology searched for clues about the nature of fishers’ engagement with the sea and how their local and professional identities are constructed within larger social and environmental contexts. Moving away from marine management, this group of maritime anthropologists paid more attention to maritime phenomena such as fishers’ knowledge of the sea, trade networks, and cultural exchanges that were largely neglected by management-oriented maritime anthropologists (Bestor, 2004; Chou, 2006, 2010; Gaynor, 2016; Pálsson, 1994; Roszko, 2020a; Spyer, 2000; Stacey, 2007). Taking a more reflexive approach to maritime borders and ocean management, these anthropologists emphasized that the sea and fishers became subject to modern state territoriality as defined by cartography (Roszko, 2015; Stacey, 2007; Stacey and Allison, 2019).

Other developments in maritime anthropology focused attention on fishers’ mobility, combining elements of political anthropology and the anthropology of migration. For example, fishers’ mobility in relation to crossing borders and conservation agendas often depends on vernacular knowledge of maritime geography and ethnic and trading networks (Adhuri and Visser, 2007; Chou, 2006; Hviding, 1996; Roszko, 2017; Stacey, 2007; Spyer, 2000), including

changing ecologies and patterns of labor (Gaynor, 2016; Prescott et al., 2017; Stacey et al., 2012). Antje Missbach (2016: 764) has shown that Indonesian fishers often use their maritime expertise to engage in trespassing into foreign waters and human trafficking. Hans Lucht (2012) draws attention to the structural marginalization of local fisheries, arguing that the depletion of fish stocks and the disintegration of traditional marine livelihoods (largely caused by EU fishing fleets) led fishermen in Ghana to look for alternative livelihoods within a globalizing context – for example, by trafficking migrants across the Mediterranean. There are also scholarly accounts of impoverished Indonesian, Moroccan, Tunisian, and Senegalese fishers being drawn into people smuggling and trafficking after their jobs in the fishing industry disappeared (see Fox, 2009; Hallaire, 2015, 2017; Missbach, 2016; Van Liempt and Sersli, 2013). In contrast to earlier maritime anthropology that focused on isolated fishing communities and their adaptation to the coastal environment, the present-day maritime anthropology has redefined its interests and focuses on how fishers construct their occupational identities and how they position themselves within an advanced capitalist context in order to navigate not just the seas, but also volatile markets and territorial sovereignties (Sather, 1997).

## **TOWARD AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE MORE-THAN-HUMAN**

Departing from the historical tendency to focus exclusively on terrestrial spaces and bounded communities, the post-1990 ‘oceanic turn’ in the social sciences began to bridge the divide between land and sea and between humanity and nature. Scholars began to seek a better understanding of how the biological and physical conditions of the sea, as well as the non-human or more-than-human life of the ocean, play out as social,

political, and economic forces (Bear, 2013; DeLoughrey, 2019; Peters and Steinberg, 2019; Steinberg and Peters, 2015). This approach thrived particularly in geography, but a number of anthropologists also adopted it (Helmreich, 2009; McCormack, 2020). Championing not just maritime but, above all, *oceanic* anthropology, Stefan Helmreich (2009) took a radical turn to the ocean, exploring marine microbes, deep seas, and the ocean floor outside of the scope of national sovereignty. Bringing attention to anthropogenic activity, oceanic anthropology thus puts a new emphasis on the interconnections of human and natural processes affecting the oceans from historical, contemporary, and future-oriented perspectives. According to Helmreich, this human–nature interconnectedness is manifest in two seemingly contradictory perceptions of the ocean: the ocean as a space domesticated by humans, and the ocean as a space that cannot be tamed or controlled (Helmreich, 2009).

According to the first perception, the oceans, with their complex life forms and food webs supporting diverse ecosystems, have been domesticated by humans, who are now extending their efforts to conquer the last frontier, which is the ocean floor. Contrary to this vision of the ocean as a great frontier to be domesticated, the ocean has also been seen as an ‘alien’ domain, inaccessible to direct and unmediated human encounter. For example, the inconclusive search for Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, which disappeared on 8 March 2014 while flying from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, clearly showed that we know more about the surface of the moon and even Mars than we do about the ocean floor.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the ocean floor remains the last and largest unexplored place on earth. In Helmreich’s words, ‘[t]he alien appears in descriptions of the lifestyles of deep-sea, heat-loving and methane-eating microbes’ (2009: xi). By proposing a conceptualization of the ocean as a ‘theory machine’ that generates insights into how oceanographers, politicians, deep-water drilling operators, seabed

exploration firms, citizens, NGOs, and other actors operate, Helmreich pushes the disciplinary boundaries of ‘maritime and oceanic’ anthropology to include marine dimensions and global concerns.

Meanwhile, other anthropologists continue to debate the human–nature division, arguing that the two are equally valid worlds that refer to different experiences of ‘being’ in the world. Gísli Pálsson (2016: 150) proposed the ‘paradigm of communalism,’ which rejects the radical separation of nature and society and instead emphasizes the reciprocity of human–environmental relations, involving both exchange and extraction based on close, personal relationships. Influenced by Tim Ingold’s rejection of binaries such as ‘nature and culture,’ ‘terrestrial and marine,’ and ‘animate and inanimate,’ Tanya King and Gary Robinson (2019: 4) problematize the imagined and idealized marine spaces in which humans are absent. Bringing together both ethnographic and archaeological research, King and Robinson explore the ways in which people have long made themselves at home at sea. This echoes the approach of Epeli Hau’ofa (2008), who turns to the ocean as a space of geographical and ontological unity rather than national unity. Hau’ofa encourages a more inclusive sense of identity around the idea of ‘sea of islands,’ which ‘destabilizes the conflation of indigenous islander with static land’ and denotes a common heritage generated by ancient and contemporary transoceanic movements (DeLoughrey, 2007: 25). Instead of seeing the islands of Oceania as separate national entities, his collection of essays, fiction, and poetry, titled *We are the Ocean* (2008), advocates alternative notions of belonging outside of and beyond the terrestrial bias and national grid. Deeply concerned about the environment, Hau’ofa postulates that Pacific peoples can and should play an important role as custodians of the ocean. In this regard, Hau’ofa might be considered a precursor to UNESCO’s (2020) *Ocean Literacy for All* and one of its fundamental principles, namely,

that the ocean and humans are inextricably connected and that without a healthy ocean our life on Earth would become impossible.

### MARITIME CONNECTIVITY: TOWARD THE RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF REGIONS

It was historians rather than anthropologists who conceptualized the sea as a unifying and integrating factor, beginning with the work of Fernand Braudel (1972) on the Mediterranean as a common historical and cultural space. Others, most notably Denys Lombard (2007) and Heather Sutherland (2003), followed Braudel's argument, showing that the ocean could be a unit of analysis and a methodological tool. For example, Sutherland (2003) looked at the Mediterranean as a model for understanding Southeast Asia. According to this model, different regions of Asia – including southern and southeastern China and Southeast Asia – are connected across the South China Sea (Sutherland, 2003: 14). Sutherland shows that the seductive power of the Mediterranean analogy lies in its liberation from the 'political borders' concept, opening a new space to explore connections and borrowings, continuity and change beyond the imposed national boundaries (2003: 17). In that respect, Braudel's seminal work gave a new impetus to scholars to shift their focus from the national scale to a broader regional perspective. This trend was particularly prominent among those historians specializing in Indonesia and Sino-Southeast Asian interactions, who started to highlight the significance of maritime trading connections and networks spanning the region that Anthony Reid called the 'Malay World' (Reid, 1988, 1993, 1999; see also Gaynor, 2016; Lombard, 2007; Lombard and Aubin, 2000; Spyer, 2000; Warren, 1981).

Besides the Malay World, the 'Indian Ocean World' – a concept coined by Gwyn

Campbell (2019) – has attracted great attention among both historians and historical anthropologists. Here, the Indian Ocean World is a 'transnational and oceanic' unit of analysis, allowing for transregional, comparative, and subaltern approaches (Burton et al., 2013; Hofmeyr, 2012). It has been studied as a zone of 'transregional connections' (Ho, 2004), as 'connectivity in motion' (Schnepel and Alpers, 2018), and for its 'encounters at sea' (Dua, 2016, 2019a). For instance, in *The Graves of Tarim*, Engseng Ho (2006) narrates trans-Indian Ocean kinship networks formed by transnational exchanges that enabled Hadrami Yemeni descendants of the Prophet Muhammad to settle in Arabia, India, and Southeast Asia and become locals while remaining cosmopolitans with vibrant connections across the ocean. Ho offers an approach that shifts our focus away from unitary models such as national histories and area studies, as well as from colonial histories of expansion, seaborne migration, and settled diasporas, and toward more fluid connections that span the Indian Ocean World and the Malay World, building on longstanding patterns of movement among people who had always been mobile. In the same strain of research but from a different angle, Burkhard Schnepel and Edward Alpers (2018) take a closer look at small African islands and their role in histories, maritime exchanges, and networks across the Indian Ocean. Often functioning as hybrid spaces where colonialism, migration history, forced labor and networking merge, islands appear as co-products of geographical and historical contingency. Neither peripheral nor marginal, islands exist as important nodal points connecting and disconnecting histories and people.

Many threads of anthropological thought about the ocean and connectivity cannot be dissected without invoking the seminal works of scholarly giants such as historian Paul Gilroy and anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot. While Gilroy (1993) uses the 'Black Atlantic' as an analytical frame to challenge Eurocentric narratives of



modernity and national identity grounded in a European continental pedigree, Trouillot (2002) proposes the term 'North Atlantic' to mark dominant parts of Western histories and geographical imaginaries that became hegemonic on a universal scale. By conceptualizing the Atlantic Ocean as the 'Black Atlantic' – a transnationally and culturally constructed space – Gilroy rejects an overly close connection between culture, ethnicity, and nation, showing that African, American, Caribbean, and European worlds interacted and mutually constituted each other over time within a common oceanic space. From this perspective, the Atlantic Ocean rather than the African continent defines black diaspora nations. In that regard, Gilroy's 'modernity' belongs to the same class of concepts that are labeled 'North Atlantic universalities' by Trouillot – 'particulars that have gained a degree of universality, chunks of human history that have become historical standards [that] do not describe the world [but] offer visions of the world' (2002: 220).

More self-aware of hierarchical genealogies and vernacular histories – from which various universalized visions of the world spring – anthropologists have focused on transoceanic connections that take them away from relatively immobile categories (e.g., state, nation, region, society and community, maritime borders, EEZ regimes) toward a more processual approach highlighting various kinds of actions, interactions, circulations, motions, and players (Ho, 2006; Hoskins and Nguyen, 2014; Roszko, 2017; Schnepel and Alpers, 2018). For example, Janet Hoskins and Viet Thanh Nguyen (2014) propose a new research paradigm of 'trans-Pacific connections,' which transcends the established binaries of West and East or Orientalism and Occidentalism. By taking a trans-Pacific turn, the authors foreground diasporas ('displaced people') and transnationalism ('movement of people and capital across national borders') across oceanic space. In my own work, I take the South China Sea as a starting point to analyse how

the historically recent understandings of territoriality and sovereignty in Asia have been projected into the past, in spite of the common historical, cultural, and ethnic flows that always existed in the region (Roszko, 2017). My work thus challenges the land-based, immobile ethnic and national categories, showing how ethnicity is constructed and sustained through cosmopolitan economic networks and movements across the sea and wider oceanic spaces (Roszko, 2015, 2017, 2019, 2020a).

To sum up, the theme of connectivity has been used by both historians and historically oriented anthropologists as a way to frame oceanic spaces as 'multiply-crossed by multi-scalar processes and forces' (Duara, 2017: 99) through which various regions, people, and goods can be conceptualized as constituting a dynamic, interconnected, and relational field (Ho, 2006; Hofmeyr, 2012; Vink, 2007). Marking a new tendency in maritime anthropology, the frameworks of the trans-Indian, trans-Pacific, and trans-Oceanic connections go beyond methodological nationalism, area studies (Beck, 2007; Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002), and the land-based imaginary that has been applied to ocean spaces. It reminds us that the present 'maritime territorialisation' (Roszko, 2015), as embodied in its most globalized forms – 'territorial waters' (12 nautical miles outward from the coast into the sea) and EEZs (200 nautical miles out from the coast) – are contingent outcomes of historical processes.

Last but not least, taking the ocean's fluidity as a model for rethinking static state borders and homogeneous ethnic and national histories as privileged units of analysis (Amrith, 2013; Braudel, 1995; Chaudhuri, 1985; Hamashita, 2008; Ho, 2006; Tagliacozzo et al., 2015) does not mean analytically obscuring the maritime borders that shore up nation-states. Quite the opposite: by exploring the longstanding relationship between maritime enclosures, capitalistic accumulation, and commons, maritime anthropologists are now in the position to show how

‘the old circulations in maritime zones have been appropriated and transformed by state and non-state actors to serve contemporary geopolitical claims’ (Roszko, 2017: 23). For example, historical presence and customary fishing rights of Chinese and Vietnamese fishers in the South China Sea have been used by their respective governments as a legal argument to claim territories at sea and to mark maritime borders.<sup>2</sup> Another example of the nexus between old circulations and present-day economic and territorial aspirations is China’s 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road initiative, which has emerged as ‘one of the axes of global trade based on [pre-nation-state] connectivity and flows but punctuated by modern territorial claims that seek to contract the world through strategic control over important nodal points, research, and people’ (Roszko, 2019: 176). As Laleh Khalili (2020) shows in her recent book *Sinews of War and Trade*, these nodal points – ports and shipping – have become new battlegrounds of 21st-century capitalism.

## MARITIME LABOR AND GLOBAL CAPITALISM

A new emerging anthropological literature on maritime workers and the shipping industry shows that anthropology has started to take an interest in understanding how maritime labor is mobilized, commodified, and trafficked, particularly in the context of neoliberal economies (S. Campbell, 2019; Das, 2019; Derks, 2010; Dua, 2019a, 2019b). For example, taking a close look at migrant workers in Thailand’s fishing industry, Annuska Derks (2010) points out the paradoxical relationship between the general perception of foreign workers’ mobility, which led to them being characterized as ‘unruly,’ and the seemingly incompatible effort to extract the maximum value from their labor based precisely on that mobility. Derks (2010: 930) argues that the conflicting

logic underpinning this relationship justifies the new legal regimes, thereby leading to people’s ‘subsequent immobilization.’

Approaching maritime workers from a different perspective, Stephen Campbell (2018, 2019) focuses on the politics of informal labor and how the price of labor is driven down. By historicizing self-employed, unemployed, and debt-bonded fishers in the political economy of independent Burma, he shows continuity not only with the contemporary proliferation of informal, unfree, and unwaged labor, but also with the growing exploitation through wage labor that has become rampant in the industrial fisheries along the Thai–Myanmar coastal border and the inland fisheries in Myanmar. In his examination of workers’ struggles for better working conditions, he departs from earlier historical idealistic views of maritime workers as a self-aware and organized class striving to free itself from harsh conditions and exploitation (Rediker, 1987). Instead, Campbell complicates economic relations in this capitalistic landscape by arguing that the self-styled ‘informal’ economy – often envisioned as resistance but ultimately destined for extinction under processes of industrial modernization – is in fact bound up with capitalistic modes of operation and accumulation.

Using yet a different angle in their comparative analysis of captivity in the worlds of seafarers and pirates, Kevin Lewis O’Neill and Jatin Dua (2018) consider anew the complex relations between violence and economy, affect and agency, bondage and freedom, and piracy and protection. They assert that the lines between hijacker and hijacked often dissolve, not just within the wider context of the capitalist economy, but also within socialities and intimacies that develop in situations of captivity between seemingly opposing maritime actors – seafarers and pirates (O’Neill and Dua, 2018: 13). Going beyond the narrative of piracy as a confrontation between pirates and navy patrols, Dua (2019: 503) highlights a different kind of connectivity in ransom economies, namely between

‘[p]rotection, a promise to keep safe (including from oneself), often through payment and violence’ to pirates or local authorities and neoliberal economies that rely on industries such as shipping or fishing. By proposing an anthropology of protection in the Indian Ocean, he challenges the categorical divides between legality and illegality, trade and finance, piracy and fishing, and piracy and counter-piracy, showing that they are deeply embedded in global capitalism. In that sense, piracy is a ‘highly professional enterprise, with technical experts performing at various levels and facilitating grey market economies that closely mimic legitimate practice’ (Biggs, 2017: 120).

While Dua foregrounds the economy of protection and the fuzzy boundaries between legality and illegality, Adrienne Mannov (2015) takes her global analysis of the international merchant seafarers and maritime piracy in another direction by considering the calculated economic risks and gains within the maritime industry. Her findings suggest that seafarers are more concerned about their potential exploitation and unequal positions within the maritime global supply chain than they are about the risk of being hijacked by pirates (Mannov, 2015: 17). Their preoccupation with economic parity is fully justified if we consider the growing number of cases around the world where seafarers have been abandoned in ports far from home without fuel, food, and water, and without pay or the possibility of shore leave for months on end (see Dua, 2019b). Sadly, such abandonment often happens when it is more profitable for shipowners to leave the seafarers and their vessels at sea without the necessary maintenance and support than it is to pay the workers their wages. While anthropologists’ new attention to ‘floating labor’ – be they fishers, seafarers, or pirates – mirrors a range of developments in the social sciences and humanities (particularly in human geography, history, and literature), maritime anthropology provides a window to understanding the logic behind such inequalities

and processes that intertwine the land and the sea with global economies at different temporal and spatial scales.

## POLITICS OF BLUE ECONOMIES

The belief that the high seas are not only open to all by natural law but also inexhaustible to human activities goes back to the ancient Roman notion of *mare liberum* or ‘free sea,’ a concept that was popularized by the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) and provided the foundation for the development of the international law. For centuries, Grotius’ notion of *mare liberum* made it possible for European settlers, colonial courts, and governments to ignore local notions of sovereignty over marine areas and resources, be they of the Maori in the Pacific (McCormack, 2020), of sea nomads in Southeast Asia (Stacey, 2007), or indigenous peoples inhabiting the Arctic regions of Greenland, Canada, and Alaska (Hastrup, 2019; Nuttall, 2019). As a result, the indigenous commons were subjected to exploitation through the ‘capital-intensive, technology-driven and putatively “civilized” operation of labor introduced by Europeans’ (Roszko, 2020b: 115).

The Western geographical imaginary of the open sea – *mare liberum* – is an example of the kind of North Atlantic universalities that have come to dominate the discourse on a global scale (Trouillot, 2002). The idea of the ‘free sea’ shaped the mindset and actions of nations for centuries, subsequently leading to the unregulated exploitation of the environment (Zacharias, 2019). In the long run, the ‘annexation of coastal seas by adjacent nations’ in the form of EEZs not only has not minimized the extraction and devastation of the marine environment, as it was presumably designed to do, but has actually exacerbated it (Zacharias, 2019: 147). The combination of increasing levels of pollutants in the ocean (e.g., plastics, pathogens, toxic substances,

nutrients, marine debris, hydrocarbons from spills, underwater noise, etc.) and overharvesting has resulted in the loss and degradation of marine habitats (Zacharias, 2019: 152), thereby dispossessing those who depend most on the sea for their livelihoods.

The search for economic growth and profit and, simultaneously, efforts to conserve and restore ocean resources prompted the United Nations to advocate a 'healthy ocean ecosystem ensured by sustainable farming and fishing operations as the precondition of blue growth.'<sup>3</sup> The terms 'blue growth' and 'blue economies' have spurred a critical debate in the social sciences, where geographers were quick to point out that they provide cover for the widespread 'ocean grabbing' of marine and coastal resources that is taking place in the name of environmental protection and the needs of the poor (Barbesgaard, 2018; Hill, 2017). For example, the marine protected areas (MPAs) that are being established all over the world combine conservation and ecotourism under the rubric of 'blue economies' but, in practice, exclude local communities, whose livelihoods strategies have often been labeled 'uncivilized' and 'threatening' to the environment (Stacey et al., 2012: 66; Voyer et al., 2014). Drawing on insights from the social sciences, maritime anthropologists bring to the fore the importance of the 'traditional ecological knowledge' of coastal peoples, which has rarely been taken into consideration in management and conservation projects and the so-called progressive 'blue economies' agendas (Stacey et al., 2012).

Pointing out the conflicts that are at the nexus of sustainability and extraction, the debates in maritime anthropology on sustainability and blue economies further indicate that seas and oceans are emerging not just as arenas for maritime and marine governance but, above all, as a laboratory for various competing experiments that are increasingly bound up in neoliberal policies and the privatization of ocean and sea spaces (McCormack, 2017).

## MARITIME ANTHROPOLOGY AS BOTH MARINE AND GLOBAL

Polar ice sheets in the Arctic Ocean and other parts of the High Arctic are melting, and the ocean level is rising, directly threatening the Pacific Island nations and other coastal countries, including Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines, and the United States. Maritime anthropology has already provided us with insights into the potential of resilience to climate change by coastal and island communities (Barrios, 2016), but there is more need for anthropology to consider how those communities have been adapting to the rising sea level, melting polar ice caps, and a growing number of climate-related natural disasters.

In 2015, all United Nations member states adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 'as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030.'<sup>4</sup> Goal 14, known as 'Life Below Water,' calls attention to the interconnectedness and interdependence of the oceans and humans and the importance of both protecting and sustainably using the oceans. Anthropologists remain highly critical of the SDGs, arguing that the goals assume and impose a universalized notion of the 'common good' that distances 'development practice from the messiness of global and local political economic vicissitudes, the wars, conflicts, catastrophes, [and] ... geopolitical realities' (Salemink, 2016: 21). Whereas Goal 14 aims to achieve more sustainable use and more responsible and effective governance of oceans and seas, anthropologists agree that 'development thinking shares with religion a naïve belief in the possibility of the realization of utopian dreams' (Salemink, 2016: 19). These critical voices indicate the potential for maritime anthropology to enter current debates to flesh out the precise connections, motivations, and actions that play out in the construction of the ocean as a political, social, and legal space. Initiatives such as the Too Big to

Ignore global research network and MARE: Centre for Maritime Research, and outreach platforms such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Small-Scale Fisheries Congress 2018 and the 2020 United Nations Ocean Summit have introduced new ways to apply maritime anthropology to solve real-world problems.<sup>5</sup>

This chapter thus shows that maritime anthropology is no longer a marginal or peripheral niche topic, but an important vector in global connections and globalization, both historically and to this day, when 95 percent of global trade is transported over the seas and oceans and more than three billion people worldwide rely on the oceans for animal protein and income (Steinberg, 2009: 21). The works and trends presented here reflect a departure from the perception of the ocean as a void (a space of distance, a surface across which humans and goods travel) or as a space of resource extraction and exploitation, to the ocean as a domain intrinsically intertwined with humans. Steinberg (2017: 20) wrote that the ocean is a 'space of society' where social conflicts arise, but it is also a space *shaped* by these conflicts, whether they are over maritime borders, marine resources, oil and gas exploitation, mining for minerals, shipping, plastics pollution, or coastal urbanization. Consequently, maritime anthropology touches on maritime–marine and nature–culture dimensions and interactions that inevitably produce planetary effects.

The social aspect of sea spaces brings me to my final point, namely, the importance of history in the conceptualization of the ocean. No longer can maritime anthropology be limited to marine management or localized coastal societies; rather, it needs to approach the ocean as an integrated space that is a product of historically contingent processes, often starting on the land but unfolding on the sea. Seemingly opposing binary concepts, such as maritime and marine or human and nature, are not sufficient to grasp the complexity of these contingent outcomes, especially if they are analysed as separate and

unconnected entities. The ocean constitutes a truly interdisciplinary field of understanding that requires that present-day maritime anthropologists contemplate all dimensions, temporalities, and scales that the voluminous waters inexorably draw in to our shores and carry back out to sea.

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## Notes

- 1 See 'The Search for MH 370 Revealed Secrets of the Deep Ocean' by Sarah Zhang, *The Atlantic*, March 10, 2017; available at [www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/03/mh370-search-ocean/518946/](http://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/03/mh370-search-ocean/518946/), accessed on January 1, 2020.
- 2 See *Award* under Annex VII to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in the Matter of the South China Sea arbitration between the Republic of the Philippines and the People's Republic of China, July 12, 2016; available at [www.pcacases.com/web/view/7](http://www.pcacases.com/web/view/7), accessed on April 15, 2020.
- 3 The 4th International Symposium on Fisheries Crime, October 15, 2019, UN City, Copenhagen, Denmark.
- 4 See 'Sustainable Development Goals', [www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html](http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html), accessed on January 10, 2020.
- 5 For Too Big to Ignore, see <http://toobigtoignore.net/>; for MARE, see [www.mare-centre.nl/](http://www.mare-centre.nl/); for the FAO Small-Scale Fisheries Congress, see <https://toobigtoignore.wixsite.com/3wsfcongress>; for the 2020 UN Ocean Summit, see [www.un.org/en/conferences/ocean2020](http://www.un.org/en/conferences/ocean2020), all accessed on April 20, 2020.

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