

## Maritime realities and imaginaries in the Indian Ocean

*Les Carnets de Recherches de l'océan Indien* is the daughter of the ocean. Our E-journal, based at the University of La Réunion will take advantage of the singular geographical location of our institution by engaging with an all-round reading and understanding of the sea. The immense maritime space, which the Indian Ocean represents is, sometimes an invitation to travel, sometimes a source of repulsion, sometimes a symbol of conquest, or a source of inspiration for the imagination. It is within its vast fold that there nestles an array of cultures and peoples bordered by more than twenty states, with a generous sprinkling of islands. What are the relationships between these riparian societies, either as continents or islands, which have settled and shared this space? The diversity of possibilities and uses offered by the Indian Ocean has made it a vast reservoir of attractions, arousing both interest and tension. From the Mozambique Channel to the Western Australian Coastal Edge, from the Indian facades to the islands of the South-West Indian Ocean, what potentialities are offered by this maritime expanse of water? And how have they been exploited and deployed? The main thrust of this third issue of *Les Carnets* is the oceanic interface of the Indian Ocean, as both a real and an imagined space. While academic inquiry has largely focused on its resources and marine reserves, this third issue of *Les Carnets* endeavours to widen the existing perimeter and bring together texts that shed new light on the maritime dimension of the Indian Ocean. We welcome proposals in the areas of geography, law, history, literature, linguistics, and economics.

In the area of Geography, the sea is the vehicle of maritime traffic. The port cities, and their concentration of maritime-related activities are emblematic of this reaching out to the great ocean. Coastal tourism, hinged on seaside resorts, with its offer of the three "S" (sea, sun and sand), has resulted in a rush for "white gold". Cruise tourism is yet another dimension of this, albeit more recent, fascination for the sea. The nurturing role of the sea is best observed in the fisheries industry, raising further questions of the exploitation and the management of resources. The questioning is open-ended: how are marine activities distributed and expressed in the regional area? What are the stakes at different levels? What strategies are adopted by coastal societies to lay a claim on their own territories? What management policies are applied and to what degree of efficiency? How to read and interpret the conflicts around the maritime borders? How do they translate power struggles? One may also broaden the investigations to consider the risks and rewards behind exclusive economic zones. Replete with fish and mineral resources, such zones have transformed this space into a theatre of strategic conflicts, as shown by the findings of the conference "Mozambique and the Mozambique Channel, a Space at a Time of Opportunity and Challenges". Populations with diverse and sometimes contradictory interests converge at areas of contact, while territories with a rich economic potential and / or strategic spaces are coveted. Competition and rivalry, or else cooperation and agreement are the possible paths to be followed in turn.

This is when the legal dimension becomes imperative, so as to define limits and formalize them in sometimes innovative legal frameworks. Lawmakers and lawyers have a crucial role to play in assisting representatives of the State to wind their way through challenging negotiations and engage with the ocean of tomorrow. By defining the prerogatives and duties of States with regard to maritime spaces, the law of the sea, through its international or national components, has to face new maritime challenges posed increasingly by ecological problems. It seeks to resolve the innumerable disputes and divergences, in particular, in the area of border delimitation and access, or fishing rights. This call for papers is an invitation to examine legal issues connected to the Indian Ocean marine environment,

such as piracy, biopiracy, the expansion of the continental shelf, the exploration and exploitation of ocean floors or maritime delimitations...

Michaël Pearson in his illuminating study, which today is a work of reference on the history of the Indian Ocean, insists on the dual perception of water expanses, which are both a "formidable obstacle" separating societies as well as "a powerful technological stimulant" for those wishing to take advantage of it. Historians can thus approach the Indian Ocean and its role in the multitude of adventures experienced by the people who live around it, and engage with its ancient, economic and practical realities. But they can also probe the imaginary of its inhabitants, for example in the area of ancient representations of the Indian Ocean. Studies akin to the one conducted in Polynesia on the myths and legends related to coral reefs would undoubtedly fill a gap in Indian Ocean scholarship. Given the diversity of societies that inhabit this space, yet other avenues await the researcher in History.

In the literary field, a conference organized by the Arts Faculty of the University of Reunion in 1992 had already concerned itself with themes and representations connected to islands and insularity. If landmasses and related island utopias, as well as national and colonial problems have, since of yore, held centre stage in the area of research, the ocean has also now become the focus of either ecocritical, "hydro poetic" or "thalassological" (M. Vink) investigation. Examples are those by M. Samuelson on the literature of South Africa and the East African coast. An important part of these research approaches and new "methods" (I. Hofmeyr) is the study of beaches as liminal spaces, or areas of crossing of utopian and counter-utopian imaginaries, or economic and ecological conflicts (N. Poddar). To this one may add the study of boats (N. Poddar, V. Bragard) or the foundation of new cartographies and routes (E. De Loughrey...), which is a well documented field.

Albeit partly initiated by the works of E. Glissant, the latter remain barely used in French research, whereas they enrich reflections on creolization, on diasporic and migrant writing, on landscape writing, on colonial, postcolonial and decolonial issues (Y. Nadarajah and A. Grydehøj), on the connections of stories, spatialities, imaginaries and intertexts.

It might be worthwhile to make these converge around a literary corpus in French and in other languages of the South West Indian Ocean region with a view to observing how they can be operational. Reference may therefore be made not only to the works of E. From Loughrey, I. Hofmeyr, M. Samuelson, N. Poddar, V. Bragard, but also to M. Cohen's methodological and theoretical proposals on the terraqueous globe. In this regard, the Indian Ocean offers an inexhaustible universe to authors and to visual artists whose practice and production can be studied in the context of the articles of this third issue.

The work on language and the verbal engagement with the maritime environment, - or the way one talks about the ocean in different societies is another perspective in the study of the relationship between the sea and coastal populations. Linguistic representations of the maritime space and their evolution can be measured from both diachronic and synchronic points of view.

Thus, the specificity of vehicular languages and the processes of creolization or pidginization in this maritime area can be analysed to gain a better understanding of the evolution, not to mention the societal repercussions of linguistic representations and imaginaries. In addition, lexical borrowings and socio-cultural concepts are instruments with a potential to reveal the way local languages have influenced one another, but also how the latter have interacted with the languages that were introduced during colonization, or through the trajectories traced by migration or maritime exploration and trade, among other factors.

The sea is likely to become a major source of economic development and employment in a number of countries and islands of the Indian Ocean zone. The "blue economy", whose

objective is to make of the coastline and the sea veritable locomotives in the processes of growth, is another European Union strategic axis to buttress development. More specifically, the blue economy, in its broadest definition, refers to all economic activities related to the oceans, the seas and the coasts (fishing, tourism, extraction of raw materials, exploitation of marine energy, etc.). In fact, one of the challenges of the next two decades will be for some of these countries to foreground the sea in their development strategies and exploit their underutilized, or even totally unexploited "blue growth" potential.

Whatever the approach, there is a need to ferret out the unifying power of maritime space. Can we say that there is a distinct community of Indian Ocean inhabitants sharing values and interests as well as a common past that distinguish them from the other societies in their respective continents? Are there realities and a common imaginary for the peoples of this marine expanse? Or on the contrary, given the immensity of the Indian Ocean, would it seem that specificities and peculiarities dominate and fragment, overshadowing such a hypothesis?

These are some of the questions and uncharted waters waiting to be mapped out in the forthcoming issue of the E-journal *Les Carnets de Recherches de l'océan Indien*.

Proposals of a page are to be sent **before the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 2018**.  
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