Is it possible to speak of island literatures in global, comparative terms? Are geography and colonial history both so influential that we can say that they have produced an identifiable body of postcolonial island literatures? This chapter explores methodologies for comparing island writing by turning to contemporary literature in English from the Caribbean, Indian and Pacific archipelagoes, foregrounding the important contributions made by island writers to postcolonial discourse and literature. Although one might arguably define every land mass on the globe as an island, this chapter focuses on the literary production of former European colonies in the global south, particularly tropical islands with plantation, diaspora and creolization histories, as well as indigenous literatures in white settler nations. Although the concerns explored here are not restricted to island contexts, this chapter suggests that the collusion of geography and history has made these particular issues more prevalent in contemporary island writing than in other bodies of postcolonial literature.

Colonial narratives and the tourist industry have long depicted island space as remote, isolated and peripheral to modernity. Yet island writers have demonstrated the ways in which centuries of transoceanic diaspora and settlement have rendered island spaces as vital and dynamic loci of cultural and material exchange. Contrary to the assumption that the privileged sites of history and modernity are continental (or generated from the British archipelago), many scholars have demonstrated that tropical islands and peoples were integral to the development of anthropology, botany, environmentalism, plantation capitalism, nuclear weapons and the English novel. From the early British texts of island colonialism, such as William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1610–11) and Daniel Defoe’s *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719), the island has provided the material, ideological and imaginative space for forging new social relations and literary genres. Island writers have turned to this complex history in order to reshape the colonial myth of island isolation, foregrounding how accessibility by sea ensures that island spaces have experienced complex patterns of migration, diaspora, ‘exisle’ and settlement. In fact, the sea is a vital component of island identity and has contributed to the formation of a complex maritime imagination in historical, literary and cultural production. Moreover, far from being isolated, most islands are part of archipelagoes and have simultaneous national and regional alliances. As a series of small nations (or colonial territories) connected by the sea, islands are often constituted by the activity of regional bodies of water such as the Caribbean, Pacific and Indian Oceans, allowing for more fluid, transcultural and multilingual relationships than those associated with the terrestrial borders of the nation state. Writing about the Caribbean, Martiniquan writer Édouard Glissant explains ‘each island embodies openness. The dialectic between inside and outside is reflected in the relationship of land and sea. It is only those who are tied to the European continent who see insularity as confining.’ Building upon Glissant and others, Chris Bongie has argued:

the island is a figure that can and must be read in more than one way: on the one hand, as the absolutely particular, a space complete unto itself and thus an ideal metaphor for a traditionally conceived, unified and unitary, identity; on the other, as a fragment, a part of some greater whole from which it is in exile and to which it must be related – in an act of (never completed) completion that is always also, as it were, an ex-isle, a loss of the particular. The island is thus the site of a double identity – closed and open.

St Lucian poet Derek Walcott explains that this tension between land and sea is vital to the spatial scale of the island imagination. ‘There is a strength that is drawn from island peoples in that reality of scale in which they inhabit. There is a sense both of infinity and acceptance of the possibility of infinity… It provides a kind of settling of the mind that is equal to the level of the horizon.’ For island writers, turning to the infinity of the oceanic imaginary provides an alternative model of space and time, a ‘tidalectic’ between past and present, land and sea, the local and the global. A term coined by Barbadian poet-historian Kamau Brathwaite, ‘tidalectics’ draws upon ‘the movement of the water backwards and forwards as a kind of cyclic motion, rather than linear’ and provides a dynamic methodology for approaching island literatures. In an effort to destabilize colonial myths of island isolation and linear models of progress, this chapter adopts Brathwaite’s tidalectics as a method for examining the relationship between land and sea, diaspora and indigeneity, and arrival and settlement in island literatures.
This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section examines influential colonial literary models of island space such as *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* and how these texts set a precedent for discussions about cultural and colonial entanglement in island literatures in English. Importantly, the patriarchal colonial power relations between Shakespeare’s Prospero and Caliban as well as Defoe’s Crusoe and Friday have been reconfigured by many island writers and interrogated in terms of their literary patrilineage. This section foregrounds the question of genealogical and racial origins, an important concern in island writing, by turning to works by George Lamming (Barbados), Dev Viraahsawmy (Mauritius) and Keri Hulme (Aotearoa/New Zealand). The second section turns to Derek Walcott’s assertion that ‘the sea is history’ and foregrounds the transoceanic imaginary in island writers, positioning the trope of colonial arrival by sea and its subsequent cross-cultural entanglements as vital elements of the history of island writing and its postcolonial revisions. Writers explored here include Edwidge Danticat (Haiti/US), Epeli Hau’ofa (Tonga/Fiji), Witi Ihimaera (Aotearoa/New Zealand) and Khal Torabully (Mauritius). Although the maritime imaginary encompasses diverse experiences, ranging from middle-passage crossings in slave and indenture ships to indigenous voyaging across the Pacific, the writerly engagement with the transoceanic provides a vital trope to explore narratives of cultural and ontological origin. The third section shifts from the focus on maritime diaspora to narratives of the land, indigeneity and national belonging, touching on the works of Sam Selvon (Trinidad), Merle Collins (Grenada) and Patricia Grace (Aotearoa/New Zealand). While the transoceanic imaginary provides an important way to think through histories of diaspora and contemporary outmigration patterns in the wake of globalization, the focus on local and terrestrial concerns allows for a closer scrutiny of issues such as indigenous sovereignty and its relationship to the settler state, postcolonial nation building, local resource development, and the relational virtues of small islandness which prioritize local communities and genealogies. The final section turns to postcolonial island texts concerned with a creolizing ‘tidalectic’ between land and sea through tropic figures of the contact zone such as the beach and the plantation. Overall this chapter foregrounds the creative ways in which postcolonial island writers have utilized their unique geographic surroundings to explore the relationship between roots and routes, to theorize local concerns of sovereignty in the wake of globalization as well as to demonstrate historical connections across space to other island archipelagoes with similar colonial histories.

Island writing, Creole cultures

Colonial models

While the etymology of the term ‘island’ simply means land surrounded by water, the popular understanding of this space is of a timeless, tropical, ‘desert’ island often associated with abundant flora, fauna and sunny beaches positioned outside the ambit of global history. In fact, in contemporary tourist discourse, the traveller generally leaves the industrialized urban north, a space understood to be the locus of history-making, to escape to a tropical island that is alluring precisely because it is positioned outside the progressive historical pace of modern time. Yet the discursive construction of the island as an especially isolated and remote space is a consequence of European colonialism and has been naturalized by the popular castaway narrative which upholds an accidental model of colonial invasion. Over the centuries of European expansion into the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific archipelagoes, the island became represented – paradoxically – as increasingly distant in time and space from a presumably modern and civilized Western metropole. Even as the forces of colonialism, slavery, anthropology, tourism and diaspora altered island communities and landscapes, the tropical island was increasingly rendered as inaccessible, a space only visited through remarkable circumstances such as shipwreck or capture by pirates. Yet this has been challenged by scholars in a variety of disciplines. Focusing on what he terms ‘green imperialism’, historian Richard Grove has shown how tropical islands across the globe were vital to the development of human and botanical transplantation, as well as theories of evolution and environmental resource conservation. In anthropology, Fernando Ortiz and Sidney Mintz have demonstrated how African and European relations in the Caribbean plantation system resulted in the complex social process of transculturation and creolization. Literary scholar Diana Loxley has demonstrated the ways in which the muscular Christianity of nineteenth-century British fiction was constituted through boys’ adventure novels about colonized islands across the globe. Writing about the Pacific, archaeologist Patrick Kirsch and historian Greg Dening have both criticized the general neglect of islands in the rendering of global history, and shown how vital islands and their residents have been to staging the history of European expansion as well as theories of human and cultural difference. From different vantage points, these scholars have established that island communities – often unwillingly – have provided the knowledge, labour and space for European laboratories and the development of global modernity.

From Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) to Johann David Wyss’s *Swiss Family Robinson* (*Der Schweizerische Robinson*, 1812), European texts have depicted
islands as remote spaces to ponder philosophical origins, renovate social structures, address cultural and biological difference, and to explore and experiment with the relationship between humans and the natural environment. Kevin Carpenter’s research has shown that between 1788 and 1910, over 500 desert-island stories were published in England alone. These Robinsonades, or island solitude and adventure stories so popular in Western Europe, may have been inspired by Robinson Crusoe, but the genre’s origins extend to the East. Ibn Tufail’s twelfth-century text Hayy ibn Yaqdhan, a philosophical treatise from Islamic Spain on precisely these representations of island isolation, origins, and the trope of the castaway and his native servant, became a vital influence after its late seventeenth-century translation from Arabic into Latin and English. This text was an important influence on Daniel Defoe and, by extension, centuries of Robinsonades to follow. Importantly, Ibn Tufail’s novel (a revision of an earlier Persian work) expanded the concept of tabula rasa or ‘blank slate’ through the motif of the isolated castaway who recreates social, material and philosophical relations on an isolated island. This concept of tabula rasa was adopted by John Locke, who emphasized the self-authoring of human subjectivity. I suspect that this concept of the ‘blank slate’ for human imprinting—which provided the epistemological space for the debate between nature and nurture—was deeply tied to the construction of the island as empty space, terra nullius, in which one might imprint imported desires. Moreover, the shift from the philosophical concept of tabula rasa to the denial of sovereignty associated with the colonial construction of terra nullius (an erasure of indigenous presence by declaring empty lands for European control) had obvious political consequences.

From a colonial perspective, the boundedness of islands provided an ideal laboratory for social and biological experimentation: a panopticon, a contained society, terra nullius, a figure for the ship and the world in miniature. The colonial model of the deserted island suspends history in a bounded, controlled space in which to render its narration possible. In The Tempest and its rewrites, the island provides a space to address issues of political and biological reproduction as well as literary succession. Yet the discourses of reproduction and succession are fraught with erasures. Loxley has shown that colonial-era authors grafted imported ideologies, technologies and histories onto the island (such as Crusoe’s handy cache of shipwreck supplies) rather than acknowledging indigenous presence, thus circumventing the thorny issue of native sovereignty. Ultimately colonial writers imagined the island as a European world in miniature, a discursive space in which to perform and experiment with the material realities of colonial expansion. After hundreds of Robinsonades, this island tabula rasa accrued a layered textuality, becoming ‘the site of a radical rehearsal of words already spoken, a rewriting of books already written.’ Importantly, this textuality is specifically gendered. Popular colonial texts from J. M. Ballantyne’s The Coral Island (1857) to Jules Verne’s The Mysterious Island (1874) inscribe ‘science, technology, empire and exploration [as] indissolubly anchored to masculinity’, a gendered mobility that is often projected upon a passive, feminized island space. In the popular boys’ island adventure novel of the nineteenth century, the island provides for the fantasy of autogenesis in which men produce boys through the dissemination of technology, the English language and Christian education.

Although this colonial island fantasy produced many parodies and critiques from within the colonial metropole, the first generation of postcolonial island writers who have ‘written back’ to the English canon have, generally speaking, focused on questions of textual inheritance through the metaphors of patrilineage and exile. Drawing on both The Tempest and Robinson Crusoe, French sociologist Octave Mannoni offered a psychoanalytic model of colonial parent/child relations in Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization (1950). Although they took issue with Mannoni’s model, it was influential to Martiniquan writers Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire, who offered more materialist critiques of the patrilineal model of colonialism. This question of succession and inheritance has been vital to both colonial and postcolonial literary discourse. Edward Said has demonstrated a shift from filiative to affiliative relationships in Western art since the era of modernism. He explains that in this break with tradition, ‘natural’ and familial bonds are ruptured and substituted by more heterogeneous affiliations that are ‘transpersonal’, professional and class conscious. Building upon Said, John Thieme traces a similar shift away from colonial filiation to affiliation in postcolonial revisions of canonical texts. He explains, ‘problematic parentage becomes a major trope in postcolonial con-texts, where the genealogical bloodlines of transmission are frequently delegitimised by multiple ancestral legacies… Orphans and bastards abound in postcolonial texts and the engagement with issues of parentage is often… intense.’

The patriarchal parent/child model of island colonization has become a vital point of interrogation for postcolonial writers, many of whom have revised Shakespeare’s depiction of Prospero and Caliban with particular attention to the question of language and representation. Caliban’s famous retort to Prospero and Miranda, ‘you taught me language, and my profit on’t / Is, I know how to curse’ (I.i.366–8), has been an important inspiration, particularly
in the Caribbean where *The Tempest* is thought to be set. As Peter Hulme has shown, the name Caliban is an anagram for the term cannibal, Columbus's mistranslation of Carib/Caniba/Caribbean. But if Prospero with all of his books can be seen to represent the power of colonial literacy and language, Caliban, as the inheritor of his language and ultimately the island, has been a primary figure for the postcolonial island writer. Caribbean authors as diverse as George Lamming, Aimé Césaire, Kamau Brathwaite, Roberto Fernández Retamar and Derek Walcott have all to some extent reclaimed the rebellious character Caliban, emphasizing his exile from land and language, issues of sovereignty and independence, and the power embedded in canonical narrative traditions.

The boundedness of the island has been translated as omnipotence over space, an assumption nicely epitomized by Prospero's attempts to control the island through the knowledge gleaned by his books and yet simultaneously critiqued in Shakespeare's play by Prospero's inability to anticipate Caliban's revolt. In an era of decolonization, this tension between social control and native revolt has been a key element of postcolonial island rewrites. Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête* (1969) for instance stages a debate between Ariel and Caliban about complicity in the colonial project and the best possible route towards liberation, positioning Ariel's mixed racial heritage as determinative of his political alliances and associating Caliban, who calls for *uhuru*, with African epistemologies and 'transcolonial' models of liberation. This revolutionary potential - and failure - of the colonized subject has been explored in Kamau Brathwaite's poem 'Caliban', a figure who appears in his trilogy *The Arrivants* under various forms of colonial and social rule. Reconfiguring Caliban's misdirected pledge of allegiance to the drunken Stefano - 'Ban' ban' Ca-caliban / Has a new master' (II.i.178-9) - Brathwaite substitutes the Jacobean drama of *The Tempest* for the liberating political and artistic potential of the region's Carnival celebration, specifically situating it in the recuperative power of folk language and rhythm: 'And / Ban / Ban / Cal- / iban / like to play / pan / at the Car- / nival'. In their construction of a modern and creolized figure of Caliban, many of these engagements with *The Tempest*, as Peter Hulme has noted, are less invested in critical readings of Shakespeare's Renaissance play or context than adopting it as an allegorical device to explore the complexity of contemporary postcolonial concerns.

Postcolonial island writing has often staged the entanglement between islander and arrivant, master and slave, metropole and colony, and their overlapping discourses of physical and cultural 'ex-isle'. The title of George Lamming's novel *Water with Berries* (1972), for instance, adopts Caliban's poignant complaint to Prospero: 'When thou cam'st first / Thou strok'st me and made much of me; wouldst give me / Water with berries in't, and teach me how / To name the bigger light' (II.i.314-7). Lamming depicts Caribbean migration to postwar England as a legacy of exile that can be traced to Prospero's patrilineage. In his essays in *Pleasures of Exile* (1960) he writes:

> I am a direct descendant of slaves, too near the actual enterprise to believe that its echoes are over with the reign of emancipation. Moreover, I am a direct descendant of Prospero worshipping in the same temple of endeavour, using his legacy - not to curse our meeting - but to push it further, reminding the descendants of both sides that what's done is done, and can only be seen as a soil from which other gifts, or the same gift endowed with different meanings, may grow towards a future which is colonised by our acts in this moment, but which must always remain open.

Like Derek Walcott, who has also explored the patrilineal model of Prospero/Caliban and Crusoe/Friday as literary figures of the Caribbean colonial condition and the region's production of art, Lamming suggests these questions of racial and literary inheritance are intertwined. As Walcott's poem 'A Far Cry from Africa' has famously queried, 'I who am poisoned with the blood of both, / Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?' In his depiction of three exiled male artists in England (a painter, composer and actor), Lamming explores but does not limit his engagement with *The Tempest* to the racialization of colonial heritage and patriarchal fears of miscegenation, such as Prospero's concern with a union between Caliban and his daughter Miranda. Importantly, Lamming expands the legacy of colonial and artistic inheritance to other figures in the play. In *Pleasures of Exile* he analyses the remarkable textual and physical absence of Miranda's mother, questioning the colonial island trope of masculine ontogenesis. In an effort to explore the complex gendering of empire, *Water with Berries* fills in this absence with the landlady Old Dowager, a reflection of a matrilineal legacy in colonialism that results in profound ambivalence towards the 'mother country'.

Other postcolonial writers have been similarly concerned with how women figure into the genealogy of this ur-text of island colonialism. Jamaican author Michelle Cliff has similarly emphasized the problem of island 'ex-isle' and called attention to the gendering of the patriarchal model of colonial relations. Her essays have questioned the patrilineage of Prospero/Caliban and her novels have highlighted the agency of characters such as Ariel and Miranda, Caliban's original language teacher, particularly in her novel *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987). In fact, this recuperation of Miranda's white Creole identity as a legacy of colonialism can be traced back to Jean Rhys's
Lamming’s call for an engagement with novel Wide Sargasso Sea (1966). David Dabydeen (Guyana) has contributed to Lamming’s call for an engagement with The Tempest’s suppressed matrilineage in his ‘Miranda/Britannia’ poems, as well as exploring Miranda’s spatial relationship with Caliban. Jamaican scholar Sylvia Wynter has demonstrated the ways in which The Tempest has staged a colonial hierarchy with Prospero reflecting the epitone of masculine rationalist knowledge, Caliban as native irrationality, and Miranda’s entrance, through the patriarchal exchange of marriage, into this courtly model of colonial power. She remarks that the text occludes the presence of native or racialized women as ‘an alternative sexual-erotic model of desire’, thereby erasing an indigenous system of biological and cultural reproduction which would have threatened the expansion of Europe. In a similar effort to develop alternative spaces of knowledge outside patriarchal colonialism, other writers have recuperated the character Sycorax, Caliban’s African mother and Prospero’s greatest perceived threat. Famously, Kamau Brathwaite interprets Sycorax as a historical presence that is represented in a visual font (Sycorax Video Style), a typeface that allows him to articulate ‘dub riddims and nation language and calibanisms’ on the page, an inspiring metaphor generative of the suppressed African mother tongue.

Later generations of island writers have not adhered so closely to Shakespeare’s original narrative and have transformed the meanings of the play by emphasizing local island concerns and languages. Dev Virahsawmy’s play Toufann: A Mauritian Fantasy (1991), for instance, is written in Mauritian Creole (Morisyen) and integrates multiple Shakespeare texts into the narrative: Miranda is substituted by the more forthright ‘Kordelia’, and Iago and Polonius enter into the story. (Virahsawmy had already translated MacBeth into Creole.) Importantly Mauritius is one of the few islands on the world that did not have an indigenous population at the time of European contact. Accordingly, in terms of cultural origins it is decidedly a Creole that draws from multiple European, African and Asian cultures, a formulation reflected in characters such as the metisse Kalibann. The problem of Prospero’s omnipotence over island space is articulated in modern terms of computer surveillance, and the question of patrilineage is substituted by the naturalization of Prospero’s fears of miscegenation: Kalibann and Kordelia produce a child, but as Françoise Lionnet (Mauritius) points out, this emphasis on biological reproduction does not necessarily reflect a resolution of the plot.

Questions about patrilineal origins and future descendants have been a concern for Pacific writers such as Keri Hulme (Aotearoa/New Zealand), whose novel The Bone People (1983) loosely draws from both The Tempest and Robinson Crusoe but positions the European as a mute arrivant child, washed ashore and adopted by indigenous Maori characters named Kerewin and Joe. These colonial island texts travelled with the empire: Robinson Crusoe was one of the first secular texts to be translated into Maori in 1852. Hulme’s vision of familial relations supports Thieme’s observation about postcolonial concerns with ancestry and orphanage. Importantly, Hulme’s depiction of the island does not uphold the colonial trope of terra nullius or tabula rasa, and the European arrivant does not bring language, technology, rational discourse, or new social hierarchies as his portmanteau. Instead her novel explores the violence in both colonial and familial relations, particularly between adult and child, but leaves it to the indigenous characters to excavate their precolonial history, which they do – literally – by uncovering a Polynesian voyaging vessel that preserves the island’s mauri (spirit). This vessel situates Maori as first arrivants and therefore sovereign, as well as agents of a complex history of maritime voyaging and technologies that predate Europe. In contrast, the European arrivant is adrift in the oceanic; in his origin story, ‘in the beginning, it was darkness, and more fear, and a howling wind across the sea’. As such, Hulme foregrounds the genealogical import of indigenous sovereignty embedded in Caliban’s declaration that ‘This island’s mine by Sycorax my mother’ (II.iii.33). Shifting the emphasis to the indigenous or island subject who receives the (silent) European arrivant, these revisionary texts foreground questions of land and sovereignty, and denaturalize the trajectory of European appropriation of island space.

The sea is history

Because this body of literature is defined by the dynamic interrelation between land and sea, the transoceanic imagination is a constitutive component of island writing. Derek Walcott has famously declared that the ‘sea is history’, highlighting the difficulties in inscribing a place which is vast and always in motion and flux. This model of history demands a different methodology than the monumentalizing models of Europe. In his poem ‘The Sea is History’ Walcott stages a dialogue between the colonials who ask, ‘Where are your monuments?’ and the poet who responds, ‘The sea has locked them up.’ The traditional markers of history are inaccessible and perhaps not even relevant to the island writer excavating other historiographies in submarine coral and in the middle-passage bones at the bottom of the sea. To Walcott, the sea holds what ‘the historian cannot hear, the howls / of all the races that crossed the water’.
Influenced by Walcott and Brathwaite, Édouard Glissant has also used an oceanic model for African diaspora history, writing in *Poetics of Relation* that: 

the abyss is a tautology: the entire ocean, the entire sea gently collapsing in the end into the pleasures of sand, make one vast beginning, but a beginning whose time is marked by these balls and chains gone green.38

The ocean as origin has been a vital trope to island writers, particularly those who have positioned the contemporary expulsion of ‘boat people’ in a longer historical trajectory that begins with the middle passage. For instance, Edwidge Danticat’s short story, ‘Children of the Sea’ explores the ways in which the abyss becomes a tautology for Haitians fleeing the *ton ton macoute* after President Aristide’s (first) expulsion. Caught adrift in the Caribbean with other refugees, the unnamed narrator writes back to his girlfriend that:

it was always meant to be, as though the very day that my mother birthed me, she has chosen me to live life eternal, among the children of the deep blue sea, those who have escaped the chains of slavery to form a world beneath the heavens and the blood-drenched earth where you live.39

Later the narrator comments, ‘there are special spots in the sea where lost Africans who jumped off the slave ships still rest, that those who have died at sea have been chosen to make that journey in order to be reunited with their long-lost relations’.40 Danticat inscribes the ongoing process of transoceanic diaspora for island subjects and responds to Walcott’s call to mark the sea ashistory, a space literally inhabited by the bodies of refugees and slaves.

Building upon the metaphor of fathoming oceanic depth, island writers have also used the breadth of the sea as a trope for regional unity. Glissant has utilized the sea as a model of regional history. Inspired by Brathwaite’s dictum that Caribbean ‘unity is submarine’, Glissant determines the islands are connected by ‘submarine roots: that is floating free, not fixed in one position in some primordial spot, but extending in all directions in our world through its networks and branches’.41 He works against the model of the isolated island by turning to Caribbean migration – originating with the earliest migrants such as Carib and Arawak – in determining that the regional sea ‘extend(s) in all directions ... a sea that explodes the scattered lands into an arc. A sea that diffracts’.42

This focus on watery trajectories is a hallmark of island writing. Cuban writer Antonio Benitez-Rojo has also developed an aquapoetic vision of the region, asserting that the Caribbean is a ‘meta-archipelago’ with the ‘virtue of having neither a boundary nor a centre’.43 He highlights the dispersal of

Caribbean peoples and configures the region as much in flux as the waters that surround it. ‘The culture of the Caribbean ... is not terrestrial but aquatic ... The Caribbean is the natural and indispensable realm of marine currents, of waves, of folds and double folds, of fluidity and sinuosity’.44 Water appeals because of its lack of fixity and rootedness; in the words of Gaston Bachelard, water is a ‘transitory element ... the essential ontological metamorphosis between heaven and earth. A being dedicated to water is a being in flux’.45 Since migration and creolization are characteristic of island cultural formations, watery trajectories provide an apt metaphor for ethnicities ‘in flux’, and are vital to imagining human and cultural origins. To Walcott’s characters in his epic poem *Omeros*, ‘Mer was both mother and sea’, whereas in Grace Nichols’s (Guyana) poetry, Afro-Caribbean origins are traced back to the traumatic birth through the ‘middle passage womb’.46 Tracing a connection to the past through genealogy or filiation, a characteristic trope of postcolonial writing, this model of oceanic origins destabilizes the abstract universal narrative of colonial history and makes a familial claim to time through ancestry, rendering memory as history.

Writers from the eastern Pacific Islands have also emphasized the complex histories of indigenous voyaging, using these trajectories to configure patterns of modern migration and globalization. For instance, Samoan writer Albert Wendt has referred to himself as ‘a pelagic fish on permanent migration’.47 Anthropologist and novelist Epeli Hau’ofa (Tonga/Fiji) has reconfigured the mapping of an isolated Pacific by asserting, ‘There is a gulf between viewing the Pacific as “islands in a far sea” and as “a sea of islands”. The first emphasizes dry surfaces in a vast ocean far from the centers of power ... (which) stress(es) the smallness and remoteness of the islands. The second is a more holistic perspective in which things are seen in the totality of their relationships.’48 Hau’ofa reorients land-based bias towards the complex processes of interculturation generated by transoceanic movement. Inspired by Walcott’s sentiment that ‘the sea is history’, Hau’ofa concludes that ‘our roots, our origins are embedded in the sea’, which is ‘our pathway to each other’.49

Pacific writers such as Hau’ofa, Wendt, Sir Tom Davis (the former prime minister of the Cook Islands), Robert Sullivan (Aotearoa/New Zealand), Caroline Sinavaiana-Gabbard (Samoa/US) and Teresia Teaiwa (Fiji) have all emphasized the transoceanic history of indigenous migration across the region, establishing a larger familial relationship between islanders in which Tahitians, Maori, Hawaiians and others in the eastern Pacific refer to each other as Polynesian kin.50 While one may not expect indigenous Pacific poetry
to reflect the same concern with transoceanic diaspora, Samoan writer Albert Wendt writes in his poem, 'Inside Us the Dead':

my polynesian fathers
who escaped the sun's wars, seeking
these islands by prophetic stars,
emerged
from the sea's eye like turtles
scuttling to beach their eggs.²¹

Maori author Witi Ihimaera’s work has also been deeply informed by the history of transoceanic migration. In The Whale Rider (1987) the prologue begins with a lyrical description of Kahu, a Maori ancestor who rode a whale from Hawaiki, ‘the land of the Ancients’ to Aotearoa to settle his community. This migration is naturalized, for when the island is sighted, ‘the land and sea sighed with gladness: We have been found … Our blessing will soon come.’²²

Generations later his young namesake saves the same bullwhale and companions from expiring on the shore, foregrounding an ancient human/whale relationship and the role of environmental guardianship, as well as invoking human evolutionary origins in the sea. Ihimaera’s vision of the boundless horizon echoes Walcott’s observations of the global scope of islandness as the former inscribes the ‘huge seamless marine continent which we call Te Moana Nui a Kiwa, the Great Ocean of Kiwa’.⁵³

While Ihimaera expands our vision of transoceanic migration by inscribing non-human travellers, other writers have broadened the gendered parameters of Pacific literary production about migration.³⁴ Teresa Kieuea Teaiwa’s poetry collection Searching for Nei N’m’ana (1999) calls upon ‘one of only a few female figures in the male-dominated field of Pacific Island navigational traditions’ as she moves between the Gilbertese, Fijian and Hawaiian islands.⁵⁵ Albert Wendt’s novel Ola also foregrounds Pacific women travellers, depicting his protagonist Ola’s subjectivity as constituted by her relationship to the sea. Through the vehicle of water Ola comes into her subjecthood at the age of six; seeing her reflection in the ocean she observes, ‘Yes, it was me, I existed, I am, I am separate. I was myself.’⁵⁶ Years later at the New Zealand shore she ‘felt at home, remembering: the sea which cups my islands, washes each night through my dreams, no matter what shore I reach’.⁵⁷ As a pelagic text, Ola privileges water as constitutive to island identity:

We are sixty-five percent water … Our brains are eighty per cent water. We are more water than blood. So our water ties to one another are more important than our blood ties! We carry within us the seas out of which we came.⁵⁸

Indian diaspora writers such as J. S. Kanwal and Satendra Nandan, both from Fiji, have written historical novels and poetry that reinscribe the crossing of kalapani, or black waters, to the islands of indenture, drawing from both historical accounts of the girmite, or labour contract, and African middle-passage narratives.⁵⁹ Nandan, using the historical crossing as a metaphor of the second diaspora of Indo-Fijians after the 1987 coup, writes of ‘Kalapani, black waters, a cross across the seven seas / With blood, betrayal, grief that never cease.’⁶⁰ This body of Indian diaspora literature often demarcates a difference between a genealogical and historical relationship to the sea. Indo-Fijian writer Subramani’s novella ‘Gone Bush’ begins, ‘In the beginning was the sea—everything came out of the sea … from it came the godess of life.’ Although the Indian protagonist ‘seemed … [like] someone sent to a landlocked culture whose people were riders of horses’,⁶¹ like Walcott’s narrator, the process of migration to the islands has realigned this character’s relationship towards the sea in a way that foregrounds the historical process. As all arrivants before the twentieth century came to islands by boat and have configured new relationships to the sea through island living, Hau’ofa argues that ‘all of us in Oceania today, whether indigenous or otherwise, can truly assert that the sea is our common heritage’.⁶²

Often travelling in refitted slave ships, Indian indenturers from Mauritius, Trinidad and other island regions have inspired an important new body of literature in which island identity is articulated in global terms. Like most maritime narratives of the middle passage or of transoceanic voyaging, the transoceanic imaginary has been traditionally imagined in terms of a shipload of male travellers or jakaji bhati.⁶³ Like the island, the ship is represented as a world but a peculiarly homosocial one. In general these narratives construct a maritime fraternity where women are absent from the public space of migration yet the feminine symbolic is apparent in representations of a fluid, maternal sea and a feminized, receptive land. Novels such as Ramabai Espinet’s (Trinidad) The Swinging Bridge (2003) have done much to recuperate the history of women in the diaspora, imagining transoceanic origins in terms of personal genealogy.⁶⁴ Mahadai Das’s (Trinidad) poem ‘They Came in Ships’ (1977) inscribes a detailed historical trajectory of the crossing of kalapani as cultural memory, in which the omniscient narrator translates oral to written: ‘At the horizon’s edge I hear / Voices crying in the wind.’⁶⁵ Like middle-passage narratives, these literatures inscribe the sea in terms of containment and terror as well as the creolizing possibilities of new social and cultural relations. Moreover, these inscriptions often engage corporeal images of the crossing, exploring how both the body and identity are reconfigured through
the migration process in the poetry of Lelawattee Manoo-Rahming (Trinidad) and in the work of Mauritian novelists Ananda Devi and Natacha Appanah-Mouriquand.66

In historicizing transonic migration for nineteenth-century Indian indenturers (derogatorily called ‘coolies’), some authors such as David Dabydeen (Guyana) have reclaimed epic narrative to articulate the experience of the subaltern in terms of a ‘coolie odyssey’.67 More recently Khal Torabully (Mauritius) has reclaimed the term and refashioned it into a theory of ‘coolitude’ which is deeply tied to the transonic imaginary. He explains, ‘It is impossible to understand the essence of “coolitude” without charting the coolies’ voyage across the seas. That decisive experience, that coolie odyssey, left an indelible stamp on the imaginary landscape of coolitude’.68 Moreover, ‘Coolitude explores the concept of the ocean as a nodal moment of migration, a space for destruction of identity, yet also one of regeneration, when an aesthetics of migration was created’.69 These narratives have been crucial to offering an alternative site of island historiography, destabilizing the myth of island isolation, and offering new genealogical models of oceanic origin across time and space.

Mapping the I-land

The past decade or more of postcolonial scholarship has emphasized the trajectories of diaspora in ways that are often gendered masculine and by focusing on migrancy has often deflected attention from ongoing struggles for decolonization and indigenous sovereignty. Glissant has warned about facile celebrations of migrancy and has argued for a return to local island concerns: ‘when one rediscovers one’s landscape, desire for the other country ceases to be a form of alienation’.70 If we adopt Brathwaite’s tidalectics, facilitating a dialogue between land and sea, our scrutiny of island writing will not privilege routes over roots, and we will uncover localized island concerns that may not necessarily speak to cosmopolitan discourses of exile. This section on the ‘I-land’ discusses texts which are concerned with reterritorializing and naturalizing the subject’s relationship to the land in the wake of colonial alienation and exile. Thus a refusal to migrate from the island may reflect a resistance to colonial trajectories rather than a lack of cosmopolitanism.

In her essay, ‘A piece of land surrounded’, Marlene NourbeSe Philip (Tobago) calls attention to how island history has been recorded by outsiders without the presence of the ‘I-lander’. She writes, ‘For me, the “story” that wanted out, wanted to tell itself, is one of islandness and its transformation into I-landness.71 Amidst a global geopolitics that prioritizes size, might, military and technological power, the I-land voice is often cartographically diminished to the supposed insignificance of its very landscape. Drawing attention to local island subjectivities and cultural production, and shifting away from definitions of the island as a “piece of real estate”, Philip’s concept of the ‘I-land’ recentres island geography as crucial to historical analysis. The I-land can be defined alternately as ‘a piece of land surrounded by seas of colonialism. Or, perhaps, afloat in its own history’.72

This attempt to map a local geography can also be seen in Sam Selvon’s (Trinidad) early novel, An Island Is a World (1955). Like Earl Lovelace’s later work Salt (1996) – in which the title refers to a substance whose ingestion makes it impossible to ‘fly back to Africa’ in popular folk narrative – Selvon’s novel seeks to naturalize national belonging, resisting the tug of exile and migration.73 His protagonist Foster despairs over his lack of identification with his repatriating Indian family and his inability to feel a sense of national roots in his (still colonial) Trinidad. He despairs: ‘of what material loss would it be to the world if the island suddenly sank under the sea? Foster senses that in this world which entirely ‘consisted of the continents,74 the disappearance of a small island like Trinidad would not alter political cartographies.

Naipaul’s infamous lament that ‘Trinidad was too unimportant and we could never be convinced of the value of reading the history of a place which was, as everyone said, only a dot on the map of the world’76 is anticipated in Selvon’s novel (published seven years earlier), which begins with a remarkably similar image:

The world spun in (Foster’s) brain, and he imagined the island of Trinidad... He saw it on the globe, with the Americas sprawled like giant shadows above and below, and the endless Atlantic lapping the coastlines of the continents and the green islands of the Caribbean... Foster imagined Trinidad as it was, a mere dot on the globe.77

Here Selvon demonstrates how the ‘I-land’ voice is reduced to the presumed irrelevance of its landscape; small size becomes a metonymy for the lack of history, anticipating Naipaul’s sentiment that ‘history is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies... There were only plantations, prosperity, decline, neglect: the size of the islands called for nothing else.78 In his poem ‘Homage to Gregorias’ Walcott’s narrator parodies Naipaul, lamenting, ‘there was no history. No memory / Rocks haunted by seabirds, that was all’.79 This tension about representing small island concerns
with colonial technologies and discourses is apparent in Hau’ofa’s short story ‘Blessed are the Meek’, which describes a resident of the fictional island of Tiko as:

A citizen of a tiny country, so small that mankind is advised not to look for it on a classroom globe for it will only search in vain. More often than not cartographers leave Tiko out of their charts altogether because they can’t be bothered looking for a dot sufficiently small to represent it faithfully and at the same time big enough to be seen without the aid of a microscope. 80

Hau’ofa’s quote is a parody of a nineteenth-century missionary text that reported that the Fijian is said to ‘look with pleasure on a globe, as a representation of the world, until directed to contrast Fiji with Asia or America, when his joy ceases, and he acknowledges, with a forced smile, “our land is not larger than the dung of a fly”; but, on rejoining his comrades, he pronounces the globe a “lying ball”’. 81

Here ‘geography serv(es) as a metaphor for history – as well it might in islands whose history has been so deeply influenced by geographical factors’. 82 It is in this way that narrative, cartography and colonial history are shown in shifting relation to each other and highlighted as central to the process of historical excavation. Louise Bennett (Jamaica) has drawn attention to – and gently mocked – the important nationalist remapping of island spaces in an island tongue. In her poem ‘Independance’ she writes:

She hope dem caution worl’-map
Fe stop draw Jamaica small
For de lickle speck can’t show
We Independantniss at all.

Morsomever we must tell map dat
We don’t like we position –
Please kindly teck we out a sea
And draw we in de Ocean. 83

By anthropomorphizing ‘worl’-map’, Bennett calls attention to cartography’s subjective rather than purely scientific production and the ways that colonial mapping marginalizes island spaces. These lines also foreground the ways in which independence movements metaphorically (and sometimes literally) enlarge ‘I-land’ cartographies. If ‘an island is a world, and everywhere that people live, they create their own worlds’, 84 then the island might be reclaimed as a space of belonging rather than marginalization and exile.

ELIZABETH DELOUGHREY

Island writing, Creole cultures

Merle Collins’s (Grenada) novel The Colour of Forgetting (1995) engages specifically with these questions of small islandness and how to articulate the ‘I-lander’ in a way that values local cultural production. The concern with local landscape is of historical importance because, as Glissant explains, the violence of the Caribbean plantocracy has prevented ‘nature and culture’ from forming ‘a dialectical whole that informs a people’s consciousness’. 85 As Michelle Cliff asks, ‘When our landscape is so tampered with, how do we locate ourselves?’ 86 Reconfiguring ‘I-land’ discourse is thus possible through what Glissant terms ‘the language of landscape’. 87 Collins’s novel animates indigenous history and the landscape through her character Carib, the presence of tree spirits, the ghosts of slaves, a whispering mountain and speaking animals, depicting a dynamic exchange between a deeply historical landscape of flora and fauna and its human residents, whose labour has reconfigured both the geography and botany of island space. A conflict arises between the older generation who work on the land, those who ‘know red mud’, and the urbanized youth whose vision of social revolution dismisses small land holding as ‘uneconomic’. As one of the novel’s elders exclaims, ‘If you think a two acres here (are) uneconomic, then you have somebody in another bigger country thinking the whole of (our island) . . . uneconomic because it so small . . . so you do away with me and my land and they do away with you.’ 88 After centuries of monocrop plantation labour, island writers and residents are rethinking sustainable land use in ways that uphold a mutually constitutive relation between nature and culture. Like Selvon and Lovelace, Collins resists the valorizing discourse of ex-isle and inscribes the tremendous pressures upon island attempts to build a sustainable, self-governing community. After the novel’s conflict results in violence (the US invasion of Grenada), it concludes by suggesting – but not depicting – a potential new pathway forged by the next generation of women leaders, a cautious hope for a (re)productive future.

Island writers in the Pacific have been deeply concerned with questions of sovereignty, especially in the wake of neo-colonial development schemes and global tourism. Solomon Islands’ writer Celo Kulagoe writes of this ‘second wave’ of imperialism in his dual poem, ‘White-Land’, the first version written in pidgin (pijin), the second in ‘standard’ English:

Compatriot,
You see that white-man coming? . . .
He was here before too . . .
He is here again
to help you,
help you in selling your
In this poem, ‘He is here again’ invokes a long history of colonialism in the Pacific articulated in terms of ancestry, for this figure of capitalist appropriation who is named ‘white-land’ appeared ‘during our grandfather’s days, / and again during our father’s times’. Highlighting the trajectory between state-facilitated imperialism of the nineteenth century and the forms of global capitalism that relegate island beaches to pieces of real estate, Kulagoe warns, ‘keep a good look-out, / for this white-land / also comes / in black skin’. As such, ‘white-land’ becomes an inheritance in terms of colonial patronymy and the reification of genealogical land.

Other writers have addressed this question of ‘I-land’ sovereignty by naturalizing indigenous relationships to the landscape as an effective political and ontological strategy for land claims in white settler nation states. Patricia Grace’s novel *Potiki* (1986), for instance, depicts a coastal Maori community’s efforts to reclaim ancestral land in the wake of a tourist development scheme that draws from previous colonial land confiscations. After refusing the sale of their land to a developer nicknamed ‘Dollarman’ who wants to build a ‘theme park’, the community experiences a series of attacks on the primary spaces of community sustainability — the gardens, the cemetery and the meeting house. While the characters debate and devise various responses to the attacks, I believe Grace’s most effective intervention is to offer a narratological response that disrupts the linear novel and capitalism’s narrative of progress through the language of ancestral place. *Potiki* has no central narrator or character, reforming the individualistic narrative into a communal Maori narration of spiral time. Rather than segregating the ‘past time’ of the ancestors from the ‘present time’ of the contemporary community, Grace employs a spiral temporality where past and future time is narratively re-experienced in a specific space of land, an experience of space and time which she terms the ‘now-time, centred in the being’.

Reforging a more sustainable relationship to the land is currently a global concern, one that is experienced in more urgent terms in island spaces which are more vulnerable to rising ocean levels, hurricanes, depleted fish stocks, desertification and resource contamination. From works such as Mayra Montero’s *(Cuba) In the Palm of Darkness* (1998) about naturalists and species extincted, to Jacques Roumain’s *(Haiti) Masters of the Dew* (1977), about deforestation, water scarcity and its impact on the labouring peasant class, island writers have long been engaged with the relationship between the text, the people and the land. Like Édouard Glissant, who has argued that the Caribbean island ‘landscape is its own monument: its meaning can only be traced on the underside. It is all history’, his compatriot Daniel Maximin has argued that the land is ‘a character in our history’. Caribbean writers such as Derek Walcott, Jamaica Kincaid, Olive Senior, Aimé and Suzanne Césaire and many others have turned to local flora as a way to explore the entangled history of ‘green imperialism’, colonial botany and island history. Similarly, Pacific writers such as Konai Helu Thaman *(Tonga)* have turned to the history of flora to excavate colonial history, while Maori author June Mitchell *(Aotearoa/New Zealand)* has inscribed the introduction of new plants and peoples to New Zealand as incorporated (and thereby contained) into a primary cosmological genealogy. This is in keeping with Épeli Hau’ofa’s call to rethink linear models of time and inscribe what he terms an ‘ecological time’, a turning to the natural world which he argues is ‘vital to reconstructing our histories’.

### Creolization and tidalectics

In this chapter I’ve organized postcolonial island literature by history and geography, demonstrating how both land and sea might be understood as thematic concerns shared between disparate islands. The final section looks at the ways in which this long historic dialogue between residents of the land and travellers by sea has contributed to the history of creolization in island spaces. Geography and history of course are integral to understanding the history of creolization, a process that while not limited to island spaces, is made all the more likely due to the constraints of island size and perpetual arrival of new settlers by sea. Yet in this last section I want to emphasize the limitations of this comparative methodology because while geography contributed to the complex racial and cultural settlements in the Pacific, the history of some of these islands prohibits a description of this process as ‘creolization’. So when we speak of islands of creolization we are generally thinking of the process of European, Asian and African diaspora and settlement in the islands of the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean. But this is a vexed term in the Pacific due to the continuity of indigenous communities and languages whose access to land claims is expressed, legally and culturally, through a local rather than transcultural genealogy. So while discourses of creolization in the Caribbean and the Mascarene Islands may bolster national sovereignty,
these same discourses may weaken nationalist indigenous claims to land in the Pacific, precisely because they undermine what J. Kehaulani Kauanui refers to as the 'blood logic' of the colonial state.93 This does not mean that writers deny mixed racial and cultural heritage; in describing his German and Samoan ancestry, Albert Wendt explains 'I am both indigenous and one of the newcomers.' Teresa Teiwa, who is of African American and Banaban descent and grew up in Fiji, describes 'The native (as) hybrid. Hybridity is essential.'96 But in the larger political and legal arena in which blood is quantified and determinative of access to land, fishing, language, and culture rights, the discourse of creolization can be perceived as threatening or irrelevant.97

At the 2008 MLA conference, Ato Quayson remarked that the process of comparison is necessarily distorting. In other words, in our efforts to trace out connections between texts, we generally ignore those aspects that do not fit easily into our hermeneutic circle. Quayson called for a mode of comparison that is not limited to themes but rather turns to configuration as a potential mode of comparison.98 Thus my final section here does not turn away from the three previous thematic models (the colonial island canon, the sea as history, and excavating the land) to argue that a separate body of island literatures is concerned with creolization. Instead, I argue here and elsewhere that these are mutually constitutive elements of island writing. There is no progression in which creolization represents the pinnacle of island articulation; rather, these island texts surpass and complicate their interpretive frames. It's important to note that the discourse of creolization does not 'travel' evenly across all island spaces nor does it represent all island histories, just as we must recognize that the popular mode of a diasporic postcolonialism has been perceived as threatening or oblivious to indigenous studies. It is by recognizing the comparative process of distortion and configuration that we might better understand how literary works that inscribe, for instance, the sea as history might also be simultaneously articulating a genealogy of creolization. In this case we might interpret creolization as a mode of tracing history through ancestry and memory.

Like other postcolonial literatures, island writing has turned to certain spaces to theorize the events of time. The chronotopes (compressions of time/space) discussed earlier include the sea, the ship and the landscape haunted by history, but we might also turn to contained spaces within the island such as the space of maroonage, the provision grounds, the port, the master's house, the slave barracks, the prison, the market and other spaces.99 In these last few pages, I will briefly turn to two island tropes of cultural contact and creolization: the beach and the plantation.

In his Islands and Beaches (1980), Pacific historian Greg Dening has theorized the beach as a transitional space of crossing, of cultural contact and of exchange. It is a space of vulnerability, of translation, of mistranslation, of violence and of new friendship. From the footprints discovered by Robinson Crusoe on the shore to the sailors washed up onto Prospero's (or Sycorax's) island, the beach has long been represented as an ambivalent space of change. Returning to Patricia Grace's novel Potiki we might rightly emphasize the ways in which the novel is concerned with Maori land sovereignty, but we might also notice how, to this seaside community, the shore plays a vital role, signalling moments of radical change such as when the novel's titular character is born in the sea. In June Mitchell's novel Anokura (1978), a text which is also about a self-sustaining Maori community resisting Pakeha encroachment, Mitchell revisits ancient legends about land birds and seabirds fighting for sovereignty on the beach in a way that parallels the tensions between her nineteenth-century Maori ancestor and her diasporic English husband. In a more recent work, James George (Aotearoa/New Zealand) inscribes the vast militarization of the Pacific from the nuclear attacks on Japan and Bikini Atoll to the Vietnam War, but inscribes how this impacts a Maori family by staging most scenes of cross-cultural intimacy, revelation and death on the strand of a small town in New Zealand's North Island, at the border between land and sea.100 In sum, the beach is an important space to reimagine the 'contact zone' between cultures – or the refusal of contact if we consider the way many tourist resorts ban locals – and has been developed by other writers who have theorized creolization through other coastal symbols such as coral and the mangrove.101

While the beach is a compelling figure to explore cross-cultural encounter, Indian and African diasporic writers have turned to the plantation to historicize creolization. Fernando Ortiz theorized the concept of transculturation as integral to the labour in Cuban sugar and tobacco fields, while Sidney Mintz and Richard Price have turned to anglophone island plantations to develop their theory of creolization, arguing against the 'cultural death' or tabula rasa model of African diaspora cultures. Kamau Brathwaite's The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770–1820 turned to the plantation to theorize the process of creolization between Europeans and Africans, later building upon this to develop a theory of 'nation language', a cultural articulation that resulted specifically from the violence of forced labour and language. Unlike models of multiculturalism promoted by global capitalism, these scholars specifically theorized cultural production from subaltern histories of violence and cultural continuity.102
The plantation novel has been associated with the creolization process in the islands of the Americas and has generally been understood in terms of the interaction between diverse groups of Europeans and Africans. It has also been a significant trope of Indian diaspora writers such as J.S. Kanwal, whose novel The Morning inscribes the recruitment from India, the crossing of the kalapani, and the creolization of diverse South Asians across caste, region, language and gender lines – in their adopted lands of Fiji. Moreover the novel, like its anti-indenture predecessor, Totaram Sanadhya’s My Twenty-one Years in the Fiji Islands and the Story of the Haunted Line (1914), inscribes an additional layering of creolization through interactions with indigenous Fijians, which were banned by the colonial administration. Although the novel does not depict interracial marriage between Indian and indigenous Fijian subjects, the novel, like Subramani’s Fiji-Hindi novel Duaha Puraan (2001), reflects a cultural and linguistic creolization that remains largely separate from the question of racial inheritance, even as it queries modes of cultural and biological reproduction.

The concept of creolization has been adopted for many cultural and political expressions. It refers to language, linguistics, epistemology, cultural contact and cultural violence, racial and ethnic inheritance, the brutal legacy of colonialism and a utopian model for future societies. In writing about francophone island cultures, Françoise Lionnet has called for a way to ‘bypass the ancient symmetries and dichotomies … of thought’, and finds that ‘Métissage is such a concept and a practice: it is the site of undecidability and indeterminacy, where solidarity becomes the fundamental principle of political action against hegemonic languages.’ Thus she reads Virahsawmy’s play Toufam as less a ‘writing back to’ the past than a ‘transcolonial’ engagement with postcolonial works that address the question of Creole power in the public sphere. Her reading of creolization’s potential is decidedly hopeful: ‘the way Toufam brings together European and Non-European traditions and realities is precisely what makes the play a creative statement about the openness of Creole cultures to an infinite array of cultural transpositions’. Lionnet’s emphasis on creolization’s modes of language, orality and alternative models of knowing can be seen in the work of Glissant, who has argued that island geography (or archipelagrophy) helps destabilize colonial epistemologies of time and space. He writes, ‘without necessarily inferring any advantage whatsoever to their situation, the reality of archipelagoes in the Caribbean or the Pacific provides a natural illustration of the thought of Relation’. ‘Poetics of Relation’ are defined as ‘the dialectics between the oral and the written, the thought of multilingualism, the balance between the present moment and duration, the questioning of literary genres, the power of the baroque, the nonprojectile imaginary construct.’

Other models of creolization have turned to the history of racial and political filiation, particularly spaces that share a violent history of slavery and indenture in the sugar plantations. Françoise Vergès (Réunion) describes creolization as ‘an invention of everyday life, an aesthetics and a creative practice in a world dominated by brutality, domination, violence’. She theorizes the discourse of anti-colonial revolution as an attempt to break with the colonial metropole in a way that is entangled with a larger issue of filiation, a break which relieves the colonized subject from a legacy of complicity and shame. In its place a colonial family romance is created in which the maternal parent becomes the colonial motherland (symbolizing cultural mores, liberty, rights), the colonized become children, creating an ambivalent role for métissage. In Vergès’s view, the acceptance of métissage is the acceptance of a genealogy of slavery, rape, violence, shame and complicity which undermines the popular narrative of postcolonial innocence. In her work, engagement with the history of creolization means accountability for the past and for the future.

Despite the discourse of colonialism, insularity does not preclude an engagement with creolization. As Chris Bongie writes:

If insular thinking is at the heart of traditional identity politics, the relational politics that emerges out of the cross-culturalizing dynamics of the creolization process puts this insularity into question … We live in a hybridized world of transcultural, transnational relations in which every island (ethnicity, nation, and the like) is but a fragment of the whole that is always already in the process of transforming the particular into something other than its (original, essential) self.

In an effort to keep pressing these methodological frames, to foreground their own comparative processes of distortion and configuration, I conclude by turning to how the concept of creoleness itself often invokes a mutually constitutive space of non-creoleness, a binary relation that needs to be deconstructed in order to destabilize the ways in which the discourse of authentic origins often upholds a notion of cultural purity. Given that the origins of the concept of creolization arose from the Caribbean historical context, I leave these last cautionary words to Glissant:

Creolization as an idea is not primarily the glorification of the composite nature of a people: indeed, no people has been spared the cross-cultural process. The idea of creolization demonstrates that henceforth it is no longer valid to glorify ‘unique’ origins that the race safeguards and prolongs.
Western tradition, genealogical descent guarantees racial exclusivity... To assert peoples are creolized, that creolization has value, is to deconstruct... the category of 'creolized' that is considered as halfway between two 'pure' extremes.112

Notes
1. Regrettably I do not have the space to explore the literature of Sri Lanka, which shares many similar themes.
13. Ibid., p. 47.
26. *Pleasures of Exile*, p. 15; see also Thiem, *Postcolonial Con-texts*, p. 130, Jonathan Goldberg, *Tempest in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,
For more on oceanic literatures, see Keri Hulme, Antonio Benitez-Rojo, Edouard Glissant, Kamau Brathwaite, J. Gibbs and F. Osofisan, writers in my model of island tidalectics due to the way in which they have engaged with the transoceanic imaginary, plantation capitalism, and other histories that link Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature (Judith Raiskin, 2004), pp. 18-57. See Chicago Press, 2001.

On the gendering of The Tempest rewrites see Chantal Zabus, Tempests after Shakespeare (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).


See David Dabydeen, Coolie Odyssey (London: Hansib, 1988). I include Guynesian writers in my model of island tidalities due to the way in which they have engaged with the transoceanic imaginary, plantation capitalism, and other histories that link this nation closely to the anglophone island Caribbean.


See Walcott, Collected Poems, p. 285. This argument is expanded in DeLoughrey, Routes and Roots.


Ibid., p. 168.


Glissant, Caribbean Discourse, pp. 33-4.


75. Ibid., p. 211.


84. Selvon, *An Island*, p. 73.


99. See the ‘American Tropics: towards a literary geography’ project which is dedicated to tracing out the relevance of many of these spaces to history and literature. www.essex.ac.uk/lifts/American_Tropics/index.htm.


101. Torabully writes, ‘In choosing the metaphor of coral to define coolitude, I wanted to underscore the symbolic importance of the “rock” for Césaire, in the context of the struggle for the decolonization of minds. It had to be forceful. The coral can be both soft, and hard, it can be found in two states, and it is traversed by currents, continuously open to new thoughts and systems. It is a living body with elements which are both vulnerable and solid, it is a symbol of the fluidity of relationships and influences’, in Carter and Torabully, *Coolitude*, p. 152. On the mangrove see Marisye Condé, *Crossing the Mangrove*, trans. R. Philocox (New York: Doubleday, 1995); Patrick Chamoiseau, *Texaco*, trans. Rose-Myriam Réjouis and Val Vinokurov (New York: Random House, 1997); and Richard and Sally Price, *Shadowboxing in the mangrove*, *Cultural Anthropology*, 12.1 (1997), 3–36.


108. Ibid., p. 35.

As it is the case with most keywords, critical discussions of magical realism should not avoid asking questions about the history, geography and cultural politics of the concepts and practices at stake in such examinations. When was the concept of magical realism articulated? Is magical realism a Latin American or a universal aesthetic form? And what is the cultural, historical and political relation of magical realism with the discourse of postcolonialism? Scholars are in general agreement about the facts, but often differ on how to interpret them. How can we make sense of the fact that the first critic to think about magical realism as an aesthetic category was a German art critic, Franz Roh (1890–1965), and not the Latin Americans Arturo Uslar Pietri (1906–2001) and Alejo Carpentier (1904–60)? What does this transatlantic (pre)history of the concept of magical realism say about the particularist (peripheral, Third World, post-colonial) claims or universalist inscriptions of this narrative form? Answers to these questions vary, but what seems to be missing in the vast bibliography on magical realism that started growing exponentially since the mid-1980s is a historical narrative of how magical realism was transformed from a narrowly defined concept capable of explaining the scope of post-expressionist painting in Franz Roh; to the aesthetic that was supposed to define the Latin American cultural difference in Uslar Pietri and Carpentier, and later in Gabriel García Márquez (b. 1927); to finally come to be seen, as Homi Bhabha suggested, as ‘the literary language of the emergent postcolonial world’. This chapter will trace the transcultural genealogy of a critical concept and aesthetic form through its various articulations prior to its becoming the highly celebrated postcolonial form we know today.

The explicit coupling of magical realism and postcolonial discourse is a rather recent development. Almost at the same time as Bhabha’s acknowledgment of magical realism as the narrative form most capable of expressing the cultural particularity of the postcolonial periphery in 1990, Gayatri Spivak had suggested the need to reflect upon the trajectory of magical realism, from its