

ARCHIPELAGIC SINGAPORE: RETHINKING ISLAND SPACE IN THE LATE
NINETEENTH CENTURY

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by

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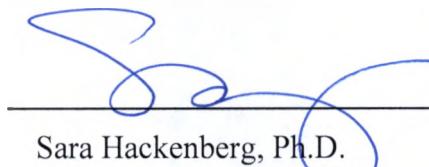
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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read Archipelagic Singapore: Rethinking Island Space in the Late Nineteenth Century by Austin Ben-Keat Lim, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in English: Literature at San Francisco State University.



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ARCHIPELAGIC SINGAPORE: RETHINKING ISLAND SPACE IN THE LATE
NINETEENTH CENTURY

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2019

This project examines representations of Singapore in British texts from the late nineteenth century. Drawing on a range of primary and secondary sources, it focuses on two central case studies: Isabella Bird's *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither* (1883) and public discourse on the Jeddah incident (1881). Through readings of these materials, the thesis argues that colonial discourses mediate both archipelagic and insular space and the racial logics that attend them. The thesis deploys methods drawn from literary studies and postcolonial theory, performing close readings of the primary texts while also interrogating the power dynamics and ideologies that shape and are shaped by them.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.



Chair, Thesis Committee



Date

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Chapter 1

Realizing Singapore: The Archipelagic Metropolis of *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither*

Thither

"If I fail in making you realise Singapore it is partly because I do not care to go into much detail about so well known a city, and partly because my own notions of it are mainly of overpowering greenery, a kaleidoscopic arrangement of colors, Chinese predominance, and abounding hospitality" (Bird 109). So writes Isabella Bird in *The Golden Chersonese and the Way Thither* (1883), an epistolary account of an unplanned excursion into the Malay Peninsula. Describing one of Asia's foremost entrepôts for her distant sister's amusement, Bird conjures up a disparate assortment of obstacles to representation: she has to account for not only Singapore's overdetermination within the British imagination but also the island/city's sensory intensity, its racialized population, its "natural" environment, and its particular variety of colonial sociality. On the level of grammar, the parallelism of the final pair of subordinate clauses ("partly because" this and "partly because" that) of Bird's sentence stages a distinction—and possibly a disjunction—between the established discourse on Singapore and the ways that the city disrupts Bird's ability to comprehend or represent it. To be sure, we might read Bird's denial of her writerly abilities as a move that foregrounds the representational quality of representation in order to make the *real* place seem more real, a performance of the "double claim" of representation and reality that marks "colonial modernity" (Mitchell 18). Yet even as Bird's quasi-paraleptic statement evokes Orientalist notions of otherness, it highlights the island/city's multiplicity in a way that underscores the contingency of colonial perception. To read with the grain of Bird's text is also to read an invitation to trace the multiple social, geographical, and political positions that Singapore occupied and occupies. The metonymic possibilities of Bird's account of Singapore

enable a reading of the broader contexts in which the island/city¹ existed, which I call the archipelago in what follows.

In this chapter, I engage with Bird's letter from Singapore using the methods of "archipelography," which Elizabeth DeLoughrey defines as "historiography that considers chains of islands in fluctuating relationship to their seas, islands and continents" ("The Litany of Islands" 23). While I do not want to erase the very real, influential ways that Singapore's status as an insular entrepot shaped the material conditions in which its inhabitants lived, conceptualizing Singapore within the archipelago reorients attention from a singular, colonized history of the island to broader histories of local alliances and struggles, successive waves of colonial incursion, and ongoing migration through the Malay Archipelago.² These histories, in turn, suggest forms of connectivity and solidarity in the archipelago that are hidden by the hegemonic narrative of transition from colonized island to nation-state, which isolates Singapore from its maritime context. Beyond providing a historical perspective that locates Singapore within broader relationalities, the archipelago offers a potential intersection of geopolitics and literary aesthetics, as it is a form that overlaps with and complicates other forms like the island and mainland, enabling us to "ask . . . what potentialities lie latent—though not always obvious—in aesthetic

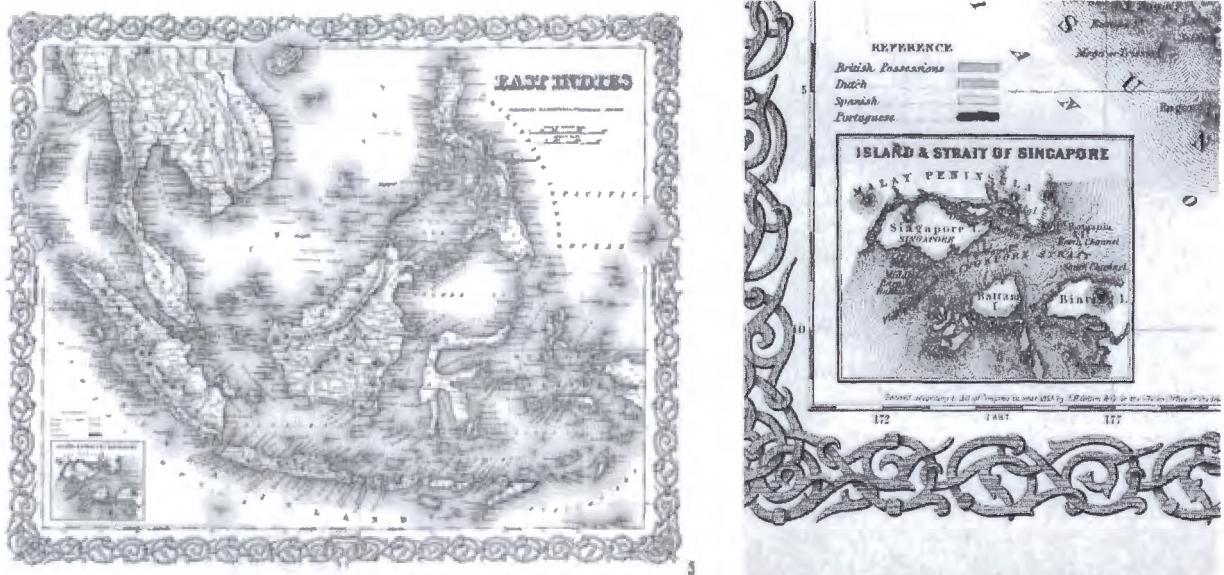
¹I am using "island/city" (and elsewhere "island/city/colony") to highlight the ways that accounts of Singapore blur the distinction between its geological form, its urban status, and its positionality in relation to the empire.

²Throughout this thesis, I use the term "Malay Archipelago" to denote the region comprising Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia, and other islands. The archipelago's *Wikipedia* page exemplifies the array of vernacular and technical terms for the region, which include "Malay World, Indo-Australian Archipelago, East Indies, Nusantara, Spices Archipelago" and "maritime Southeast Asia" ("Malay Archipelago"). While "East Indies" was also used in the nineteenth century, I use "Malay Archipelago" because it includes "archipelago" and because it was popularized over East Indies in the nineteenth century by works like Alfred Wallace's book *The Malay Archipelago*.

and social arrangements" (Levine 7). In my reading of *The Golden Chersonese*, I attend both to what Bird writes about Singapore and to the ways that the formal arrangement of the text offers opportunities to read against and beyond her viewpoint as a white woman traveling in through the archipelago.

I argue that Bird's Singapore letter, within the context of *The Golden Chersonese* as a whole, finds Bird in the process of producing an insular conception of Singapore, useful to the British Empire and global capitalism, even as the information she presents gestures toward other potentialities. Discrete parts of Bird's letter on Singapore—descriptions of the island's size, data on its population, repeated references to Chinese diaspora—convey that it is situated in a regional context not purely reducible to colonialism at the same time that they establish the island/city as a site of racialized control. Simultaneously, the letter's formal logic, which relies heavily on metonymy, opens up opportunities to read adjacent, archipelagic histories alongside Bird's letter. Even the "chersonese" or peninsula of Bird's title, drawn from *Paradise Lost*, suggests a rich relation between continent, island, ocean, and archipelago, as it derives from the Greek words for "dry land" and "island" ("Chersonese, n."). Reading Bird's letter archipelagically offers benefits to the present, revealing that the British rule was powerful but not total and that there are potentialities beyond colonial racialization in representations of Singapore.

Spatializing Singapore: Island, Entrepot, Archipelago



Figures 1 and 2: Colton, J. H. Map of the East Indies and detail.

Singapore provides the opportunity to consider a vast geographical range because Victorians themselves imaginatively toggled between the island/city and larger spatial scales: the Malay Archipelago, Southeast Asia, and Asia as a whole. Reflecting on Singapore's strategic importance to the Empire, *The Times* opines in 1884 that "To resign Singapore to the mercies of a hostile squadron of ironclads is to surrender in advance the commerce and maritime dominion of half the East" ("Our Special Correspondent" 9). Similarly, in a geography book published in Singapore in the same year, Allan Maclean Skinner, a member of the Royal Asiatic Society, conceptualizes Singapore as "a city at the centre of a circle" that defines the Malay world as a whole (vi). J. H. Colton's 1855 map of the East Indies translates this rhetoric into visual form, providing a full overview of the region as well as an embedded map that magnifies Singapore and its immediate surroundings (fig. 1 and 2). While this map originated in the United States, it elucidates British approaches to Singapore: it aligns the mini-map with a key explaining the

colors used to denote different colonial powers, a juxtaposition which underscores Singapore's role as a defining cartographic feature of the region. As Koh Keng We observes, "Singapore functioned both as a gateway-intermediary and as an imperial 'panopticon'" that facilitated trade and maintained (colonial) order in the region (66). Just examples of a broader set of conventions, these visual and textual representations of Singapore demonstrate the extent to which British colonizers imagined it as a node that structured not only their economic activities in Asia but also the political geography of the "East."

But despite Singapore's central location in the Malay Archipelago (and Asia more broadly) and its apparently outsized sphere of influence, its "dangerous potential for difference could be mediated, and controlled, by turning it into something to buy" (Morgan 47). A look at the *Times'* archive from the 1880s reveals Singapore's place within the late-Victorian economic regime: it appears almost daily in shipping and mailing reports, but only as one port (along with others like Hong Kong) at which British mercantile ships would stop within the broader commercial networks of the larger British Empire. In an apt analysis of island/city as feminized space of consumerism, Susan Morgan states that "Singapore was a shop. What British women could browse for among its safe and civilized isles was the entire world" (48). By this reading, Singapore's synecdochic (and feminized) relation to the imperial world acts as a means of taming it. Singapore's sphere of influence is large, but the logic of capital defines its ambit.

This dominant account of Singapore relies on a particular mode of spatializing the island and region that "Singapore" signifies. For obvious reasons, the geographical formation people most frequently associated with Singapore is the island. In spite of its apparent givenness and neutrality, however, this classification has its own stakes, placing Singapore within a larger ideological and political field, for as scholars of the Caribbean, Pacific, and other oceanic regions

have highlighted, the "island" has accumulated meaning through complex, often violent histories of travel, pillage, and colonization. Elizabeth DeLoughrey points out that "the island of colonial discourse is simultaneously positioned as isolated yet deeply susceptible to migration and settlement" (*Routes* 9). Complementing this narrative of isolation and susceptibility is the assumption that "islands are vulnerable, fragile, dependent and problematic on the basis of a categorical difference that is assumed to exist between continents/mainlands and islands, and which privileges the larger land mass" (Stratford et al. 116). The subordination of island to continent involves not only people's perceptions of space, but also their understandings of the peoples and cultures that inhabit that space. "The myth of the remote isle," asserts DeLoughrey, "derives from an amplification of the nautical technologies of the arrivant and an erasure of islanders' maritime histories" (8). In other words, European colonizers laid claim to islands by denying the legitimacy of their other inhabitants, permanent and temporary. The ideological legacy of the island persists into the present, for "[e]ven the insular model of sovereignty . . . is an inheritance from the colonial empires" insofar as it derives from concepts of space and boundedness that developed within those empires (Stephens 13–14).³

These ideas of islandness emerge within Singapore's history (at least its history vis-à-vis the British Empire), from its conscription as a British colony in the early nineteenth century to its transition into statehood in the mid twentieth century. Britain staked its claim to Singapore in 1819, when the imperialist Stamford Raffles first arrived in Singapore. (*The Golden Chersonese* itself contains a very condensed history of "the prescience of Sir Stamford Raffles" [Bird 111].)

³ Stephens's argument unfolds primarily within the context of the Caribbean, a siting that must be acknowledged. At the same time, the connection she makes between the insular nation-state and European ideology can be adapted to Singapore and Southeast Asia as a region. According to Morgan, "Nineteenth-century European aggressions helped to change the notion of what a state is in Southeast Asia and to draw some of what would become the literal boundaries of nations territorially defined" (5).

Then a settlement under the auspices of the Johor Sultanate, a Malay political dynasty, Singapore eventually came under British rule after Raffles machinated to gain control over the island. The island formally became a part of the British Straits Settlements in 1826 and rapidly developed into an important site of British commerce, becoming the administrative center of the Straits Settlements in 1832. Britons subsequently encoded the series of uneven developments leading up to colonial rule in Singapore "as a case of 'civilizing,' of making a civilized place, because its history was originary, a matter of making what was glossed as an always already British city from the raw material of a tropical island" (Morgan 38). It is certainly the case that what Morgan calls "the Raffles creation narrative" recapitulates the notion that islands are isolated spaces that can and should be occupied (38).⁴ Han Mui Ling's claim that "[t]he underlying assumption in the founding narrative is that Singapore is *already* there, just there for Raffles to discover" maps onto the ideologies of island space (and also, as Han observes, to liberalism's fantasies of a self-regulating free market) (261–262). Thus, Singapore's "civilizing" substantiates DeLoughrey's claim that "[i]n the grammar of empire, remoteness and isolation function as synonyms for island space and were considered vital to successful colonization" (*Routes* 8).

While there is no denying the geoforms Singapore comprises, Singapore can be conceptualized in relation to a different geographical entity than the island: the archipelago. Many scholars have turned toward the archipelago as a topography that holds forth different potentials than the island, even identifying one as "the very antithesis" of the other (Stephens 11). In her work on the Caribbean, Michelle Stephens proposes that "[i]t is the

⁴ Morgan asserts that the Raffles narrative constitutes part of the gendered logic that structures "the imperial historiography of nineteenth-century Singapore": Raffles' interventions are coded masculine, whereas following events become feminine (35).

archipelago, as opposed to the island, that offers a vision of bridged spaces rather than closed territorial boundaries" (11). Furthermore, although the material form of the island contributes to the material form of the archipelago, Stephens draws a distinction between the two, arguing that

discursively and ideologically, the island is not merely a unit within the broader signifying concept of the archipelago. In actuality, the island is a separate, cultural, and political signifier that stands apart from and in direct opposition to the notion of the archipelago. As a signifying construct, the island replaces and tames the archipelago's more threatening relational currents. (12)

Though Stephens writes in the context of the Caribbean, and though we should be careful to acknowledge the Caribbean's particularity as a site of the Transatlantic slave trade, her thought helps to gloss the political geography of Southeast Asia, especially in light of how the British colonized the Caribbean from the seventeenth century onward, defining what islands could mean in relation to their empire.⁵ Thinking of the division of the archipelagic region variously named "Southeast Asia," "the East Indies," and "the Malay Archipelago" into small island holdings might help the epistemic dominance of colonialism, which renders other possibilities of alliance and relation difficult to perceive.⁶

⁵ Beyond this epistemological relationship between the "West Indies" and "East Indies," the two archipelagos not so separate in the nineteenth-century as their distance from each other might suggest. As Lisa Lowe persuasively demonstrates in *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, British colonialisms in Asia and the Caribbean did not simply operate parallel to each other but deeply informed each other's trajectories. Lowe reminds us that "Asia and Asian labor became deeply implicated in abolition and the legal end of slavery and the slave trade: the importing of Chinese and Indian workers was imagined as a means to replace the slaves [in the Caribbean], while the colonial profits of the plantation system were expanded in the imperial East Indies and China trades in goods and people" (162).

⁶ This might also restore a better sense of the terraqueous (a word used in the Victorian period) space of Southeast Asia. As Morgan states, "The written British imperial history of Southeast Asia through most of

In the specific context of this project on Singapore, I emphasize the archipelagic framework for three interrelated reasons. First, though the archipelagos can be coopted by colonialism,⁷ foregrounding the several archipelagos that also inhabit the same space as Singapore provides a counternarrative to Singapore as an insular outpost of British trade by highlighting the fact that Singapore is geographically, economically, and socially related not only to the Malay Peninsula but also a broader archipelagic network. As Koh points out, "Singapore's rise as a cosmopolitan entrepot was complemented by its growing importance as a node for trans-regional religious, ideological, and cultural flows between the archipelago and other parts of the world" such as China and the Middle East (52).⁸ Second, the archipelago can activate not only a (trans)regional but also transtemporal resonances. While my reading of *The Golden Chersonese* will certainly work with nineteenth-century history, it will also take into account that the archipelagos of Southeast Asia have long, varied histories that predate European colonialism by

the nineteenth century needs to be read not so much in terms of the economic values of the region's land resources but rather of its waters as highways of trade and also in terms of British responses to the moves of other governments in Europe" (6).

⁷ As Stratford et al. remind us, "The archipelagic relation has . . . been used cynically and opportunistically in the processes of colonial acquisition: island constellations have been convenient stepping stones of dominion" (120). Similarly, complicating Antonio Benítez-Rojo's concept of the "repeating island," DeLoughrey highlights that "Great Britain is discursively refashioned as a repeating island throughout its colonies in the Caribbean and Pacific" (*Routes* 7). While we should be attuned to ways that the idea of the archipelago or "repeating island" might create new horizons for domination or provide the means of reproducing metropolitan space in the colonies, however, Stephens's idea that island and archipelago are antithetical concepts interrupts the colonial appropriation of the archipelago by highlighting relation, not expansion.

⁸ See also Gaynor, *Intertidal History in Island Southeast Asia: Submerged Genealogy and the Legacy of Coastal Capture*, for more on Southeast Asian archipelagic geographies in the early modern era. Gaynor notes that maritime Southeast Asians' "connections with others in this archipelagic geography show that maritime people operated interstitially between states, sometimes on their behalf, and at times as part of the inner circle at their highest echelons" (7). Well before British colonization, then, archipelagic migrations defined the area.

centuries and persist through the nineteenth century. As Levine argues, "institutions are themselves composed of overlapping repetitions and durations, which routinely violate the frame of periodization that typically organizes historicist scholarship" (52). Finally, the archipelago provides a means of renegotiating "the global," which Sanjay Krishnan identifies as "a mode of thematization or a way of bringing the world into view" that "mak[es] legible within a single frame the diverse terrains and peoples of the world" (4). Krishnan argues for "the repeated interruption of [the global's] frame" (14), a task that the archipelagic analytic can promote because it comprehends transregional scales without adopting a totalizing viewpoint.

Bird in the Archipelagic Metropolis

Singapore is Isabella Bird's first stop within the British-controlled Straits Settlements, providing a resting point on her journey away from the "civilisation" of Hong Kong and into the Malay Peninsula (or Golden Chersonese) (92). In Bird's initial estimation, Singapore holds forth "the things one has dreamed of after reading Jules Verne's romances" and "a world of wonders" that outshines the "non-vividness of the Far East" (107). This statement evokes Orientalism's fundamental "tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary" (Said 5), which Bird herself contributed to over several decades. By the time that she made for Singapore and the Malay Peninsula, Bird was already one of the premier travel writers of the Victorian era. Her career began in the mid 1850s with the publication of *The Englishwoman in America* (1856), and over the next five decades, she went on to publish a range of influential texts. *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (1879), the book that preceded *The Golden Chersonese*, was an exceptionally popular depiction of Japan. After *The Golden Chersonese*, she published works on the Middle East, Tibet,

Korea, and China. By anyone's standards, then, Bird was a premier travel writer, and as such, she did not merely relay information but framed new realities for her readers.⁹ As Morgan observes, "For its large British readership *The Golden Chersonese* literally writes British Malaya into being" (160). In this context, Bird's wish to make her reader "realise Singapore" is noteworthy because its denotations gesture towards the complex interplay of the imaginary, the material, and the economic. The *OED* provides three primary definitions of the word, all of which would have been in circulation at the time Bird wrote:

I. To give real existence to something

II. To make real to the mind

III. To turn an asset into money. ("Realize, v. 2")

When Bird admits she might not cause her reader to "realise Singapore," she most clearly evokes the first two definitions, suggesting that her text can neither mimetically produce nor psychologically convey the island's essence. The third definition also haunts Bird's text, as she explains in the preface to *The Golden Chersonese* that the Malay Peninsula "is probably destined to afford increasing employment to British capital and enterprise" (ix).¹⁰

⁹ See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, for a further account of "how travel books by European about non-European parts of the world went (and go) about creating the 'domestic subject' of Euroimperialism; how they have engaged metropolitan reading publics with (or to) expansionist enterprises whose material benefits accrued mainly to the very few" (4).

¹⁰ See Anna Kornbluh, *Realizing Capital: Financial and Psychic Economies in Victorian Form*, for an analysis of the relationship between the narrative, psychological, and economic dimensions of *realize*. According to her, "To realize capital is to express capital graphically, rhythmically, structurally—to craft language so as to crystallize or perform the figurative, fictitious agency of finance" (9).

Unsurprisingly, the world that Bird animates is a rebarbative one, and most scholarly readings agree that *The Golden Chersonese* undeniably accepts and promotes colonial, capitalist ideologies.¹¹ *The Quarterly Review's* exultantly expansionist article on *The Golden Chersonese* and F. D. Bridges's *The Journal of a Lady's Travels round the World* demonstrates that Bird's contemporary audience was all too eager to yoke her text and the spaces it described to the British Empire's mission of colonizing Australasia:

That the whole vast expanse of the Southern Pacific Archipelago, with all its island worlds, from the tropical luxuriance of New Guinea and the Polynesian groups, down to the extremest glacier-capped peaks of New Zealand and the ice-belted volcanoes of Antarctic desolation, is portion and parcel of our own destined inheritance, as a field for British enterprise and a mart for British trade, is what must now no longer be regarded as a theory, a prophecy, an anticipation, but an actual fact, already half accomplished, soon to be entirely so. ("ART. II.—I. *The Golden Chersonese*" 324)

In its desire for colonial dominance over the "whole vast expanse" of the Australasian, the review consolidates the sense that *The Golden Chersonese* was complicit in empire-building, as Bird's idea of Malaya as a site of increasing employment to British capital and enterprise" indicates (ix). The capitalist aspirations of the book are, unsurprisingly, accompanied by racist depictions of the

¹¹ Examining Bird's text as a "a feminine imperial discourse," Morgan argues that *The Golden Chersonese* "continually blends feminine domestic with colonial ideology, defining and evaluating public achievement in familial terms" (155, 159). Eddie Tay develops this analysis, pointing out that "Bird's narrative is certainly concerned with depicting the benevolence of British rule" even though it sometimes evinces sympathy with the colonized peoples she encounters (102–103). Meanwhile, Julia Kuehn reads *The Golden Chersonese* as an illustration of "colonial cosmopolitanism," a term she coins to describe the way that "the [Victorian] British 'ethical' and 'economic' cosmopolitan encounter with the world and the other had become a 'colonial one'" (267). Kuehn reads two letters from Hong Kong as evidence that Bird has espoused an actively imperialist role in her writing by adopting an authoritative, patriotic stance in her writing (273–276).

people performing the labor; Bird repeatedly refers to Malays and Indigenous peoples as "ugly" savages who can only benefit from colonialism's violent regime¹² and Chinese people as productive, mechanically efficient workers delimited by "their usefulness to the colonial political economy," to borrow Han Mui Ling's words (265)

Given that imperialist jubilation is an effect/affect of *The Golden Chersonese*, what other kinds of possibilities exist within it? First of all, it is worth noting that Bird's representations are far from uniform, her representations of Malays providing a clear example of the unevenness of her representations. Pointing out Bird's changing representations of Malays as colonizers and natives, as civilized and backwards, Eddie Tay notes that "These acts of writing and re-writing, of vision and re-vision, of assertions and qualifications in her portrayal of the Malays are . . . perhaps a function of fluctuations between moments of complicity and resistance in relation to colonial rule" (102). Furthermore, as I suggested in my introduction, I believe it is helpful to experiment with the idea that *The Golden Chersonese* negotiates Singapore's archipelagic qualities not only through its content but also through its form. Bird's letter ends much as it begins: with an interruption of realization and a list of objects. "How I wish I could convey an idea, however faint, of this huge, mingled, colored, busy, Oriental population," Bird writes in closing (118). The sentence plunges forward with a litany of descriptors that apparently attempt to encapsulate in a short space the representation that Bird states she is unable to complete. She

¹² Bird repeatedly subjects the people she meets to white supremacist standards, calling "the adult Anamese" of Cochin-China "hideous" (104) and the Malays she meets in rural kampongs "decidedly ugly" (138). *The Golden Chersonese* also provides supposedly exemplary profile and frontal images of an Indigenous man and woman, problematically captioning the image "Orang-utan (male and female)" (Bird 14). "Orang-utan," which roughly translates to "man of the jungle," is also the name of a group of apes native to Southeast Asia. By inviting comparison between an Indigenous group and animals, Bird participates in a violent regime of dehumanization. Currently, an accepted term for Malaysia's Indigenous communities is "Orang Asli," which it indicates both the indigeneity and primacy of the communities (Minority Rights Group).

wishes for her sister to be able develop a mental picture

of the old Kling and Chinese bazaars; of the itinerant sellers of seaweed jelly, water, vegetables, soup, fruit, and cooked fish, whose unintelligible street cries are heard above the din of the crowds of coolies, boatmen, and gharriemen waiting for hire; of the far-stretching suburbs of Malay and Chinese cottages; of the sheet of water, by no means clean, round which hundreds of Bengalis are to be seen at all hours of daylight unmercifully beating on great stones the delicate laces, gauzy silks, and elaborate flouncings of the European ladies; of the ceaseless rush and hum of industry, and of the irresistible, overpowering, astonishing Chinese element, which is gradually turning Singapore into a Chinese city! (120)

Bird's statement unfolds in an anaphoric, additive fashion marked by the repetition of "of" at the beginning of each phrase; different observations pile up on top of one another without stated connections between (though it is important that most of the phrases contain racialized ethnic markers). The imperfect, incomplete realization of Singapore is a metonymic process unfolding outward from Bird, belying the statement's brevity. An example of the implications of the passage is the linking of the embodied force ("beating") of commodity production with the "elaborate flouncing of the European ladies," a connection that displays, in a compact way, the contradictory linkages of global trade. The metonymic form works in tandem with multisensory imagery—the visual spectacle supplemented by Singapore's "din" and "hum"—that multiplies sense perception. Certainly, the metonymic form of the letter might well reinforce the expansionist urges of its content, but, as I will argue, it also accentuates the sociogeographical sprawl manifest at the level of content, an effect that will prove useful to resituating Bird's Singapore in the archipelago(s) by following its metonymic structure.

At the level of pure spatial description, Bird's letter both acknowledges Singapore's archipelagic sprawl and attempts to regulate its parameters by reconceptualizing it as an objectively defined island. Early in her letter, she openly avows the difficulty of conceptualizing Singapore as an island because of its proximity to other islands that blur the distinction between individual and group: "I almost fail to realise it is an island; one of many; all like itself, covered with vegetation down to the water's edge; about twenty-seven miles long by fourteen broad, with the city at its southern end" (109). Here, the recurrence of the word "realise" and all its thematic freight alerts us to the fact that Bird is negotiating representation. Apparently dislocated by the objects in her visual field, Bird *nearly* betrays ("I almost fail") what she knows she ought to know about Singapore: that it's an island that has bounds and is therefore controllable. This is one moment where Bird's text registers a kind of double vision that comprehends both the island and the archipelago. But Bird only evokes the sense of indeterminate space to circumscribe it via the measurements—positivist correctives—at the end of the sentence. From there, more numbers help to locate and reinscribe the island. It's "only seventy miles from the equator"; "its highest point, Bukit Timor or the Hill of Tin, [is] only five hundred and twenty feet high"; "three hundred people yearly" die from tiger attacks (109–110). Providing these measurements, Bird begins to materialize Singapore into a three-dimensional space that she can apprehend. Understanding the space as having a definite shape is the first step to organizing its other characteristics: its population, its history, and its interrelations with other spaces within the region.

I would suggest Bird's delimitation of the island in her visual field is not merely a process of islanding Singapore but also obscuring the archipelagic political relations that might circulate within the littoral spaces interpenetrating it. Here, DeLoughrey's idea of archipelagraphy, of turning to the multivalent histories of an archipelagic space, helps to supplement Bird's letter.

When Bird invokes the "many" islands around Singapore, they appear as physical spaces emptied of social and political meaning. Yet as Colton's map (see fig. 2) shows, Singapore lies in close proximity (about twenty miles in some cases) to Batam Island, Bintan Island and the numerous other parts of the Riau Archipelago, which were Dutch-claimed outposts in the nineteenth century (see fig. 1). As Koh demonstrates, these islands were deeply connected to Singapore as dynastic Malay families attempted to maintain their power within the colonized world by "articulating alternative identities and socio-political imaginaries" through the city (42). Koh traces these families for nearly an entire century after Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 (which formalized British and Dutch territorial boundaries in Southeast Asia), arguing that "Singapore became an important recourse for their elite families in their bids for autonomy, and their concomitant attempts to attract capital, labour, and ideas for their various enterprises" (43). Beyond these contemporary relations, the archipelago's transtemporal resonances also link Singapore to the islands of the Riau Archipelago. Under its former names of Temasek and Singapura, the island occupied the same political and economic space as the islands of the Riau Archipelago, connected by the trade routes of pre-European empires and the movements of the Orang Laut, maritime peoples who lived and traversed the region.¹³ Bird makes no mention of these histories, and even contemporary archipelagic relations go largely unremarked, despite the fact that a representative of one of the families Koh discusses—Maharajah Abu Bakar of Johor—appears in Bird's Singapore letter as the host of diverting "receptions and dinner parties" (119). As Bird's depoliticized vision of Singapore's archipelagic neighbors portends, the maharajah too is emptied of political agency,

¹³ For accounts of Singapore's early history, see Edwin Lee, *Singapore: The Unexpected Nation* (1–20), and Jean Abshire, *The History of Singapore* (13–36).

framed by his "unswerving fidelity to British interests" (119).¹⁴ Thus, the archipelago appears in Bird's visual field, but it is made static by the signifier "Singapore," its inhabitants and histories elided in the realization of the land.

It is precisely in contrast to the emptiness that surrounds it that Singapore emerges as a biopolitical entity. It appears in Bird's text to be crammed with people to be measured and understood through extensive, duplicated relays of census information and accompanying descriptions of the inhabitants' temperaments and propensities. Despite its length, one litany of Singapore's inhabitants, their numbers, and their racialized occupations warrants examination here:

The English, though powerful as the ruling race, are numerically nowhere, and certainly make no impression on the eye. The Chinese, who number eighty-six thousand out of a population of one hundred and thirty-nine thousand, are not only numerous enough, but rich and important enough to give Singapore the air of a Chinese town with a foreign settlement. Then there are the native Malays, who have crowded into the island since we acquired it, till they number twenty-two thousand, and who, besides being tolerably industrious as boatmen and fishermen, form the main body of the police. The Parsee merchants, who like our rule, form a respectable class of merchants here, as in all the great trading cities of the East. The Javanese are numerous, and make good servants and sailors. Some of the small merchants and many of the clerks are Portuguese immigrants from Malacca; and traders from Borneo, Sumatra, Celebes, Bali, and other islands of the

¹⁴ Koh shows that it was precisely by harnessing British interests that the Temenggong family, and especially Abu Bakar, were able to maintain their power in the region (57–65).

Malay Archipelago are scattered among the throng. (Bird 114–115)

The paragraph's staggering length (and this isn't even the whole thing) is enough to lend it the appearance of authority. In it, Bird presents a neat image of the colonial division of labor, which accords with the way that "[t]ravelogue portrayals of the main ethnic groups in Singapore — for example, Malays, Indians, Chinese — are frequently situated in their respective roles in the colonial market-place" (Han 264). Bird emphasizes (perhaps sardonically) that the British are the "ruling race" despite their non-appearance, and the laundry list of racialized occupations continues from there, complete with demographic data. The elaborately racialized division of labor is, for Bird, a really good thing, for she later notes the absence of "the indolence and apathy which one associates with Oriental life, and which I have seen in Polynesia" (118). Instead, Bird finds "yellow, brown, tawny, swarthy, olive-tinted men [who] are all intent on gain; busy, industrious, frugal, striving, and, no matter what their creed is, all paying homage to *Daikoku*," the Japanese god of wealth (118). Tay points out that Bird highlights differences "between poverty-stricken Saigon and prospering Singapore . . . to legitimise the claims of British imperialism" as a system that "is guided not by economic interests, but by compassion" (105). Even if Bird is at pains to represent the British economic regime as compassionate, her elaborate biopolitical descriptions are, of course, not far removed from the economic calculi that might strike a reader as too inhuman. Bird even reproduces the numbers woven into the main body of her letter in a footnote presenting 1881 census data, presenting her data both within the diegetic world of her writing and outside it in a form of paratext (115–116). The reduplication appears to be a case of biopolitical knowledge piling up on itself. Each account is confirmed by the other in a circular way: the census seems real because Bird has seen the population, and Bird's experience seems real because it is backed by the census.

If the island itself has unregulated transregional and even global horizons, the racialized bodies of the workers themselves provide the stabilizing influence that Singapore might otherwise lack. Here, a retroactive glance backward from Singapore's (and Malaysia's) present helps to illuminate Bird's text. In an article that connects Singapore's colonial origins to its current social composition, Daniel Goh asserts that racial "pluralism was an outcome of colonial state formation. Racial conflicts and the racial division of labor were not natural outcomes of cultural differences and economic modernity" (237). Figuring this process, Bird's demographic description already begins to ascribe essentialized meaning to the workers as it comments that Singapore's Javanese inhabitants "make good servants and sailors" (114). The text only continues to delve into the natures of the inhabitants in subsequent paragraphs. Describing the "Klings"¹⁵ who live in Singapore, for instance, Bird states that they are "active and industrious, but they lack fibre apparently, and that quick-sightedness for opportunities which makes the Chinese the most successful of all emigrants. Not a Malay or a Kling has raised himself either as a merchant or in any other capacity to wealth or distinction in the colony" (116). Activity, industry, fiber and lack thereof: Bird's letter embeds stable meaning in the bodies of Singapore's racialized nonwhite inhabitants. While their journeys to Singapore may evoke indeterminate diasporic geographies, by Bird's accounts, the natures of the (im)migrants themselves remain stable. The laborers' essentialized, racialized bodies stabilize the space, performing the work of insularization even as their travels seem to counteract it. If, in Morgan's words, colonial discourses made Singapore manageable as "something to buy," Bird's text shows that this necessarily involved the commodification of racialized workers as a surplus of their own, circulating in a vast global

¹⁵ The *OED* defines "Kling" as "[a] disparaging term applied to Indian settlers in Malaysia" ("Kling, n."). While it derives from the name of the Coromandel Coast, it is used to designate not only people who emigrate from that region to Southeast Asia, but all people from India who do so.

network but simultaneously stabilizing the island. Bird prefigures the ongoing processes of creating many races, as the state works to inscribe racialized ethnicity from the moment of people's birth by mandating that race be on people's identification cards and that citizens learn a language associated with their racial category.¹⁶

Still, Bird's foray into demography opens up multiple possibilities about Singapore, particularly given the broader interest in its population. Surveying British discourses on Singapore, Morgan helpfully links "the characteristics of the population of nineteenth-century Singapore" to "the fluid and changing quality of its spatial history" (39). Unlike some other places, Singapore could not necessarily be defined by its inhabitants because they were migratory, often returning to their homes, and because none of those inhabitants were easily identifiable as Indigenous (Morgan 39). Bird's letter is interesting in this context. Like Bird's measurements of a nearly unrealizable island, positivist demography is ambivalent because it metonymically evokes all the places and large populations from which these people hail even as it fixes their numbers within Singapore. That is, by highlighting the migratory nature of the Singaporean population, the mention of "all the great trading cities of the East" and the "islands of the Malay Archipelago" disrupt the sense of stable locale. Bird even goes so far as to question British hegemony when she proposes that Singapore has "the air of a Chinese town with a foreign settlement." While I will return to the specific significance of the Straits Chinese population momentarily, for now it suffices to say that Bird actually complicates the colonial order when she imagines the Chinese as locals and all other inhabitants (including, to all appearances, the British)

¹⁶ Under Singapore's Mother Tongue Language Policy, Malay, Chinese, and Tamil students are required to learn their "mother tongues," while "Eurasian" students have more flexibility in choosing the language(s) they learn in school (Ministry of Education, Singapore).

as "foreign" settlers. To recycle Morgan's apt phrasing, demography offers a glimpse into "Singapore's dangerous potential for difference" (47).

While Bird's foray into demography emphasizes the importance of a host of diasporic laborers, it is the Straits Chinese who most complicate Singapore's status as a space. When, at the end of her Singapore letter, Bird marvels at the "the resistless, overpowering, astonishing Chinese element, which is gradually turning Singapore into a Chinese city!" (120), she both invokes the influence of Chinese people in the city and also thematically links the city to numerous other locations in the text. Her fixation with Chinese people permeates *The Golden Chersonese*, as Bird comments on the ascendancy of Chinese people in practically every place she visits. Before her arrival in Singapore, for example, Bird stops in Saigon and narrates a halting of realization similar to the one she describes in her letter from Singapore, again involving the ethnic composition she encounters:

I stepped ashore [in Saigon] and tried to realise that I was in Cochin-China or Cambodia, but it would not do. The irrepressible Chinaman in his loose cotton trousers was as much at home as in Canton, and was doing all the work that was done; the shady lounges in front of the cafes were full of Frenchmen, Spaniards, and Germans There was not a native to be seen! A little later there was not a European to be seen! (95)

Within Bird's visual field, colonization has ousted the area's indigenous inhabitants and replaced them with a cosmopolitan community, the most vivacious of whom are the Chinese laborers. The presence of the Chinese workers, compressed into the singular figure of the "Chinaman," links

Saigon to Canton, a city Bird has roundly criticized in letters preceding her trip to Singapore.¹⁷

Meanwhile, after she leaves Singapore, she notes of her ship "is one of the many tokens of preponderating Chinese influence in the Straits of Malacca" (123). Everyone she encounters and everything she sees—"tickets," "supercargo," and "cabin passengers"—are Chinese (123). Before, during and after her trip to Singapore, then, Bird encounters a diasporic Chinese population throughout Southeast Asia.

Bird's representation of Chinese people populating and claiming Singapore under the gaze of its British inhabitants reflects some historical developments in Sino-British relations while eliding others. On the one hand, the recurring accounts of the Chinese sharing spaces with the British, the former often outnumbering the latter, substantiates Ross Forman's concept of Britain and China as "empires entwined" in a way that "reconstitute[s] East and West as a complicated network of entwined imperial projects" (6). Outside the epistolary content of *The Golden Chersonese* Bird concedes that the Chinese are powerful, as she highlights in her introduction not just their "rapidly increasing" presence that "ow[es] to direct immigration from China" but also their economic ascendancy: "It is by their capital, industry, and enterprise that the resources of the Peninsula are being developed" (17).¹⁸ To be sure, Bird domesticates the

¹⁷ Among several things Bird takes issue with in Canton is its judicial system, which she depicts (at length) as bloody and despotic (80–85). Adding to an opening section describing the flight of persecuted Christians (53–54), this section renders Canton as a site of violence and pathologizes China.

¹⁸ Han describes how travel writing constructed "'two kinds of Chinese' in nineteenth-century colonial Singapore, evident in the travel representations": the tractable, intelligent laborer and the avaricious addict (266). Only the first type of Chinese person appears in Bird's narrative. The construction of Chinese people (and Asians more generally) as good workers is itself useful to global capitalism across time. Reading a report issued by the World Bank, Krishnan observes how Asians are integrated into a celebratory capitalist telos: "unlike the bad past of modernization theory, where Asians had to be inducted into capitalist values and habits for their own good, in the happier era of neoliberal globalization, Asians are discovered to have always had a propensity for capitalism" (Krishnan 11).

Chinese people she encounters by pointing out that those born into British rule "have given up the barbarous custom of crushing the feet of girls and "glory specially in being British-born subjects" (17).¹⁹ But she nonetheless acknowledges their vast influence, stating that "The Chinese promise to be in some sort the commercial rulers of the Straits" (17). If, as Forman suggests, "China was one place where the British were forced to recognize—and sometimes contest—the agency of a people and culture that they were actively trying to control, classify, or otherwise contain" (14), Singapore is a site where Bird encounters a Chinese population growing in size and influence.

On the other hand, the Singapore letter (as well as *The Golden Chersonese*) doesn't allow much room for Chinese difference. As Morgan notes, Singaporean's Chinese community was internally diverse in a way that British accounts often did not acknowledge, as many of the people whom the British perceived as "Chinese" were actually from "the two earlier British settlements along the Straits of Malacca, Penang and Malacca" (38). Furthermore, these peoples were not isolated from the other groups in the area, having often mixed with other groups in the region—Portuguese, Dutch, Indian, Arab, or Malay (Morgan 39). Describing these peoples as "creole and mestizo Chinese who had inhabited the port cities of Southeast Asia for centuries," Carl Trocki highlights a crucial (if problematic) degree of heterogeneity within the Chinese community itself (4). Bird's discussion of the Chinese presence in the Malay world is inconsistent to say the least. At one point, she states that "[t]he date of their arrival is unknown, but the Portuguese found them at Malacca more than three centuries ago," highlighting that the Chinese have a long history of engagement with the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago (17). The next moment, however, she locates the arrival of Chinese people within a narrower time frame: "They have been settled in

Pinang and Singapore for ninety-three and sixty-three years respectively (17). These latter estimates align the arrival of Chinese settlers with the advent of British colonialism in Penang and Singapore, a move that seems to contradict Bird's previous sentence, which recognizes the long history of the Chinese people in the area.

In spite of its essentializing tendencies, I would argue that Bird's recurring references to the Chinese highlights another archipelagic geography Singapore occupies: the Nanyang. Meaning "south sea," Nanyang is a Chinese term that roughly describes Southeast Asia, though, like the archipelago, it is not a static descriptor but a dynamic geopolitical concept that writers can harness to various ends. In postcolonial literatures, Brian Bernards argues, the "Nanyang imagination" functions as "an archipelagic trope Chinese and Southeast Asian authors deploy to rethink colonial and national paradigms that contrive their cultural genealogies" (13). Hundreds—possibly thousands—of years old, the concept of the Nanyang originated as an imperial geography that Chinese empire could use to justify expansion (Bernards 15–18). Bernards notes that "it is only with the post–Opium War downfall of the Chinese imperial order in Asia in the mid-nineteenth century—and its replacement with an industrialized Western one—that the Nanyang takes on its modern signification as a route of mass migration and network of exchange between China and Southeast Asia" (18). *The Golden Chersonese* attests to the fact that this moment has arrived, and Singapore is a site where Chinese influence registers particularly strongly. If *The Golden Chersonese*'s "narrative order effectively . . . reiterate[s] the British trade route" in Asia, configuring the main locations Bird visits into "stopovers between India and the 'far east'" (Morgan 151), it simultaneously marks the geography of the Nanyang, which is another branching space of possibility that the letter admits.

As *The Golden Chersonese*, through its form and content, uneasily registers the presence of the Nanyang, it also reveals the complex spatial alignments of the empire itself. Though, as I stated earlier, Bird is very committed to the imperial project, her relation to the individual spaces she encounters is often complex. In her reading of Bird, Morgan argues that Southeast Asia "gives meaning to her. This place creates the subject, as she becomes the English lady who is there" (161). But though Bird desires unmediated contact with the colonized region—calling herself "a savage at heart" as she prepares to head for Singapore—being an "English lady who is there" involves a degree of not-thereness. Bird foregrounds the backward-glancing orientation of them women she encounters: "I think that in most of these tropical colonies the ladies exist only on the hope of going 'home'! It is a dreary, aimless life for them—scarcely life, only existence. The greatest sign of vitality in Singapore Europeans that I can see is the furious hurry in writing for the mail" (110–111). She describes that "even the feeble Englishwomen exert themselves for 'friends at home'" when the mail comes (111). Here, Bird poses a critique of the gendered position of women in the colonies, but she also critiques their orientation toward the space itself. The expatriates' international desire moves in the wrong direction: back to home instead of out into the unexplored frontier as Bird's does. Yet the very same imperative frames Bird's text, itself a letter going back to home; it even ends as the mail arrives: "I must conclude abruptly, or lose the mail" (120). Even though Bird implicitly distinguishes herself from the wives of colonial officers she sees in Singapore, her activities are still located within the same global networks, the same daily routines. While Bird gestures back to the British homeland as the site of identity, she also highlights how the homeland itself is shot through with connections to even the furthest colonies through networks of letters, telegraphs, and affects. This network itself is part and parcel of archipelagic Singapore.

Having looked at the archipelagic potentials of Bird's Singapore letter, in the next chapter, I consider the relays of information emanating to, from, and around Singapore in the wake of the near wreck of the *Jeddah* in 1880. Occurring within the same five-year period as Bird's journey and the publication of *The Golden Chersonese*, what came to be known as "the *Jeddah* incident" brings to the fore the complex interplay of transregional religious politics and liberal justice, all mediated by an archipelagic information system.

Chapter 2

Subaltern Bodies in the *Jeddah's* Archipelagic Public Sphere

August 11, 1880: Two sensational and contradictory telegrams arrive in London. The first announces that the *Jeddah*, a ship bearing nearly a thousand Malay Hajjis²⁰ on their way from Singapore to Mecca, has sunk on its way to the port at Jeddah, with all but a few of the passengers perishing in the wreck. The second telegram follows shortly after, emending the first and bringing a disturbing train of events to light. It reveals that the *Jeddah*'s British captain had not, as was first reported, escaped a sinking ship but abandoned a damaged one, that the pilgrims aboard had not died en masse but been abandoned in the middle of the ocean, rescued only when the crew of another ship saw the *Jeddah* flying distress signals. These events are not the full extent of the captain's misconduct: it quickly becomes apparent that he has actively concealed the fact that his ship was still afloat when he set out from it in one of its lifeboats. After these details emerge, a court at Aden convenes to determine what has happened, concluding that the captain is to blame for abandoning his ship and ruling in favor of temporarily depriving him of his license.

This narrative displays the events of the *Jeddah* incident in all their appalling but unsurprising brutality. The event, however, was anything but simple or one-dimensional, as it occurred at the nexus of overlapping, divergent geographies and histories. What the *Jeddah* incident illuminated was not only the violence permeating the imperial project but also the extent to which imperial geographies are entangled with the other geographies that they coopt. Even though "the changing structural conditions brought about by European rule intensified the role of

²⁰ So far as I have been able to glean, there is not a universal consensus about the spelling, capitalization, or stylization of the word "Hajj" and its derivations in English texts. I have chosen to capitalize the word without italicizing it to indicate its religious and cultural significance without visually othering it from the rest of my text.

movement and the market in new ways," longstanding migratory practices and routes also survived through colonialism (Tagliacozzo, *Secret Trades* 174).²¹ In the case of the *Jeddah*, the Hajj, the journey that many Muslims make to Mecca, articulates a geography that predates and persists through British and Dutch colonialism in Southeast Asia. Indeed, in the nineteenth century, the Hajj was one of the means by which the colonized peoples of Southeast Asia "subverted the controlling mechanisms of the state that had been erected to mediate contacts and commerce among locals" (Tagliacozzo, *Secret Trades* 171). In a Habermasian sense, "the Hajj might have been part and parcel of the concept of the public sphere, a space in which Muslims could make community in ways often unsanctioned by the modern state" (Tagliacozzo, *The Longest Journey* 8). In the specific context of Singapore, the Hajj might have provided colonized subjects with an archipelagic form of space-making that challenged the racialized stability of the island/city/colony, which was becoming, in Koh Keng We's phrasing, "a conduit for the flows of ideas, commodities and people between the Middle East and the archipelago" toward the end of the nineteenth century (50).²² I would suggest that these "flows" did not merely pass through a stable place designated "Singapore." Given that there is a "dynamic and mutually constitutive relationship between places and the ways in which they are depicted", the Hajj might function as a "performative geography" that rearticulates Singapore spatial formation (Fletcher 27). Adapting Michel de Certeau's claim that "[t]he act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is

²¹ See Tagliacozzo's *The Longest Journey: Southeast Asians and the Pilgrimage to Mecca* for a history of Southeast Asian Hajjis from the thirteenth century to the present.

²² Similarly, Timothy Harper comments that Singapore "also became home to a network of Muslim publishers. New technology galvanized older networks of communications. The British developed a keen appreciation of their importance. The island was the centre of communications of the eastern Islamic world, an intersection for diasporas, a starting point for the *hajj* and a refuge from the Dutch authorities" (267).

to language," I suggest that the Hajj might similarly be read as a performative practice that repeatedly rearticulates Singapore (97). The journey from Singapore to Jeddah, then, would reveal and (re)enact forms of archipelagic relationality that expand the city's horizons and entanglements even as the British administration attempts to control them.

In this chapter, I consider how the *Jeddah* incident simultaneously disrupted and illuminated the Hajj, catalyzing containment efforts by British writers and administrators working across colonized regions. Newspaper accounts of the *Jeddah* incident demonstrate the extent to which Singapore exists within archipelagic networks and how these networks pose a representational challenge to the British, affording a rather different view of Singapore and its relationalities than *The Golden Chersonese*. As I argued in my previous chapter, Isabella Bird reveals that colonial island-making depends not just on geographical positivism but also the regulation of a racialized population, reified through various biopolitical stratagems that also highlight the potential instability and connectedness of colonial space. In this chapter, I contend that newspaper accounts of the *Jeddah* show how the British Empire attempted to manage mobility for strategic economic ends and also how the Hajjis and the archipelagic geographies they perform occupy the position of the subaltern who, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues, cannot speak. The *Jeddah* incident demonstrates the doubled possibilities of mobility in these networks. On the one hand, movement through the archipelago and into other spaces in British trade routes reveals the ways that colonial subjects were exposed not only to outright violence and neglect but also to arbitrary racialization within Orientalist frameworks. On the other, it also highlights how the mobility of Southeast Asian peoples in some ways troubled British colonialism, necessitating adaptations of colonial paternalism. The contingency of British ideology is clearest in the representation of the Malay passenger—the Hajji—which undergoes

continuous and contradictory change that reveals both the system of racialization that the British Empire used to control its colonial subjects and some ways that archipelagic mobilities disrupt the ways that the British used to justify colonization, as oceanic scenes and approaches may "complicate the nation-state, which encodes a rigid hierarchy of race, class, gender, religion, and ethnicity for its representative subjects" (DeLoughrey, *Routes* 21).

Precipitating conversations about race, empire, and capital in the networks of mobility that the British tapped into and developed through their imperial project, the *Jeddah* incident provides a unique opportunity to examine British imperialism because it is transregional in both its content and in the mode in which it was represented. White British writers publicly discussed the incident in London and the Straits Settlements, as well as in India to a much smaller degree, while politicians and administrators debated the fate of the *Jeddah*'s captain in Aden, Singapore, and even British Parliament.²³ The *Jeddah* thus activated its own public sphere, a transregional network that looked rather different from the "bourgeois public sphere" that Jurgen Habermas locates in modern Europe.²⁴ Contemporary commentators recognized this situation; in a hearing about the Jeddah incident in the Legislative Council of Singapore, Frederick Weld, the governor of the Straits Settlements, acknowledges that periodicals were the main means through which officials understand it, stating, "I simply know it, as all of us do, through the newspaper accounts" (Moore 128). These newspaper accounts not only respond to but also extract and repurpose one

²³ See, for example, a *Hansard* entry from March 9, 1882, titled "Mercantile Marine—The Pilgrim Ship 'Jeddah.'"

²⁴ According to Habermas, "The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public" (27).

another, sometimes quite self-consciously so, in a kind of discursive assemblage.²⁵ In one long piece on the *Jeddah*, the weekly newspaper the *Straits Times Overland Journal* excerpts its counterpart the *Daily Times*, which in turn comments on the dearth of coverage in the India before excerpting a small segment from "the *Times of India* of the 24th August" (Moore 117). This nesting of source within source reflects just one facet of Singapore's "diasporic public sphere," in which various groups brought together by British colonialism and imperialism negotiated their relations with each other (Harper 262–263). It is because I want to study these layered conversations that I have chosen to foreground newspapers rather than a more common object of entry: Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1900), a novel that fictionalizes the *Jeddah* as the *Patna*. While Conrad's novel will feature in my paper, it is not primary because it does not center issues that are crucial to public debate—for example, the legal regulation of the "pilgrim trade" and the racial, religious, and colonial status of the Hajjis themselves.²⁶

Though it connected locations across half the globe, the transregional public sphere that the *Jeddah* affair made visible was white and Anglophone, almost completely excluding non-white commentators. Even Singaporean newspapers in English provided few opportunities for non-European peoples to voice their opinions. As Torsten Tschacher points out, "the *Straits Times* was very much the mouthpiece of Singapore's expatriate European settler community, a community as wary of attempts by the local colonial government to curtail its privileges as it was

²⁵ Torsten Tschacher points out that Singaporean newspapers in various language published news that they gleaned from a range of other sources, essentially forming a transnational assemblage of discourse (Tschacher 72). See Tschacher's article for an account of how vernacular newspapers assembled accounts of the Mahdiyya from 1887 to 1890.

²⁶ As several scholars have observed, Conrad's novel treats the *Patna* incident primarily as an occasion to reflect on the nature of moral obligation. Padmini Mongia, for example, points out that race recedes into the background to make way for "an analysis of the disjunction between an individual's heroic sense of himself and his private capacity" (173).

of the rise of Asian elites operating outside of its own ambit" (70). As a result, the public conversation about the *Jeddah* circulates and reworks certain narratives about the wreck even as discrepant views, particularly of the Hajjis' racial and religious status, spar for space in the periodicals' pages. Always represented, never representing, the pilgrims take on different racialized identities than those that might have been ascribed to them in Singapore or British Malaya, occupying a range of different identities within public discourse as they embark on their oceanic journey across the archipelago. Many newspapers render them as savage Orientals in the same moment that they empty the Hajjis of agency. I have not found any contemporary accounts of the *Jeddah* written by non-white authors or in languages other than English. This gap is partially due to my own linguistic limitations, but it also attests to the difficulty of accessing vernacular periodicals (though they were emerging in this period).²⁷ Nonetheless, the *Jeddah* incident provides an important opportunity to examine the placement of colonial subjects within the dominant discourse. The newspaper accounts do not simply and silently elide the Malays' presence. Rather, writers actively disagree with one another about representation of the Hajjis and their place in the British Empire.

The tendency in the newspaper accounts of the Jeddah to racialize and Orientalize the pilgrims draws attention to the potential epistemological and biopolitical violence of mobility. By representing the pilgrims in shifting, often contradictory ways, the Jeddah's public sphere in turn reveals something about Singapore: that a manageable population requires constant reinforcement. I argue that the deracination and re-racialization of the Malays (described

²⁷ While "newspapers were established in all of the three major Asian languages of Singapore, starting with the Tamil weekly *Singai Varthamani* in 1875, the Malay weekly *Jawi Peranakan* in the next year, and the Chinese daily *Lat Pau* in 1881" (Tschacher 69), they have not been preserved as well as London newspapers or even the *Straits Times*. *Jawi Peranakan*, for example, was in print 1876–1895, but "the earliest surviving issue" in Singapore's public archive dates from March 28, 1881 (National Library Board).

variously as "natives," "Mussulmen," "passengers," or "pilgrims") reveals the extent to which the British were unable to conceive of mobilities and relations between the archipelago and other parts of the world. Existing archipelagic routes that persist into empire may allow colonial subjects to continue to enter into global networks. As the case of the *Jeddah* demonstrates, however, these travelers may also be stripped of even the dubious privileges afforded to colonial subjects as they traverse networks coopted by imperial capitalism. The *Jeddah* incident highlights potentially problematic aspects of oceanic and archipelagic theories, which may "exaggerate the agency of migrants and minimize their experiences of border policing" if they "configure the sea as a space beyond territorialism" (DeLoughrey, *Routes* 26). Indeed, as Lisa Lowe shows in her examination of the conscripted movement of coolies from Asia to the Caribbean, mobility is often the tool of biopolitics. After the First Opium War, the British Empire produced "a new mode of imperial sovereignty" in addition to older modes of violent "colonial power," a development that enabled the empire "to administer the life, health, labor, and mobility of colonized bodies" (Lowe 102). Lowe highlights that this new form of power harnessed a rhetoric of volitionality, as "[t]he productive powers of liberty were realized in the command of bodies that *moved themselves*, exemplified by the millions of Chinese emigrant laborers exported around the world" (102, emphasis mine). The *Jeddah* incident reveals the vexed relationship between volition and coercion, as the pilgrims may choose to travel but are entrapped within racist structures of movement.

One of the most obvious narrative strategies that British newspapers use to apprehend and stabilize the pilgrims is the Orientalist stereotype, which is quickly deployed to subsume the *Jeddah*'s regional particularity under the monolithic Orient/Occident binary that Edward Said describes in *Orientalism*. One early article in the *Times*, published on August 12, exemplifies the

ways that newspapers made sense of the pilgrims by situating them at the juncture of universalism and Orientalism. While the beginning of the article is devoted the *Jeddah* incident, more than half of the article discusses other topics: pilgrimage in general, the specific place of the Hajj in British trade networks, and the overcrowding of ships bound from Southeast Asia to the Middle East. The newspaper familiarizes the Hajj by advancing a universalist narrative in which pilgrimage transcends nation and religion, reminding readers of the *Canterbury Tales* and contemporary holy sites in France and Ireland. A similar narrative appears in an article about the *Jeddah* from the *Daily Times* in Singapore, which describes the drive toward pilgrimage as a "tendency among the members of most religious persuasions to attach peculiar interest to certain spots" (Moore 113).²⁸ This "tendency," the article suggests, is simply strongest in "those professing the Mahomedan faith" (Moore 113). Despite its superficially even-handed and familiarizing rhetoric around pilgrimage, however, the *Times* article contains a surreptitious claim to modernity: the English may have undertaken pilgrimages in the Middle Ages, but that time is over, and pilgrimage is located firmly in the British past. In contrast, the *Times* locates the Hajj in an ahistorical, delocalized present that is implicitly out of step with European modernity, stating that "Islam has one faith, with one learned language as its medium of communication, from Sierra Leone to Shanghai, and from the Siberian steppes to the Cape Colony; and, as a rule, wherever the Mahomedan faith exists, the duties it prescribes are observed with the most scrupulous attention" ("London" 9). This statement replaces the *Jeddah*'s specific geography—its archipelagic journey from through Singapore and Penang—with the image of a diffuse but undifferentiated Islamic network that the British can apprehend. In the case of the *Times* article,

²⁸ Many of the articles I reference are drawn from Gene M. Moore's "Newspaper Accounts of the 'Jeddah' Affair," and I accordingly cite Moore. See the article for further publication information.

there is no need to reckon with the particularity of the *Jeddah* and its passengers because they have resolved into a stable Orientalist essence.

Whereas the rhetorical tack of this *Times* article is to dissolve the particular geographies and bodies involved in the *Jeddah* incident into broad claims about pilgrimage and Islam, another article in the same newspaper deploys Orientalism to achieve a different end, eliding the *Jeddah* by defaulting to a racist narrative of violence and degradation aboard pilgrim ships. Published on August 14, this article's centerpiece is an excerpt from a letter written by Henry Carter, a ship captain who levels various Orientalist attacks against Hajjis in what he claims is a factual account of time spent about pilgrim ships. The article prefaces the letter by stating that it "suggest[s] that the strange desertion of [the *Jeddah*] by the captain and his chief officers may only too possibly have been prompted by a natural instinct urging them to trust themselves to the sea rather than face perils of a more dreadful kind" ("The Abandonment of the Jeddah" 5). As Kathleen Frederickson has argued, "instinct eases contradictions and gaps in liberal political and economic theory" (4), serving here to "naturally" distinguish British self from Oriental other and reconcile the abandonment with the Christian paternalism introduced shortly after, when Carter's letter portrays pilgrims as uncontrollable zealots who resort to violence at the slightest perceived provocation:

No one who has not witnessed the pilgrims actually *en route* can form the slightest conception of the unromantic and unpicturesque appearance of these wretched fanatics. It is a pity that some philanthropist will not take the trouble to make the tour, and go on board one of the pilgrim vessels about to start on a voyage to Jeddah. There are horrors on board such a ship which no Christian has ever dreamt of, and none but those who grow rich by such wickedness can form any idea of what goes on in these vessels under

the British flag—wickedness worse, by far than was ever found on board a slaver. ("The Abandonment of the Jeddah" 5)

The pilgrim ship may traverse the boundaries of nation, colony, and region, but Carter's letter generates a different source of stability: the fundamental opposition between the "wretched fanatics" of Islam and the Christians who might, if they knew what was going on, intervene in the atrocities taking place onboard. Filled with circuitous language ("No one who has not witnessed," "will not take the trouble," "no Christian has ever dreamt of," "none but those who grow rich"), the passage locates the passengers in the spaces of invisibility and absence. They are racialized through their unrepresentability, the "wickedness" and "horrors" providing sites onto which readers can project racist preconceptions. These floating signifiers allow Carter to relocate responsibility via a rhetorical sleight of hand. When, for instance, the letter describes the absence of medical treatment on board, Carter obviates blaming the British by describing how the "wretched beings" on the ship practically wish to die in transit so they may attain "eternal happiness" ("The Abandonment of the Jeddah" 5). Nothing in Carter's letter is even about the *Jeddah*, but the article's arrangement makes it clear that readers may extrapolate its racism and apply it to the present event. Indeed, the article never returns to the framing commentary with which it begins, ending instead with Carter's account of Hajjis massacring a British crew and dying in the wreck. As it diverts attention from unanswered questions about the *Jeddah* (What happened? Why did Clark leave his ship?), the ending creates a sense of closure rooted in racialized assumptions about Hajjis in general.

Carter's very attempts to debase and fix the Hajjis, however, also threaten to exceed the letter's seeming purpose, a situation clearest in his description of "wickedness worse, by far than was ever found on board a slaver." Carter's allusion to the Transatlantic slave trade, obviously

meant to bolster his Orientalist accusations, hyperbolizes the Hajjis' abjection from the vantage of post-emancipation moral superiority. Aligning the Hajjis with the enslaved Africans forcibly transported during the Transatlantic slave trade, Carter treats the slaver as a dehistoricized symbol of violence, the complicity of the British in enslavement elided; it appears as an atrocity without a clear perpetrator in order to diffuse blame ambiguously across the pilgrims and "those who grow rich by such wickedness." Yet the allusion still evokes resonances of British racial violence that undercut the central message and destabilize the geographies and bodies that the letter treat, suggesting that what Christina Sharpe calls "the semiotics of the slave ship" underlie discussions of the *Jeddah* (21). As Kathleen DeGuzman pointed out to me, the *Jeddah* incident recalls—imperfectly and problematically—the massacre of enslaved Africans aboard the *Zong*, perpetrated by British slave traders almost exactly a century before. To be clear, it is crucial to recognize the "incommensurability of antiblackness," which renders any equivalence between the two ships, between Malay Hajjis traveling to Mecca and Black Africans treated as chattel slaves, impossible (Jung 157). The *Zong*'s crew actively murdered the enslaved Africans on board the ship with the goal of claiming insurance, whereas the *Jeddah*'s crew abandoned their ship because they felt threatened. Nonetheless, the slaver that appears in Carter's letter suggests that the slave trade haunts writing on the *Jeddah*, acting as another archipelagic geography in which the ship exists. Sharpe's concept of the "Trans*Atlantic" provides a way into conceptualizing this geography: the Trans*Atlantic is that s/place, condition, or process that appears alongside and in relation to the Black Atlantic but also in excess of its currents. I want to think Trans* in a variety of ways that try to get at something about or toward the range of trans*formations enacted on and by Black bodies. The asterisk after a word functions as the wildcard, and I am thinking the trans* in that way; as a means to mark the ways the slave and the Black

occupy what Saidiya Hartman calls the "position of the unthought" (Hartman and Wilderson 2003). The asterisk after the prefix "trans" holds the place open for thinking (from and into that position). (30)

The reference to the slaver in Carter's letter demonstrates how the Trans*Atlantic permeates British modernity, supplying its vocabulary and shaping its rhetoric. In my reading, the reference does not merely add another element to Carter's racism but holds the key to understanding the anxieties circulating around the *Jeddah*. If, conceptually, the ship is located not just in the archipelagic geography of the Hajj but also in the Trans*Atlantic, it symbolizes the planetary reach and culpability of empire.

While Carter's letter is the only text (I have found) that explicitly references slavery in relation to the *Jeddah*, I would suggest that it manifests more widespread anxieties about the British Empire's violent histories and far-flung geographies, which British newspapers would have to mediate. Indeed, Carter's letter elicited responses that reflect the ways that discussions about the *Jeddah* shifted as more details emerged and it became clear that the white crew members were culpable for the abandonment. In this shift, writers began to consider the relationship between the British Empire and its colonial subjects in what was termed the "pilgrim trade," sometimes highlighting the racialized dynamics informing the event. Writing to the *Times* in response to the article in which Carter's letter appeared, Sir George Campbell, a British MP who had been a colonial administrator in India, criticizes the letter for its logical and ethical incoherency: "I [cannot] quite make out whether he most intended to condemn the 'wretched fanatics' who sail in pilgrim ships or the avaricious Britishers who make money by sailing ships on board which are 'such horrors as no Christian ever dreamt of'" (10). Campbell highlights the ways that Carter's letter—and to a lesser extent other newspaper accounts—equivocate and elide

details of the *Jeddah* incident to exculpate the British people involved. Although one "Singapore Merchant" writes to the *Times* to say that "no such horrors as those depicted by Captain Carter have been known in the pilgrim trade between Singapore and Jeddah" and specifically claims that British regulations on ships are meticulously followed (Moore 108), many more newspaper accounts evince a willingness to believe that the system itself is broken. In his letter to the *Times*, Campbell questions whether Carter had "abandoned" or "saved" the ships that he oversaw in order to stage a broader critique of the pilgrim trade, which was rife with incidents in which "very large numbers of native passengers have been left to drown while the officers and crew escaped" (10). Campbell closes his letter by quoting Carter, locating the blame for "Wickedness worse by far than was ever found on board a slaver" with corrupt British people rather than with the Hajjis themselves (10). Another account in the *Globe* (excerpted in the *Straits Times Overland Journal*) suggests that "it seems possible that the nationality of the passengers, who were pilgrims from Singapore, may have led the officers to be less careful of their lives than if they had been Europeans, emphasizing rather than minimizing Singapore's salience to the case (Moore 120–121). Such critiques were amassed in the *Straits Times Overland Journal* in an issue that reprinted newspaper articles from London and Singapore and official documents from Aden, offered readers a multi-pronged critique of the *Jeddah* incident. The *Overland Journal* roundly criticizes Captain Clark for abandoning the Jeddah, stating that his wrongdoing is "a slur or stain upon the whole British mercantile service" and that "such conduct cannot be denounced or repudiated in too strong terms" (Moore 121).

Though they denounce the mistreatment of the Hajjis, these criticisms of Captain Clark's behavior and the structural inequality of the pilgrim trade often rely on their own logic of racial difference, through which the Hajjis can be recognized and delimited as colonial subjects worthy

of imperial protection. Campbell exemplifies this rhetoric in his retort to Carter's letter, stating that he might believe that "Turcomans and Bedouins" would react violently if provoked, but he "wholly den[ies] that there is any ground for applying such a term as 'wretched fanatics' to the ordinary pilgrims from the English and Dutch East Indies" (Campbell 10). Predicated on the idea of the "ordinary" colonial subject, Campbell's statement does not so much reverse the Orientalism of earlier accounts so much as qualify it and adapt it to colonial paternalism. Meanwhile, the *Overland Journal* ends its article by explicitly highlighting the racial categories that the British, as *The Golden Chersonese* demonstrates, created and maintained in Singapore: "It seems to us that these poor helpless crowds of pilgrims have at least quite as good claims for protection from Government as the lusty Chinese coolie and his ingenuous Kling brother" (Moore 121). The invocation of the "coolie" and the "Kling" suggests that the push for the Hajjis' rights will incorporate them into colonial rule.

The shift toward critiques of Clark affect the representations of the passenger as well, who figure not as violent Orientals but passive natives, victims of the dishonorable Captain Clark's negligence. Newspapers become invested in representing the pilgrims' racialized helplessness. The *Straits Times Overland Journal* represents the general post-hearing attitude toward the Hajjis when it describes them as "helpless poor creatures, pilgrims, many of them women and children" (Moore 109). This shift from outright Orientalism to moralistic paternalism does not, however, mean that the pilgrims gain access to the dominant discourse. Instead, the shift indicates the newspaper articles running up against a problem—the culpability of a British agent—and circumventing it by reracializing the Hajjis, a transformation that can be accomplished because their identities are indeterminate as they move. The text that presents the narrative of Malay helplessness in its purest form is Conrad's *Lord Jim*, in which the *Patna's*

passengers are so passive that Sanjay Krishnan comments that "human beings do not behave in this way" (135). The omniscient narration describes the Malay Hajjis as being "surrendered to the wisdom of white men and to their courage, trusting the power of their unbelief and the iron shell of their fire-ship" (Conrad 15). This sentence renders the Hajjis docile subordinates to European oversight, the use of "fire-ship" implying that they are unversed in the ways of modernity. Conrad's novel may be deeply critical of its titular character's decision to abandon the *Patna*, but it also assumes that the Malays on board are never part of the action. As Krishnan argues, *Lord Jim* presents Southeast Asians "as *pre-texts* . . . that provoke a moral dilemma without themselves figuring as ethical or historical agents in their own right" (134). Krishnan close reads *Lord Jim*'s scene of desertion, foregrounding two Malay helmsmen who witness the white crewmembers deserting the damaged ship but do nothing and, even more significantly, do not appear cognizant of the situation at hand. They exist in what Krishnan terms an "ontologically stupefied relation to the world" in which they are unable to make the abstract judgments that white people do (137).

The combined rhetorics of colonial paternalism and native helplessness enables the extension of imperial law. While the call for increased regulation is undoubtedly necessary, its framing in these racialized terms demonstrates that at least part of the motivation was to stabilize colonial rule in Singapore, bringing more subjects and practices under the purview of "Government." One member of the Legislative Council of Singapore's hearing on the *Jeddah* incident states that "the Government is bound to protect the pilgrim traffic from these ports, and to show these devotees, and others in this Colony, that such unprincipled conduct as Clark's does not pass unheeded" (Moore 124). By official actions such as this, the British could have pacified Malay audiences in Singapore even as they reinforced the colony's authority to administer its subjects' lives and the ways they move through the world. Campbell calls for the British

government to enforce the law more stringently to avoid such catastrophes in the future, specifically requesting that ships from Singapore be subjected to stricter regulation.²⁹ In many instances, the British harness solicitude for the pilgrims in order to shore up the metropole's moral and legal authority, a strategy evidenced in the *Overland Journal*: "It is well-known that the poor Hajjis are often subjected to gross injustice, and it is a sin and a shame that the religious prejudices which dictate their pilgrimages to the tomb of their prophet are taken advantage of to impose penalties upon them which would never bear the calm investigation of an English Court of law" (Moore 109). The form of this sentence reveals much about its rhetoric: it begins with the Hajjis before shifting to moral outrage. It is only in the final dependent clause that the law appears, anchoring sympathy and outrage in metropolitan rule. In moments like this, where imperial governance becomes the solution to discrimination, the newspapers establish an opposition between the Hajjis and the lawless Captain Clark and the unregulated pilgrim trade. Mediating this opposition is imperial law—its rightness unquestioned because it would (the story goes) rectify everything if only it were applied evenhandedly. The critiques of the pilgrim trade are obviously not critiques of imperialism; indeed, they do more to formalize and legitimate British control over subaltern geographies than they do to destabilize it. Indeed, the Hajjis are instrumental to the legitimization of imperial rule because their racialized helplessness. Through this means, the geographies of colonialism are imposed on their maritime journey and other networks suppressed.

²⁹ By all appearances, Campbell was quite dogged in his purpose. Nearly two years after the *Jeddah* incident, Campbell was to inquire in the House of Commons whether anything else could be done to prosecute Clark, to which he received the response that the legislative body in Singapore had already determined that there was nothing else to be done because of "the absence of witnesses" to Clark's crime ("Mercantile Marine").

Tellingly, the legal proceedings emerging from the *Jeddah* suppress the legal capacity of the pilgrims, a move which elides both their ability to participate in the legal sphere and a simple fact of the Hajj: they're going to return to Singapore. During the hearing in Singapore, the colonial secretary agrees that Captain Clark's behavior was egregious and deserving of a more severe punishment than the temporary suspension of his license, yet he states that it is impossible to indict Clark because "there is not one single person in the Colony who could give evidence for the Crown against the accused person" (Moore 126). From a purely logistical perspective, it makes sense that none of the Hajjis aboard the *Jeddah* would have made it back to Singapore in time to be at the hearing, which took place on September 14, barely a month after the wreck. Yet I would like to speculate about the logics that this claim reveals. First, the colonial secretary only implies that purely objective reasons prevent the passengers from being present at the hearing; the expletive construction of his sentence ("there is") and the general witness he refers to eliminates the necessity of stating that a Malay might have been the ideal witness. Second, the colonial secretary glosses over the fact that witnesses might in fact return to Singapore; after all, the Hajjis were, by definition, not immigrating to Mecca and presumably planned to return to Singapore once they got back. There are, of course, formal legal clauses that determine when witnesses can be summoned, but what I want to highlight is that the Hajjis' mobility finds no space, even speculative, within the formal structure of the courtroom. It is formally unrepresentable. Ultimately, this unrepresentability seems to serve the secretary, who ends his remarks by stating that the *Jeddah* was fully in compliance with regulations when it left Singapore (Moore 127). Censuring Clark and absolving the colonial government from blame, the secretary is content to leave the archipelagic mobility unresolved so that the colonial stability of Singapore can persist.

Given that the Hajjis never speak—or are never permitted to speak—in the public discourse on the *Jeddah* incident, it is difficult to read their presence into the public narrative. Furthermore, to presume that the Hajjis perform some kind of political narrative might be to recapitulate the very move that the British administrators make, incorporating the passengers into a political narrative in which they fundamentally have no say. This is the very problem that Spivak addresses when she writes that "the historian must suspend (as far as possible) the clamor of his or her own consciousness (or consciousness-effect, as operated by disciplinary training), so that the elaboration of the insurgency, packaged with an insurgent-consciousness, does not freeze into an 'object of investigation,' or, worse yet, a model for imitation" (82). Given Spivak's warning, it is not ethical to ascribe any fixed agency or consciousness to the *Jeddah*'s passengers. As Spivak writes, "[t]he subject implied by the texts of insurgency can only serve as a counterpossibility for the narrative sanctions granted to the colonial subject in the dominant groups" (82). It is perhaps only by acknowledging the "counterpossibility" that the Hajjis and their archipelagic journey that there is any possibility of reading against the dominant imperial narrative. The representation of their retaliation against Captain Clark's abandonment is one site at which the counterpossibility might register. On February 24, 1881, *The Times* printed an article relaying the results of the inquiry at Aden and representing the Hajjis' actions: while Clark had "alleged that [his] life was in danger from the violence of the pilgrims" and particularly that his wife, on board with him, had been threatened, the newspaper states that "[t]he pilgrims did not behave with violence till they found they were about to be deserted by the only persons on board who could navigate the vessel" ("The Jeddah" 11). Here, the newspaper marks the materiality of the Hajjis' actions even as it attempts to grant them legitimacy via the court's decision. The violence registers the condition of the subaltern insofar as it is an action to which it is impossible

to ascribe a teleological purpose; there is no saying what the passengers intended when they acted, and their actions are thus judged by the court rather than functioning as forms of witness or complaint.

The Hajjis' actions may not assimilable into liberalism's structures of agency, but they possess an undeniable materiality, even if viewers encounter this materiality at a remove, as the newspaper accounts mediate the bodies involved in the incident. I suggest that we dwell with the unresolvability and materiality of performative actions, whether they are violent reactions to abandonment or longstanding routes of mobility that articulate alternative paths. To be sure, British discourses did absorb and redirect the energies of the Hajjis' energies in order to modify colonial law, apparently to maintain order and establish the exceptionality of colonial subjects. This is the fundamentally unresolvable aspect of Singapore: the archipelago is not a concerted political response to the concerted, if piecemeal, construction of the island/city/colony. Rather, it is a series of material forms, practices, and relations that exist through colonization, complicating it even if we cannot necessarily ascribe agency to one locus within it.

Coda

Island Dreams in the Security Archipelago

In 2006, four researchers working for RAND Corporation, an influential think tank based in California, published an article that identifies "Maritime Southeast Asia—Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore—[as] an area of significant economic and security interests for the United States" (Nichiporuk et al. 83). The researchers give the following four reasons for the region's importance:

First, the United States seeks to maintain open sea lanes through the region, especially through the Straits of Malacca, through which much Persian Gulf oil is shipped to East Asia. Second, the moderate Islam practiced in the region can help offset radical Islamist movements elsewhere. Third, Washington seeks to prevent terrorist infrastructure from developing in the dense jungles of the region. And fourth, the United States needs to build strong strategic relationships in the region to assure access for American air and naval forces. (Nichiporuk et al. 83)

In the RAND imagination, Maritime Southeast Asia, identifiable with the archipelago I have examined in this thesis, proffers the United States the opportunity to shore up its global dominance through various mechanisms: the continuation of petrocapitalism, the containment of radicalism,³⁰ and the consolidation of the US military-industrial complex. As the statement above reveals, Maritime Southeast Asia also activates anxieties around violence, an issue that comes into focus in a 2009 RAND monograph. Focusing primarily on Thailand, Indonesia, the

³⁰ In using the word "radicalism," I do not mean to denote any stable reality but rather a complicated discursive figure, commonly racialized and Islamophobic, used in accounts like these.

Philippines, and Cambodia, the goal of this monograph, *The Evolving Terrorist Threat to Southeast Asia*, is "to gauge the scope and parameters of the terrorist threat to Southeast Asia and, by extension, U.S. security interests in the region" (Chalk et al. iii). In this discourse, Southeast Asia occupies an ambivalent position because it is a site of both potential security and potential violence, which means that it must be conceptualized as an agent *and* object of US surveillance. Whereas Foucault uses the metaphor of the "carceral archipelago" to describe "a whole series of institutions" designed to discipline subjects outside "the frontiers of criminal law" (297), RAND Corporation's works suggest that the term *security archipelago* could signify an imagined assemblage of relations between the United States and the Maritime Southeast Asia that signals a shift within imperial relations.³¹ Building on the history of US imperialism in the Philippines, these relations crucially represent the archipelago as a self-surveilling space whose interests align with those of the United States.

Having examined the ways that late nineteenth-century British writers attempt—and fail—to realize Singapore, whether through travel writing that reinforces the racial logic of the island colony or through public discourse that reveals the vulnerability of Singapore's colonized subjects as they travel the archipelago, I conclude by considering the legacies of empire and the continued utility of archipelagic readings of Singapore in twenty-first-century culture. Broadly speaking, examinations of the connections between the nineteenth century and present are useful

³¹ Paul Amar's book *The Security Archipelago: Human-Security States, Sexuality Politics, and the End of Neoliberalism* describes "an archipelago, a metaphorical island chain, of what the private security industry calls 'hotspots'—enclaves of panic and laboratories of control—the most hypervisible of which have emerged in Global South megacities like Cairo and Rio" (15–16). Whereas Amar's use of the term "security archipelago" resembles Foucault's in that it treats the geological formation as a metaphor, I use the term to describe the conjuncture of metaphorical and physical relations of proximity, surveillance, and securitization.

because "colonial differences" prefigure "the management of life and death we now associate with neoliberal security regimes and the state of exception in crisis and war" (Lowe 54). As the RAND texts above demonstrate, Maritime Southeast Asia, as well as Singapore within it, is the focus of intense governmental interest in the era of the security regime. Simultaneously, Singapore came into the US public view with the publication of Kevin Kwan's novel *Crazy Rich Asians* (2013) and the release of the novel's film adaptation. To conclude this thesis, I consider the how the film functions within the security era, asking the following question: How does the film's representation of Singapore and Maritime Southeast Asia recapitulate or extend representational strategies developed in the nineteenth century? I will briefly argue that the film develops its own security aesthetic and, simultaneously, that an archipelagic approach to the film can help us trace its neocolonial impulses.

This set of relations does not emerge from nowhere. As Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Stephens observe in their examination of the "archipelagic Americas," the US has a long history of archipelagic entanglements with Maritime Southeast Asia. They point out that "the Indonesian archipelago has been a long-term—and indeed bordering—neighbor of the United States of America," which "via the Philippines, shared a watery border with the Dutch East Indies" (Roberts and Stephens 8). This proximity between the US and Indonesia, Roberts and Stephens observe, persisted "via US control of Micronesia as the UN Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands and the US' 'continuing compact with the Republic of Palau'" (8). Beyond highlighting the long presence of the imperial US in the Philippines, Roberts and Stephens' work provides the opportunity to think about how British and US imperialisms existed in close proximity to each other in Southeast Asia through the end of the nineteenth century, as evidenced by Rudyard Kipling's 1899 poem "The White Man's Burden," which enjoins the United States to

colonize the Philippines in the wake of the Philippine-American War. These foundations undergird relations like the ones identified by RAND Corporation, as well as other kinds of links between the US and Maritime Southeast Asia such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a trade alliance between the US and several other countries on both sides of the Pacific. After years of negotiations, the TPP appeared to be well on the way to becoming a reality in early 2016, as the proposed member nations pledged to the alliance. US participation in the TPP, however, never passed Congress, and Donald Trump cut ties with the TPP when he took office in 2017 (McBride and Chatzky). The TPP's website, now archived, openly highlights the centrality of US interests and US dominance: "The rules of the road are up for grabs in Asia. If we don't pass this agreement and **write those rules**, competitors will set weak rules of the road, threatening American jobs and workers while undermining U.S. leadership in Asia" (Office of the United States Trade Representative, bolding original). The TPP's website helps to visualize trans-Pacific relationalities as a connectivity linked by the ocean (fig. 3).



Figure 3. Visualization of the TPP (Office of the United States Trade Representative).

Where the TPP spotlighted the economic salience of Southeast Asian countries to US interests, *Crazy Rich Asians* was responsible for introducing Singapore into the American cultural imagination in summer 2018. Indeed, it was probably the most influential popular representation of *any* country in Southeast Asia in the past decade. When the film was announced and trailers released, many Asian Americans I know and follow on Twitter expressed excitement (sometimes cautious) about the film's release: finally we could see ourselves on screen. At the same time, others expressed concerns about the movie's at best ambivalent relationship with capitalism and its erasure of non-Chinese residents of Singapore. These concerns only solidified when the movie was released. For many people, optimistic comparisons between *Crazy Rich Asians* and *Black Panther* seemed unwarranted, even problematic insofar as they elided crucial differences between the films merely because the majority of the actors in them were not white. As Jane Hu observes, it's difficult to equate the two films given "the overt wish fulfillment of Kwan's capitalist-driven romance plot." Other commentators point out how the film unabashedly obscures a large swathe of Singapore's residents. Singaporean writer Pooja Nansi highlights how the film uncritically centers Singapore's Chinese majority, stating that "[a] vision built at the expense of a less visible 26% is less the philosophy of Wakanda, and more the logic that colonial empires were built upon." These obvious exclusions undermine the film's claim to diversity, which, as Ruby Thiagarajan persuasively argues, was promulgated as much by Asian American viewers as by white ones. In Nansi's words: "You can't have your dim sum and eat it too. You can't position yourself as a vehicle for representation and then wash your hands of that role when questioned about those you are eclipsing."

As Nansi's and Thiagarajan's critiques of the film suggest, the problem with *Crazy Rich Asians* is not merely that it's not representing enough people but that it reinforces colonial

racialization. The overrepresentation of Singapore's Han Chinese at the expense of other groups exemplifies Lisa Lowe's claim that "[t]he social inequalities of our time are a legacy of these processes through which 'the human' is 'freed' by liberal forms, while other subjects, practices, and geographies are placed at a distance from 'the human'" (3). The troubling relation between Chinese Singaporeans and the legacies of British Empire registers in *CRA*'s opening scene. In it, Eleanor Young, a wealthy Singaporean, arrives at the Calthorpe Hotel in London only to be snubbed and then expelled by racist staff members who refuse to find a room for her. After a phone call to her husband, however, Young returns to the hotel to meet its owner, Lord Calthorpe, who announces that the Young family has purchased the entire establishment. On the one hand, the scene reverses the power dynamics of Young's earlier encounter with the staff and provides the satisfaction of viewing racists flummoxed as an East Asian woman ascends to a position of authority. On the other, the film only accomplishes this reversal through the intervention of the literal British aristocracy and the concomitant fantasy of colonial transfer, as a wealthy Chinese family obtains—through a friendly, almost eager transaction—property that formerly belonged to the ruling class. It is all too easy to read this scene as a fallacious allegory for the passing of national power from British colonial administrators to the "Chinese majority" that Bird finds in Singapore and who continue into the present.³²

³² While there really is a Chinese majority in Singapore—about 75%—I do not mean to suggest that the formation of the Singaporean nation-state was at all simple or easy. As Ien Ang and Jon Stratton point out, "[n]ational independence has been constructed in Singapore's official discourse as a deeply involuntary historical moment" because it became a nation-state when it was expelled from Malaysia, though *CRA* wouldn't have us remember that (69). Simultaneously, I am not arguing that Chinese people are actually equivalent with British colonizers, only that the movie insinuates that this might be the case. It is also worth noting that Islamophobic narratives rarely encompass Chinese people, even as China is imagined as an economic threat to the United States in the post-2008 era.

Where the London scene works to establish the now-privileged position of Chinese Singaporeans in relation to the former metropole, later sequences showcase their transnational purchase in the digitized age, representing the archipelago as an undifferentiated space of Chinese migration and settlement. When Rachel Chu and Nick Young—respectively the film's protagonist and her secretly wealthy love interest—are spotted getting coffee in a New York café, word spreads from the US to Southeast and East Asia through a Chinese digital network. The film depicts relays of information as luminous comets flying from place to place as Asia's Chinese elites search for information about Rachel. Before the news about Rachel finally makes its way to Eleanor Young, revealed to be Nick's mother, the digital comets congregate around a woman atop a building with a view of Singapore's skyline. Under her feet is an extradiegetic map of the Malay Archipelago, the comets of digitized gossip swirling around her as overlaid text messages pop up on screen (Chu 00:06:30-00:07:45, fig. 4). This shot neatly encapsulates the film's depiction of archipelagic Singapore as a space fully networked with the rest of Asia by Chinese kinship. While, as I discussed in my first chapter, the Nanyang can function in complex ways as "a postcolonial literary trope of Chinese travel, migration, settlement, and creolization in Southeast Asia" (Bernards 3), in *Crazy Rich Asians* it is a geography that recapitulates Bird's problematic notion of "Chinese predominance." The film reinforces this departicularized view of Asia through its intertitles, which announce places like London, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Singapore in the same font, a formal, extradiegetic choice that elides salient differences between national contexts and presents instead the extended Young family and their placeless transnational capital.



Figure 4. Woman receives news of Rachel amidst digital network (Chu 00:07:18)

If the film represents East Asia as a networked, borderless region, it simultaneously represents the archipelagic spaces in proximity to Singapore as totally accessible to the same wealthy Chinese community, generating what I will term a security aesthetic. Like *The Golden Chersonese*, the film positions Singapore as a central hub that grants access to the rest of the archipelago. This ideology is clearest in an extended sequence in which Nick and Rachel venture out from Singapore for simultaneous bachelor and bachelorette parties thrown by their friends Colin and Araminta. The first shot in this sequence reveals three helicopters (containing the bachelor party) flying over a body of water as Richard Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" plays; the shot is superimposed with an intertitle reading "International Waters" (fig. 5). The shot is a direct allusion to a scene from *Apocalypse Now* (1979) in which US helicopters, accompanied by the same Wagner song, cross international waters to gun down a village during the Vietnam

War.³³ In *Crazy Rich Asians*, the dissonance between the bachelor party and the helicopters and bellicose extradiegetic music is clearly supposed to be comedic, yet the scene suggests a violent territorial relationship between Singapore and the spaces surrounding it, one that recapitulates US imperialism. The fact that the helicopter journey ends when the party arrives at an enormous barge enlisted specifically for the celebrations (fig. 6) does not neutralize the militaristic security aesthetic of the journey so much as suggest that the easy access that rich Singaporeans have to the archipelago, rehearsed repeatedly throughout the movie, depends on an implicitly violent relation with other territories. Aligning the bachelor party with the Vietnam War via the allusion to *Apocalypse Now*, the film evokes a practice that Teresia Teaiwa has termed "militourism," which is "a phenomenon by which military or paramilitary force ensures the smooth running of the tourist industry, and that same tourist industry masks the military force behind it" (251). The allusion also contributes to a notion of Singapore as a security apparatus that provides access to the waters around it.

³³ I am extremely grateful to Francesca Colonnese for pointing out the allusion to *Apocalypse Now*, as well as for broad comments on the whole coda. The fact that *Apocalypse Now* is itself based on Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) suggests complex transtemporal circuits between *Crazy Rich Asians* and the nineteenth century.



Figure 5. Intertitle reading "INTERNATIONAL WATERS" (Chu 00:53:52).



Figure 6. Helicopters approach the party barge (Chu 00:54:23).

Whereas the film makes the militarized aspects of the bachelor party relatively explicit, it elides the potentially violent dimension of the bachelorette party, suggesting, perhaps, the second dynamic in Teaiwa's formulation: the concealment of military force behind putatively peaceful tourism. Prior to their departure, Araminta, the bride-to-be, tells Rachel that she has secured the entirety of her "mum's resort in Sumatra" for the party (00:52:00-05). As with the site of the bachelor party, the site of bachelorette party receives its own intertitle (fig. 7), and when the

women arrive, Araminta announces: "Welcome to paradise. This is Samsara Island" (00:56:15-20). As she finishes her sentence, the film cuts from a long shot of the party to an overhead shot of the island. In this transition, shot with some form of aerial technology, the camera replicates the gaze from the helicopter of the last scene. In other words, the helicopter has moved from the diegesis into the extradiegetic level of cinematography, meaning that the film is rehearsing the same security aesthetic that its characters participate in. The exoticism of her description of the island as "paradise" is compounded when she announces that she has staged a shopping spree aboard the island. The island feels like a fantasy precisely because it is one. Samsara Island doesn't even exist; it was filmed on Langkawi, a popular resort island in Malaysia (Lee). Purportedly part of Sumatra but filmed in Malaysia, the island is a fiction nested within the realized capitalist fantasy of peaceful island life. And in a bizarre but fitting turn of events, Samsara Island has become an advertisement for the idea of the tropical island, as the wedding website *The Knot* advises its readers to "Get those passports ready" because "fans will likely be flocking to the dreamy destinations," including Langkawi, "featured in the rom-com" (Esther Lee). Thus, while the International Waters of the bachelor party provides a militarized fantasy of maritime territory, the island of the bachelorette party produces a fantasy of a peaceful tourist retreat into the archipelago, which is itself amenable to security interests.



Figure 7. Intertitle for Samsara Island (Chu 00:56:15).

To be sure, the film is somewhat ambivalent about both parties; Nick openly disapproves of the insufferable Edison Cheng, who has organized the barge party, while Rachel becomes the target of increased hostility from the wealthy Singaporeans on Samsara Island. Yet, unsurprisingly, what critiques the film does pose are directed more at characters than at the militouristic idea of being able to dominate the archipelago. Indeed, the film resolves the excesses of the bachelor party by transporting Nick and Colin, Araminta's fiancé, to a *different* island. After yet another superimposed intertitle announces that the film has moved to Rawa Island, the film shows a shot of a pontoon off a rocky island, a helicopter atop a sea stack to the left (fig. 8). Nick and Colin drink beers and lounge on chairs, clearly enjoying the break from the party's debaucheries (fig. 9). A little while later, Nick shows his friend the ring he is going to use to propose to Rachel. The site of heart-to-heart talks and male bonding, Rawa Island (which, unlike Samsara Island, is actually a place) represents the good, simple life that relieves the sickening wealth of Singapore's elite. Yet the helicopter adjacent to Nick and Colin provides a reminder of the technologies that enable the pair to access the island in the first place. The island remains a

territorial fantasy; it has no meaning of its own, no inhabitants, functioning only as an adjunct to the real world of Singapore. It makes sense, then, that the movie ends by essentially recuperating Singapore's elite as Rachel agrees to marry Nick, resolving any discomfort she might have experienced over the excessive wealth that enables he and his friends unconstrained access to archipelagic space.



Figure 8. Colin, Nick, and their helicopter off of Rawa Island (Chu 00:57:53).



Figure 9. Colin and Nick on the pontoon near Rawa Island (Chu 00:57:59).

While it is true that these territorial fantasies are contained within the clearly unrealistic boundaries of the romantic comedy, they do produce several uncomfortable consequences. In a time when, as the RAND reports demonstrate, the United States government and military are taking increased interest in Southeast Asia as a site for capital and military intervention, they represent Singapore, a potential US ally, as having unrestrained access to the spaces around their island. Simultaneously, the film obscures the Brown bodies that might, according to racist, Islamophobic narratives, pose a threat to continued US use of the area. *Crazy Rich Asians* depicts a variety of security fantasy because it represents a world in which the realities of surveillance and other security technologies are invisible, replaced by the unrestricted mobility of wealthy members of a majority. We might wake from the island dream that *Crazy Rich Asians* presents by reading archipelagoically: thinking of the ways that island fantasies might recapitulate former colonialisms and reinforce current forms of socioeconomic hegemony. Read in this way, *Crazy Rich Asians* and cultural texts like it might not produce false consciousness, but occasions to ask why geopolitical arrangements look the way they do, what histories undergird the archipelago.

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