

## Introduction

# A Terraqueous Predicament

Global capitalism is a seaborne phenomenon. This simple fact gives us multiple reasons for thinking about the relationship between capitalism and the sea today. The global ocean still serves as a trade route, strategic space, fish bank and supply chain as it has since the advent of capitalism (and indeed long before then). Seabeds continue to be drilled for their fossil fuels and minerals, and coastlines developed for real estate and leisure. Container ports now act as regional hubs for the complex networks of global commerce, transferring commodities and generating value across different maritime-dependent sectors of the world economy ranging from shipbuilding to insurance, freight transport to cruises. The legacies of, and continuities in, seaborne slavery and bondage – as well as the modes of resistance and internationalism they engendered – remain central to emancipatory politics across the globe. Bioprospecting has extended capital's reach to the deepest underwater frontiers, while the offshore world accumulates, displays and recirculates the wealth, surplus and excess of the planet's super-rich populations and their often indistinguishable criminal associates. The toxic discharges of our carbon civilisation have for centuries now been absorbed by the oceans, expanding, warming and acidifying the blue-water part of the planet in ways that will bring unpredictable but irreversible consequences for the rest of the biosphere. These are all aspects of the complex interaction between capitalism and the sea that we address in this volume, showing how neither can be fully understood without the other.

The central concern animating the book is the creative destruction that accompanies the reproduction of a *social* system like capitalism in its interaction with a *natural* force like the sea. Ocean winds, currents, tides and weather patterns have combined with biochemical and geophysical characteristics like salinity, acidity, density and temperature, or natural features such as sandbanks, reefs, lagoons, inlets and shallows to produce specific risks, unique logistical difficulties and singular geographical obstacles in the way of capitalist accumulation. For all its power to subsume most of planetary life under the logic of commodity exchange, capitalism regularly confronts geophysical barriers to its own self-expansion, which in the case of the sea are especially challenging. This is largely because the high seas cannot be permanently occupied and settled as is the case on land, thus complicating capital's need to punctuate its constant circulation with the spatial fixes that secure surplus creation. By the same token, from its inception in the 'long' sixteenth century, capitalism has found in the sea a vital conduit for long-distance trade – including that in humans – and the place from which to embark on colonial ventures critical to its own existence. For capital, the sea thus presents both risks and opportunities. It has periodically acted as a site and source of competitive innovation and experimentation in finance, technology, insurance, labour regimes and spatial governance, as well as a major geophysical hurdle in the appropriation of nature through the enclosure and commodification of the sea.

In turn, the expanded reproduction of capital has radically transformed the nature of the oceans, particularly since industrialisation. It has reshaped coastlines and reconfigured marine ecosystems through dredging, dumping, depletion and discharging. Together with global warming, the concentration of greenhouse gases in the oceans is drastically altering the biochemical attributes of the sea, and with it generating changes in marine geophysics manifest in ocean stratification, more frequent and more intense extreme-weather events, and coral bleaching, among other deleterious phenomena.

The starting point of this book is therefore the fundamental, but often overlooked, fact that the Earth's geographical separation into land and sea has significant consequences for capitalist development. Our terraqueous predicament – simply meaning 'consisting of land and water' – has from the beginning forced different land-based societies to reckon with the bountiful but potentially ferocious energy of the liquid vastness that covers seven-tenths of the planet – adapting, creating and transforming diverse coastal and marine spaces, institutions and cosmologies to human habitation and social reproduction.<sup>1</sup> But the historical specificity of capitalist social formations, with their inherent drive for the competitive accumulation of surplus value, has bestowed them with a special relationship with the oceans. The distinctive features of capitalism as a mode of production continuously seek to transcend the land–sea binary in an incessant quest for profit, thereby engendering new articulations of terraqueous territoriality – that is, uniquely capitalist alignments of sovereignty, exploitation and appropriation in the capture and coding of maritime spaces and resources. Although various human societies have through time engaged in different conceptions and practices of terraqueous territoriality, it is capitalism – particularly in its industrial form – which has intensified the relationship between land and sea, incorporating the oceans into the law of value, extending maritime commodity frontiers and attempting in the process to 'flatten' the geophysical division between solid ground and fluid water.<sup>2</sup>

While insisting that there are ineradicable material properties attached to land and sea, the chapters that follow also assume that they change in time and place. We are therefore necessarily addressing a socio-natural relation between the terrestrial and the marine which capital has sought to both channel and overcome in different spatio-temporal contexts. This is an interaction, moreover, shaped by both sociopolitical contestation and cooperation (involving state agencies, trade unions, companies and international organisations, among other bodies) over the parcelisation of the sea – but rarely under geographical conditions of their own choosing. Ours, then, is a contribution to the long-standing and mutually enriching exchange between historical materialism and political-economic geography in its widest acceptance (including the exploitation of fishers and seafarers, the appropriation of marine life and the ordering of maritime space).<sup>3</sup> It is organised around three broadly spatial phenomena (order, appropriation, offshore) and three mainly temporal processes (circulation, exploitation, logistics), although plainly this division is a matter of relative emphasis, rather than absolute contrast.

The book conceives of capitalism as a mode of production with its own distinctive logic of competitive production and accumulation of value through the appropriation of nature, which nonetheless finds diverse expression in concrete social formations across different

geographical and historical contexts. Our principal objective is to offer an analytical framework through which to understand these various settings where capitalism interacts with the sea. Underlying this aim is an argument regarding the centrality of the ‘maritime factor’ in the origins and development of capitalism, while simultaneously making a case for the reciprocal impact of the law of value upon the salt-water world. At play here is the dual use of ‘factor’ as both a socio-natural force with its own material properties and effects (in our case, the sea), and the more specific etymology connected to the human figure of the commercial agent, or company representative posted to overseas ‘factories’ (trading ports). The remainder of this introduction identifies the theoretical commitments informing the rest of the book, in particular elaborating on our own understanding of the temporalities and spatialities that characterise the interface between capitalism and the oceans, as well as the vital experiences of those peoples living near the sea, from the sea and at sea during the modern period.

## Temporalities

The much-quoted poem ‘The Sea is History’ by St Lucian Nobel laureate Derek Walcott has become a shorthand for the complex and overlapping conceptions of historical time that accompany modernity’s relationship with the sea. From the perspective of many Americans and Caribbeans of African descent, the answer to the loaded question ‘but where is your Renaissance?’ is: ‘Sir, it is locked in them sea-sands / out there past the reef’s moiling shelf, where the men-o’-war floated down’.<sup>4</sup> Contrary to the common perception of the sea as a smooth horizon of opportunity which simply connects one market to another, merely acting as a surface in the realisation of masculinist reveries of adventure and enrichment, the ocean seabeds – not just of the Atlantic – can also be seen as the underwater resting place, both real and imagined, of lives sacrificed and destroyed at sea. ‘Whenever a fleet of ships gave chase to slave ships’, Martinican author Édouard Glissant says of the Middle Passage,

it was easiest just to lighten the boat by throwing cargo overboard, weighing it down with balls and chains. These underwater signposts mark the course between the Gold Coast and the Leeward Islands. Navigating the green splendor of the sea – whether in melancholic transatlantic crossings or glorious regattas or traditional races of *yoles* and *gommiers* – still brings to mind ... these deeps, with their punctuation of scarcely corroded balls and chains ... the entire sea gently collapsing in the end into the pleasures of sand, make one vast beginning, but a beginning whose time is marked by these balls and chains gone green.<sup>5</sup>

For Elizabeth Deloughrey, one of the most articulate advocates of the ‘tidalectics’ involved in such trans-oceanic histories, ‘the sea does not merely facilitate modernity, but is constituted by it.’<sup>6</sup> This is a strong claim, which we wish to both endorse and qualify here. The perception, conception and lived experience of the sea have certainly been transformed by the economic, political, cultural and technological forces of modernity. Modernity, too, we shall be insisting, has been fundamentally moulded by the sea. Yet what is at stake in Deloughrey’s statement is both the periodisation of this relationship between modernity and the oceans, and the recognition of multiple, overlapping and sometimes contradictory temporalities operating during this epoch. We place special emphasis upon capitalist

development as setting the pace of this interaction between modernity and the sea: a historical specificity of capitalism which nonetheless also carries unsimultaneous temporalities, like those of the Middle Passage. Plainly the ‘submarine unity’ that Barbadian author Kamau Brathwaite identifies with the underwater connections across an archipelago of African diasporas also applies to other seagoing civilisations, both during and before the modern period.<sup>7</sup> Several centuries before the Roman Empire constructed its famed road network, the coastal peoples of Atlantic Europe had established a dense lattice of ‘seaways’ – the Gaelic *astar mara*, the Norse *veger*, or *hwael-weg* (the ‘whale’s way’) in Old English – which linked today’s northern Spain with England, France and Ireland, as well as the Atlantic and Baltic beyond.<sup>8</sup> Seafaring populations of the Pacific have, for centuries, developed intricate cosmologies that conceive of the waters surrounding them as a ‘sea of islands’, while the Norse and Icelandic sagas reflect a rich culture of maritime trade, skill, plunder, conquest and enslavement where the oceans become an active historical force.<sup>9</sup>

The enormity of the Atlantic slave trade was thus unprecedented not because of the underwater connections it spawned, but in its repurposing of the age-old institution of slavery to the requirements of capitalist accumulation. The slave trade integrated the merchandise of captive Africans into the emerging seaborne world market, thereby contributing to the process of capitalist development in Europe. The sea played a key role in this experience, acting both as the main conduit for human trafficking on an industrial scale, and as the site for the production of geographical distance necessary in the generation of profit through conveyance. Viewed from the depths of the Atlantic and the holds of the slave ships that criss-crossed it, there is therefore something historically peculiar about the modern ways of social reproduction at and through the sea. The capitalist mode of production – born on land, but from the beginning facing the oceans – has been the central driver of this special terraqueous relationship. Moreover, due to its uneven and protracted geohistorical development, capitalism has imbued this association with distinctive temporalities.

Consider the notion of ‘value’ when applied to the transatlantic slave trade. The bondspeople awaiting sale and transportation in the coastal barracoons and floating factories of West Africa found themselves at the confluence of two different, albeit compatible, logics of wealth creation: one based around practices of slave raiding, tribute, debt repayment and war booty; the other premised on the commercial trade in humans, inserted into a wider transnational commodity market. Both of these had long antecedents in Africa, Europe, the Americas and beyond, but by the beginning of the sixteenth century it was the latter expression of racialised profit making through ‘civil slavery’ that came to dominate human trafficking across the Atlantic. ‘One might say,’ Robin Blackburn suggests in an effort at specifying the modernity of Atlantic slavery, ‘that many Roman slaves were sold because they had been captured, while many African slaves entering the Atlantic trade had been captured so they might be sold.’<sup>10</sup> European traders had created a new market in chattel slavery as they founded plantation colonies first in the Canaries, Madeira and Cape Verde, and thereafter in the Americas. But African captives had to be, in Stephanie E. Smallwood’s phrase, *turned into* Atlantic commodities.<sup>11</sup> This required a multifaceted and extended process of deracination, classification, subjection and surveillance through both physical

violence and confinement, as well as various methods of inducing ‘social death’.<sup>12</sup> Here, the ocean is not merely a barrier to circulation but a *place*, and the ship a site of social disciplining. It is unsurprising that such practices of subjection were principally conducted in the liminal zones of coastal forts, as the Atlantic Ocean became a real, not simply figurative, place where diverse African individuals were transformed into the generic racialised Negro labourer by the time of their New World landings. As Sowande’ M. Mustakeem has argued,

It is not enough to say that Africans were captured, transformed into commodities, shipped out of Africa, sold to interested buyers, and turned into slaves once moved into plantation. The human manufacturing process and, more importantly, the interior holds of merchant ships served as vital sites of power sailors used to dehumanize captives, enforce dependency, inflict pain, establish authority and prohibit any sense of control over one’s own personal life.<sup>13</sup>

The Middle Passage thus produced both use- and exchange-value in that commodified bondpeople shipped from one coast were brutally primed for, and subsequently sold into, plantation labour for a profit on another shore. This surplus was, moreover, integrated into, and put to further profitable work within, complex circuits of capitalist finance, insurance, shipping and other marine-related industries along the Atlantic seaboard. The forced transportation of millions across the Atlantic Ocean involved the production of value through movement in that the human cargo of modern slave ships was transformed in space, arriving in places where they could be ‘valued’ and sold as property. The specific psycho-physical attributes of captive Africans – their gender, age, size, strength, health and temperament – formed the basis of property valuation:

Every slave was viewed and valued for possessing a healthy, young-like, and reproductively capable disposition. Conversely, any person perceived as unhealthy, old, or presumably barren in nature represented risky investments and thus extreme impediments in the process of securing future sales and satisfying customers.<sup>14</sup>

The profitable exchange was in *bodies*, not labour time. Simultaneously, the sailors charged with guarding, punishing and safely and efficiently transferring this human merchandise were among the first industrial workers to be paid a regular wage, which, notwithstanding the coercive aspects of sailors’ lives, corresponded to a compensation for abstract labour time.<sup>15</sup>

These seemingly semantic or technical distinctions matter because they draw attention to the different, contradictory and often conflicting temporalities set in motion by modern seaborne trade. The transatlantic slaving ship encapsulated, as Paul Gilroy, Marcus Rediker, Ian Baucom and others have illustrated, both capitalist wage labour and ancient slavery, abstract exchange-value and concrete use-value, universal ‘freedom’ and racialised captivity.<sup>16</sup> The different social agents involved in the Middle Passage were subject both to the turnover time of an incipient capitalism (bondpeople insured, moreover, through the abstraction of human life as a ‘general average’), and to what Orlando Patterson called ‘natal alienation’ (permanent separation of people from their kin) which permitted the enslavement of people *for life*.<sup>17</sup> The slave ship carried both an alienable, uniform time that found its way into a ledger sheet or a risk premium as a universal equivalent, and a notion of time embedded in particular, ancestral memories and cosmologies, whether these are lived or historically submerged, as in Glissant’s ‘scarcely corroded balls and chains’.

The chapters below on ‘Circulation’, ‘Exploitation’ and ‘Logistics’ are especially

attentive to these contradictory temporalities, as they concern the role of the sea in the origins and periodisation of capitalism, as well as the place of distance and turnover time in the circulation of value (although Ernst Bloch's notion of the 'non-simultaneous' coexistence of conflicting historical phenomena also makes an appearance in the 'Offshore' chapter where the legacies and reinventions of overseas colonial outposts as offshore financial centres are explored). We try in the chapter on 'Circulation' to steer between the Charybdis of ahistorical formalisms that define capitalism merely on the basis of economic exploitation through free wage labour, and the Scylla of infinite regression whereby any and every historical instance of commodity exchange is classified as being capitalist. Our position can be summarised as follows: sometime in the course of the 'long' sixteenth century (1450–1650) a historically particular way of 'committing social labour to the transformation of nature' emerged,<sup>18</sup> first in the English countryside, and then gradually and unevenly extended overseas by latching on to pre-existing circuits of long-distance trade. This peculiar mode of production was grafted onto all sorts of labour regimes, forms of political rule and sociocultural institutions, but without ever forsaking its indispensable quality: the competitive accumulation of surplus value for the purpose of ceaselessly generating further value. It is this logic, we argue in the rest of the book, that gives shape to capitalist modernity as a historical epoch and condition. It is the imperative of value creation that produces the sea as a particular space of exploitation, appropriation and world ordering during the modern period. Such processes of creative destruction are, to be sure, prolonged, uneven and, in some instances, unsuccessful. In the chapters that follow we slice historical time into different periods, reflecting the diverse ways in which various technological innovations (e.g. the steamship), geopolitical changes (the rise of imperialist navalism), economic transformations (the foundation of chartered companies) or legal conventions (the freedom of the sea) appear, disappear and reappear at different junctures in the modern history of the oceans. Still, there remains an overarching assumption throughout, that the capitalist imperatives just identified find qualitatively different historical expression across three eras: that of commercial capitalism (from 1651 to 1849), that of industrial capitalism (from 1850 to 1973) and that of neoliberal capitalism (from 1974 to the present). In all this, the sea is indeed history, but one that is characterised by radical rupture as much as by enduring connections. Moreover, the pace at which change unfolds also varies both between historical periods and within different environments – the Earth's oceans or its cryosphere have changed more slowly than, say, our cities. By the same token, the conquest of the Americas or the Industrial Revolution arguably accelerated the transformation of nature, with global warming being the clearest instance of this. The geophysical properties of the deep-water world thus play an important role in defining what the balance is between change and continuity when thinking about capitalism and the sea, and so we turn now to the geographical determinants of this relationship.

## Spatialities

Despite its etymological association with the term 'waste', the sea's 'vastness' has for many societies been a source of great riches. We have already mentioned the sophisticated world views and institutions of nautical cultures – both ancient and modern – that find in the oceans

a crucial life force and cosmic power. The perceptions of scale that accompany the notion of ‘vastness’ also imply a historical variation in what constitutes distance, location, remoteness, marginality and periphery. The rise and global reproduction of capitalism have, however, given these geographical categories a distinctive quality by making them relative to processes of capital accumulation. In the specific case of the sea, the production of distance in the transatlantic slave trade considered earlier was premised on the generation of wealth through differential accumulation: ‘buying cheap’ on one coast and ‘selling dear’ in the other. The Atlantic Ocean acts here as a real geophysical and logistical barrier in forcible population transfers, yet also creates multiple profit-making opportunities for insurers, traders, bankers, ship- and slaveowners, manufacturers and shipbuilders, by turning distance into a market for risk, credit, manufacture, commodity exchange and transport. With the advance of industrial capitalism, the oceans became increasingly commodified – its living and inanimate resources appropriated, extracted and processed in the realisation of exchange-value, to the extent that fishing quotas or seabed exploration and bioprospecting are also being financialised. Yet, because the oceans retain some intrinsic bio- and geophysical properties that resist valorisation, capital has periodically been forced to experiment with, and attempt to enforce, new ways of exploiting at sea, and appropriating and ordering the oceans. We are thinking here principally of spatio-juridical forms such as exclusive economic zones (EEZs), or the open-registry ‘flag-of-convenience’ regime, although ‘volumetric’ conceptions of appropriation like the individual transferable quotas (ITQs) in fisheries also apply. At root, these exercises in capitalist valorisation of the sea raise some of the book’s fundamental questions: where does authority lie on the high seas? What is nature’s role in reproducing capital? Or who owns the fish?

The oceans have been used by humans mainly for energy, as a source of both protein and propulsion. Most obviously, winds, currents and tides have been harnessed for transport, while whales, walruses, seals, fish, crustaceans, molluscs and other shoreline flora and fauna – from seaweed to goose barnacles – were transformed into food, fertiliser and fuel. But the capitalist commodification of these ‘free gifts of nature’ has been far from straightforward, and in many instances much harder than on land. In the ‘Appropriation’ chapter, we concentrate on the case of capture fisheries, which, despite investment in technologies such as fish-aggregating devices, purse-seining and sonar detection, still cannot enclose highly migratory species like tuna that straddle different jurisdictions on the high seas. Unlike farmland or forests – and notwithstanding the notable exception of coastal aquaculture – the ocean’s yield cannot be artificially ‘improved’ (although it can be depleted and restored), nor can most of its pelagic biomass be physically fenced in as private property (tuna ranching of high-value species for Japan’s sashimi market is one of the few experiments that have proven profitable). Instead, capitalist appropriation has had to adapt – via mechanisms such as EEZ rent extraction or fishing quotas – to the natural properties of the value-in-motion that are highly migratory species. Capital, with the support of state and multilateral agencies, thus opens fresh marine commodity frontiers in an effort to capture and sell parcels of the oceans and their biomass. This is also true of the wind and wave energy that originally drove capitalist trade and transport during the age of sail, and which in our carbon-dependent era still significantly contributes to the commercial calculations of shipping companies and their

underwriters (weather patterns, tidal currents and water depth continue to play a role in these computations). Even though shipping remains the most cost-effective means of long-distance transport in goods, there are also geophysical choke points – the world’s major straits – that determine the routing of the global economy’s principal shipping lanes. Regardless of liquid fantasies of seamless commodity flows across the oceans, friction at sea (involving storms, pirates, mechanical breakdowns) or ashore (inspections, industrial action, fuel costs) continues to characterise maritime freight transport.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, different seas behave through history and across changing seasons in different ways, following shifts not only in climate and weather, but also in salinity, temperature, density and depth. These are all geophysical phenomena that even the most technologically advanced submarines or container ships need to be aware of in order to effectively perform their tasks.

What this all adds up to is an argument about the distinctive materiality of the sea,<sup>20</sup> and its power to shape capitalist development. The unique qualities of the saltwater world just outlined have certainly served up exceptional opportunities for value creation, but they have also proved to be resistant to capitalist accumulation precisely for the same reasons: of course offshore hydrocarbons and minerals can be extracted at great depths, and water desalinated for more permanent human habitation at or by the sea, but the oceans (not unlike the exploitation of outer space) demand a high price for such subordination of natural forces to the further extension of commodity frontiers. A large part of such cost comes from sustaining a maritime order principally, though not exclusively, through the combination of public international law and naval forces. The closest the planet has (yet) come to a Third World War was during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis when the Soviets managed to deploy seaborne nuclear weapons some 100 miles from American territory. The US had for the better part of that century – and particularly so after 1945 – come to exercise global hegemony through its unassailable naval and commercial primacy over the high seas. The USSR, in contrast, emerged out of the Second World War as the far weaker superpower, but this imbalance with regard to Washington was further exacerbated by Moscow’s lack of access to any significant naval bases outside the Eurasian land mass (certainly not until the African and Arab revolutions of the 1970s). The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), as we will see in the ‘Order’ and ‘Appropriation’ chapters, offered the Soviets and many of their allies greater leverage over their marine resources, mainly in the institution of the 200-nautical-mile EEZ.

Yet this regulation of the ‘global commons’ that is the sea beyond the twelve-nautical-mile territorial waters has largely benefited capitalist firms and economies (rather than, say, small or cooperative fisheries) insofar as the principle of freedom of the seas favoured those maritime nations of the North Atlantic seaboard that had, in previous centuries, created a necklace of overseas colonies connecting up their empires based on commercial capitalism. The geographical legacy of capitalist imperialism – both commercial and industrial – is also apparent in the London-centred offshore networks that link secrecy jurisdictions and financial centres of Caribbean and English Channel Crown dependencies to the former colonies of Singapore and Hong Kong. Here, once again, physical geography matters, since the naval basing, free navigation and access to financial services across time zones that underpinned capitalist development under British and now US hegemony are still reliant on strategic



positioning. That distance is relative and space is produced are both givens; the questions are: in relation to what? And produced by whom? For what purpose and under what conditions? Our response is that the historical production of spaces such as Diego Garcia or the Cayman Islands as sites, respectively, of naval and financial power is relative to the ascendancy of British and later American imperialism. Their location is not merely incidental, nor is their geographic insularity. For all their 'topological' connection to wider imperial networks, Diego Garcia and the Caymans are also strategically situated in relation to the world's largest known oil reserves and within the American Eastern time zone; and their being islands facilitates claims to exceptional jurisdictional status so central to their value as distinct places.

Throughout the book, we emphasise how – in an amended adaptation of Andreas Malm's formulation – the material attributes of the sea have to be considered as being autonomous from, yet connected to, the logic of capital.<sup>21</sup> With Malm, we want to acknowledge the causal power inherent in natural forces (in our case, the sea and its biota) while all the time recognising that these are changed through human intervention. The terraqueous nature of the planet is ineluctable and socially significant, but the ways in which this is so will obviously vary according to the dominant forms of social reproduction within a given time and place. This is why our materialism is both historical and geographical. There is, once again, no disputing that a 'first', given, uncommodified nature retains many of its material properties even as it is transformed into a 'second' nature, produced for exchange-value – the Suez and Panama canals were for instance constructed upon natural isthmuses. As Neil Smith says of all social matter, 'though their form has been altered by human activity, they do not cease to be natural in the sense that they are somehow now immune from non-human forces and processes – gravity, physical pressure, chemical transformation, biological interaction'.<sup>22</sup> Our challenge instead lies in identifying the multiple tensions and contradictions that follow from such interactions, and in trying to offer some causal hierarchy when explaining the structured processes generated by the capitalist valorisation of nature. As we discuss in the 'Appropriation' chapter, the socio-natural variations in both international consumer tastes and the natural qualities of different tuna species determine the industrial capture techniques and processing in that sector. Similarly, the sea's natural attributes, we now know, are being actively transformed through industrial carbon emissions, but the consequences of this – beyond the quantifiable warming, expansion and acidification of the oceans – remain unpredictable, in large measure because of the complex interaction between biophysical/chemical and social processes. In this, too, there is a cost beyond that accounted through the neoliberal notion of 'negative externalities' in that, as indicated by the apparent consensus among climate scientists, increasing global warming beyond the extra 2°C threshold will, not least by shutting down certain forms of ocean circulation, lead to irreversible and catastrophic climate change.

In the rest of the book, then, we understand the global ocean in all its changing variety as part of what Jason W. Moore calls 'historical nature': a dialectical and therefore ever-changing, yet asymmetrical and stratified, relationship between nature and society (and indeed within society).<sup>23</sup> As recent geographical research variously informed by

‘assemblage’, ‘New Materialist’ or ‘actor-network’ theories has demonstrated, natural forces are not merely passive objects of human activity – ocean life and energy here being no exception.<sup>24</sup> Our analysis of capitalism and the sea indicates that, while all matter has potency, whether this is of social significance has a great deal to do with eminently human structures and agencies: ocean winds, tides and currents, as we have already noted, are governed by autonomous geophysical laws that certainly relate to biospheric dynamics and, of course, beyond to the Sun and Moon. But they have also been altered – radically so since the emergence of fossil capitalism – by human activity. Moreover, the social power of such awesome natural energy is by definition mediated through human practices and institutions of rule, knowledge, reproduction and exploitation which punctuate with critical turning points or lasting structures the otherwise ‘pure process’ of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation. Contrary to Philip Steinberg and Kim Peters, we do not recognise marine place as being ‘provisional and forever ... (re)produced’,<sup>25</sup> but rather see specific sites of socio-natural reproduction (e.g. the EEZ or the open-registry fishing boat) as existing *because* fairly stable structures of rule, like private property rights or state jurisdiction, remain prevalent. The point, therefore, is not to dismiss the emergent powers and often unpredictable capacities of all matter, but rather to insist that these are enmeshed within enduring hierarchical relations where human agency – for good or ill – still claims the dominant role. Such ontological assumptions are especially important to our account because they help to justify the emphasis we place upon the metabolism between society and nature in the production of terraqueous territorialities. This will become particularly apparent in our discussion of ‘Logistics’ and also ‘Appropriation’, for it is here that even the most powerful social innovations pertaining to capitalism and the sea – from the galley ship to the shipping container, seafood canning to regional fisheries management organisations – are shown to be geographically conditioned by our terraqueous predicament, thus producing new spatial forms like EEZs or container ports and logistics hubs, precisely where land meets sea.

## Lives

We cannot make proper sense of our dire global situation today, and the place of the sea in its unfolding, without considering the oceans as emphatically social spaces, where all manner of radical struggles and transformations have taken place in the past and continue today. The political implications and prospects of these changes will be discussed in the book’s conclusions, but throughout the rest of the volume we are keen to illustrate how even (or especially) when it is presented as being hidden, distant and remote the sea is never void, nor indeed far from land. In its own way, every chapter of the book tries to honour Marcus Rediker’s plea ‘to see the world’s seas and oceans as real places, where a great deal of history has been made, indeed is still being made’, taking on board, moreover, that ‘*maritime history is not simply the story of great, white, nation-loving men in the service of a small promontory of land off the Asian land mass, once called Christendom and eventually “Europe”*’.<sup>26</sup> Whether it be the women tuna canners encountered in the ‘Appropriation’ chapter; or the South Asian seafarers who appear in ‘Exploitation’; the poor, marginalised and oppressed of

various nations and ethnic groups who were transported overseas to create the modern offshore world; or African and Asian merchants and mariners who introduced medieval Europeans to new seafaring techniques central to circulation, a book on capitalism and the sea cannot avoid class, gender, internationalism and racism, nor the complex and contradictory life stories that embody such experiences. If capital has historically approached the oceans as a site of both risk and opportunity, so have many groups and individuals who have under duress or voluntarily crossed the high seas. The motley crew of characters in Amitav Ghosh's riveting *Ibis* trilogy fictionalising British imperialism in South and East Asia during the mid-nineteenth century have one thing in common: whatever their social origins, gender, nationality, age or colour, the sea profoundly remade them in ways that would have been unthinkable had they remained on land.<sup>27</sup> The real-life stories of personal and collective sea change are reflected in the countless experiences similar to that of Dada Amir Haider Khan. Born in 1900 in Rawalpindi district (within today's Pakistan), he joined the British merchant navy at the age of fourteen, sailed to the USA where he was politicised by South Asian and Irish nationalists, thereafter became a member of the Communist Party and launched a lifelong career of radical militancy that saw him dispatched by the Comintern from New York to Moscow, and later Bombay and Lahore.<sup>28</sup> As we saw at the start of this Introduction, even for those for whom the sea is a submarine cemetery, it can be and has been powerfully invoked as a site of memory and resistance generative of other cultural and political resources for revolutionary emancipation.

This all said, we are intent throughout the book to avoid a blithe transnationalism that sometimes seeps into conceptions of the maritime world as a hybrid, indeterminate space of aleatory flows, chaotic cross-currents and horizontal networks. The sea has generally been a site of cruel confinement and exploitation central to the rise of modern imperialism and has witnessed the reinvention of the vilest practices of human oppression and degradation integral to these forms of rule. It has also become a key location in the occlusion of toxic waste, surplus wealth and destructive testing of nuclear weapons, among other 'externalities'. Ocean lives have been characterised by masculinist violence, racialised hierarchies and brutal exploitation of labour, only intermittently – albeit poignantly – fostering bonds of human solidarity and political mobilisation key to modern campaigns for justice and equality. We do not, therefore, wish to romanticise the sea, nor to hide the fact that, in analysing the origins and development of capitalism from a maritime perspective, we may inadvertently privilege some peoples' histories and regions over those of others. Modern world history is inextricably tied to the Atlantic, but throughout the book we show how all of the other oceans are central to this story, to the extent that it becomes impossible to disassociate, say, the 'fall' of Britain's thirteen American colonies in the Atlantic from the eastwards pivot of the 'new' British empire after the Battle of Plassey (1757), or the rise of American imperialism after 1898 from the rivalry with an also emergent Japan over command of the Pacific Ocean.

Equally, we recognise our prejudice toward maritime lives *at sea*, rather than those lived *off* the sea but predominantly *on land* (with some of the gender bias this also entails). Dockers, wives and families, shipbuilders, rope makers, taverners, sex workers, porters and the wider assortment of ocean-dependent people living in the world's harbour communities do not figure as prominently in our study as do seafarers. Yet we seek in the 'Circulation',

‘Exploitation’ and ‘Logistics’ chapters in particular to underscore the primacy of land-side infrastructures and social networks in the reproduction of capitalism at sea. The terraqueous predicament of the Introduction’s subtitle refers to a constant and generative interaction between land and sea when it comes to reproducing maritime labour, capital and value: the affective labour of (generally female) companions left on land turns out to be vital in mitigating (overwhelmingly male) desertion at sea;<sup>29</sup> onshore institutions of risk, credit, regulation, construction, refuelling, maintenance and repair are crucial to the smooth operation of offshore finance and distant fisheries. The sea is a domain of capitalism as much as it is of patriarchy, and insofar as our narrative sometimes concentrates on the lives and travails of men, this is by way of reflecting upon the material reality of a masculinised sphere, not its political justification. We try in the Conclusion to identify possible avenues for future research on the relationship between production and reproduction when thinking about capitalism and the sea.

Agencies of the modern state, labour unions, maritime corporations, multilateral organisations, business groups and political movements will appear across the book as major protagonists in the mediation between capitalism and the sea. As we’ll suggest in several chapters, the sea has been critical to modern class formation – be it of fishers, merchants, sailors or, as already mentioned, land-side stevedores, ship workers, bankers, truckers, slave dealers or cannery or plantation workers. The outcome of (geo)political struggles and socio-economic disputes over surplus, trade routes, access rights, quotas, subsidies, safety, pay or employment terms and conditions has varied considerably. Yet there is no question that at several key junctures (at the start of the seventeenth century in Europe, toward the end of the nineteenth century in America and East Asia, across the world since the 1970s) a distinctive ‘maritime factor’ has boosted capitalist development through a combination of technological or institutional innovation, imperial expansion, organised violence, state investment and multilateral cooperation. As we discuss in the ‘Circulation’ and then ‘Order’ chapters, it is difficult to understand the rise of English capitalism and state formation without taking into account the phenomenal role of overseas war, trade and plunder in this process, and the place of firms like Lloyds or Peninsular and Oriental (P&O) in facilitating it. Likewise, Japanese capitalism is inconceivable without factoring the maritime origins of *zaibatsu* like Mitsubishi or Mitsui. We draw on illustrative examples to make the case for our core argument that, in constantly seeking for fresh ways to valorise the oceans, capital produces new terraqueous forms of appropriation, exploitation and world ordering, sometimes in alignment, but generally in antagonism to both labour and nature.

There is no human agency without imagination, and so a final aspect of our understanding of capitalism and the sea relates to the fictions, projections and ideologies that have contributed to this romance – this commodity fetish – between value and the maritime world. When looking at the origins and evolution of the offshore world in the chapter on that subject, a utopian presence becomes evident in the relationship between capitalism and the sea. Islands, in particular, are valued among today’s super-rich in ways not dissimilar to Renaissance utopias for their virgin, fertile, Edenic qualities, which, combined with remoteness, exclusivity and seclusion, distinguish them from land-lubbing plebeian society.<sup>30</sup> What tends to be occluded in such associations is the political act of secession that

characterised the creation of More's Utopia, and which in the actual historical cases of say, Bermuda, Hong Kong or Singapore, involved conquest, forced labour and racial segregation before these island states were rebranded as offshore financial centres. Similarly, scholars of eighteenth-century English culture have noted the deep interconnections between the rise of the modern English novel and the development of a financial imagination among the general public during the decades after the founding of the Bank of England.<sup>31</sup> Early eighteenth-century authors like Daniel Defoe and Jonathan Swift combined their work as novelists with the art of 'projecting' and promoting financial enterprises like the ill-fated South Sea Company, aimed at generating credit for, and profit from, future returns on intangible, invisible investments.<sup>32</sup> More recently, among (neo)liberal seastealers, the celebration of oceans as a horizon of possibility, where physical displacement leads to social mobility and personal development, is in large measure connected to the imagination of the sea as a placeless void that erases memory and identity, allowing enterprising individuals (generally white males) to embark on a life-changing journey of self-discovery.<sup>33</sup>

Such invocations of the sea and its islands as places of freedom and abundance are certainly products of a particular time and place. In the West, as Alain Corbin's erudite study suggests, the sea was mainly feared and reviled as a realm of chaos and destruction, but, coinciding with the ascent of Dutch maritime hegemony in the early seventeenth century, the sea and its shores started to be the subject of admiration:

Two key images govern this national identity: the Dutch had tamed the fury of the oceans, and had successfully subjugated it to their mercantile aims ... The miraculous affluence of the shores reinforced the image of Holland as a country blessed by God. The fecundity of herrings rewarded the labour of the poor living along the coast, just as the prosperity of the fleets compensated the audacity of rich shipowners.<sup>34</sup>

Although by no means oblivious to the ideological power of maritime representations in the culture of capitalism – from J. M. W. Turner to Series 2 of *The Wire* – the chapters that follow only make passing reference to the sea in either popular or high culture.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps more controversially, we dedicate less attention than may have been desirable to the technical cultures – from cartography and oceanography, navigation to fishing techniques – attached to maritime lives. As will hopefully become apparent in the chapters that follow, with Henri Lefebvre we consider representations of space (e.g. nautical charts) to be dialectically intertwined with the spaces of representation (for instance, zonal organisations of the sea). In seeing capitalist development from and through the sea, a particular relationship with nature emerges – one characterised by moments of experimentation and innovation in the extension of the maritime commodity frontier, as well as episodes of retreat, where the particular properties of our terraqueous world force a momentary lull in the relentless accumulation of capital.