

Sailors, Tailors, Cooks, and Crooks: On Loanwords and Neglected Lives in Indian Ocean Ports

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A renewed interest in Indian Ocean studies has underlined possibilities of the transnational. This study highlights lexical borrowing as an analytical tool to deepen our understanding of cultural exchanges between Indian Ocean ports during the long nineteenth century, comparing loanwords from several Asian and African languages and demonstrating how doing so can re-establish severed links between communities. In this comparative analysis, four research avenues come to the fore as specifically useful to explore the dynamics of non-elite contact in this part of the world: (1) nautical jargon, (2) textile terms, (3) culinary terms, and (4) slang associated with society's lower strata. These domains give prominence to a spectrum of cultural brokers frequently overlooked in the wider literature. It is demonstrated through concrete examples that an analysis of lexical borrowing can add depth and substance to existing scholarship on interethnic contact in the Indian Ocean, providing methodological inspiration to examine lesser studied connections. This study reveals no unified linguistic landscape, but several key individual connections between the ports of the Indian Ocean frequented by Persian, Hindustani, and Malay-speaking communities.

Keywords: Indian Ocean, lexical borrowing, loanwords, cultural contact, sailors, textile, food.

Introduction

Cultural vocabulary tends to overstep ethno-linguistic boundaries with relative ease. In the case of the nineteenth-century Indian Ocean, it is thanks mostly to Amitav Ghosh's best-selling novel *Sea of Poppies* that this fascinating story of lexical cross-fertilisation "from below" has not yet sunk into the depths of oblivion.¹ He drew ample inspiration from the wealth of data left by colonial-era lexicographers, such as Lieutenant Thomas Roebuck—a professional linguist with a more than keen eye for

sailing matters. Yet the diverse cadre of sailors at the core of such treatises have influenced the linguistic landscape of the Indian Ocean more significantly than any writer, then and now, has given them credit for. To see this demonstrated we need only look eastwards. In his monograph on the jargon of Malay-speaking sailors, Dutch lieutenant-colonel A. H. L. Badings recorded the expression *tjoerdej agil boelin jang proewan*.² What neither the author nor those using his dictionary appear to have realised is that the entire “Malay” sentence was taken over verbatim from Laskari, South Asia’s once prevalent nautical slang with a grammatical core from Hindustani³ and loanwords from several other languages: *chor de āgil būlin yāhom parvān* (“let go the head bowlines, square the yards”).

How influential was the language of these “lascars,” that is, European-employed ship crew or militiamen hailing predominantly from Gujarat and Bengal?⁴ What more forgotten connections can be established through a study of lexical borrowing? Loanwords in the languages encircling the Indian Ocean offer a fruitful and faintly trodden way to tie together the fragments left behind by sailors and other neglected agents of the past, many of whom continue to elude scholarship. Indian Ocean historiography disproportionately features kings, merchants, conquerors, religious scholars, money-lenders, European colonial officials, and those with whom they interacted. On the margins, however, unfolded a largely parallel world aboard ships, in harbours, tailor shops, kitchens, brothels, and prisons—often leaving nothing behind except one crucial thing: language. There has been a renewed interest within Indian Ocean studies in the lives of these “subalterns,”⁵ yet little has been written thus far from a language-centric perspective.

The present study, hence, aims to delve deeper into the transmission of “culture words”⁶ between ports around the Indian Ocean and slightly beyond. This demonstrates how an investigation of lexical borrowing can substantiate our historical understanding of cultural contact—that is, long-standing interaction between different communities typically resulting in knowledge exchange—and expand our methodological toolkits to study this phenomenon. The often forgotten connections between different port cities—rather than between ports and their hinterlands—speak to a growing interest within Indian Ocean studies in communities oriented towards the sea⁷ and long-distance contact between non-European societies.⁸ Loanwords can also add substance to ongoing debates on what some authors call the “Indian Ocean world” and the extent to which this imagined space constitutes a unified area. On account of climatological factors, cultural convergence, and economic interdependence, a number of scholars have espoused the idea that the Indian Ocean has become an integrated whole. Others however distinguish several units within the ocean, arguing that the area must be seen as interregional if not global.⁹ The question of whether the Indian Ocean constitutes a “world” is further complicated by the fact that not all its sub-regions enjoy equal quantities of academic attention and available source material. I propose that this imbalance can in part be redressed by expanding the focus to language, which has been notoriously absent in previous debates on the ocean’s presumed unity.¹⁰ Marginalised communities—such as sailors, artisans, household personnel, and exiles—rarely left easily available written documents, yet their lexical imprint on those with whom they

interacted provides valuable insights into processes of cultural contact and, hence, knowledge exchange. It is, of course, impossible to exhaust this topic and I must at this point be content with scraping the surface, in particular since I am most familiar with the linguistic situation of maritime Southeast Asia. Yet, on a methodological level, adding a dimension of lexical borrowing to the study of the Indian Ocean is crucial, for it offers an analytical approach to reconstruct the trajectory of words—and the associated products, trends, and ideas—from one ethno-linguistic community to another and hence assess their historical connectedness.¹¹

The present study focuses on the long nineteenth century, but will also pay attention to events leading up to this period. On the one hand, this was a period of decline for Asia's great empires, including China's Qing Dynasty, the Ottomans, the Sultanate of Aceh, and the Mughals, although the latter's elaborate court culture continued to influence neighbouring elites. On the other hand, it saw continued mobility across much of the Indian Ocean, albeit now largely under European control. Steam-powered ships entered the waters of Africa and Asia from the early 1820s, although multiple-masted sailing vessels remained relevant for decades to come. Mercantile groups from Kutch and Gujarat migrated in unprecedented numbers to coastal eastern Africa.¹² Elsewhere, too, colonial subjects found opportunities to move between a number of nodes connecting the vast expanses of Empire, while the annual hajj to Mecca connected a growing number of Islamic nations. The Persian language was in use by the educated classes from the Ottoman Empire to the Indian subcontinent and—into the nineteenth century—in some port cities of Southeast Asia.¹³ It is within these maritime zones of contact that societies influenced and learned from each other in ways not always fully understood. Only from the nineteenth century onward do we possess sufficient data to examine these connections comparatively, due to a small contingent of European authors interested in previously undocumented nautical and other cultural vocabularies of the communities under colonial rule.¹⁴ While lexicographic scholarship existed in previous centuries too, it was unconcerned with cultural terms beyond Europe's direct academic curiosity. The extant versions of Malay and other non-European texts cited in this study—while they are attributed to earlier times—are also very much a product of nineteenth-century knowledge formation, with more archaic versions no longer available. These non-European texts differ from the European-authored vocabularies in that none of the lexical items they contain, on which I partly base my analysis, are explained. Hence, words that have meanwhile become obsolete can at present only be understood through a comparison with other languages, as demonstrated further in this study.

In what follows, four case studies of cultural contact are highlighted along with the loanwords substantiating them. I begin with the very facilitators of maritime mobility and hence of trade and economic growth: sailors. They were, in the words of Amitav Ghosh, “among the first to travel extensively; the first to participate in industrial processes of work; the first to create settlements in Europe; the first to adapt to clock-bound rhythms of work-time; and they were the first to be familiar with emergent new technologies.”¹⁵ While sailors were the “muscles of Empire,”¹⁶ they nevertheless

constituted “an invisible underclass in historical studies.”¹⁷ As will be demonstrated, part of their cultural impact lies in the words they used and the associated novel concepts they introduced. The economic growth enabled by sailors also opened the door to further exchanges between non-European societies. Among the cargoes they shipped from port to port was another key constituent of Indian Ocean capitalism and social differentiation: items of dress. As international shipping increasingly connected the port towns of the Indian Ocean,¹⁸ so too did their inhabitants develop sartorial preferences that set them apart from less extravagantly dressed communities in the hinterlands. Tailored garments, footwear, and sought-after Indian textiles made them part of a visibly distinct class of sophisticated urbanites. In addition to attire, the same people suddenly also had access to a much more variegated diet.¹⁹ South Asian cooks in particular transformed the foodscapes of the Indian Ocean, introducing a cuisine that was itself a rich blend of subcontinental and Persian influences, and that was able to flourish under wealthy patronage.²⁰ Malay cuisine, too, spread far beyond Southeast Asia in a history of forced displacement initiated by the Dutch East India Company. Finally, this study calls attention to those facets of language that even the boldest European lexicographers had scruples about documenting: criminal slang, swearwords, and other epithets deemed offensive. Taking nineteenth-century Penang as an example, we see that urban dialects often became repositories of forgotten contacts between cultural brokers beyond the interests—and hence the archives—of colonial officials. These four case studies complement each other in their predisposition towards non-European encounters in port cities. Their selection for the present article is due to the fact that they can all be approached through the lens of language, and as such offer otherwise unavailable perspectives on the interconnected past of the Indian Ocean (Figure 1).

Lascars and Their Vocabularies

Large-scale shipping has from time immemorial relied on multiethnic crews. Thus far, most linguistic attention has gone to the widely used nautical slang of the Mediterranean.²¹ Unfortunately, the philology-obsessed academics of Empire paid little attention to “the barbarous dialect of the ‘lascars.’”²² Nevertheless, it may be argued that a number of Indian Ocean ports underwent a comparable stage of lexical convergence in the domain of nautical terminology. Contact between ship crews from Hindustani, Tamil, Malay, and other linguistic backgrounds, who often worked on the same European-owned vessels, resulted in the exchange of specific maritime vocabulary among these communities. Several examples are outlined below in support of this claim. We may also call attention to a passage from the *Hikayat Banjar*, a Malay chronicle belonging to a royal dynasty from the pepper-rich southeast of Borneo, compiled and enlarged over many centuries. Although the (imprecisely dated) text never directly mentions Europeans, certain passages feature firearms and European-type watercraft, placing it at least partly in an early modern context. Of

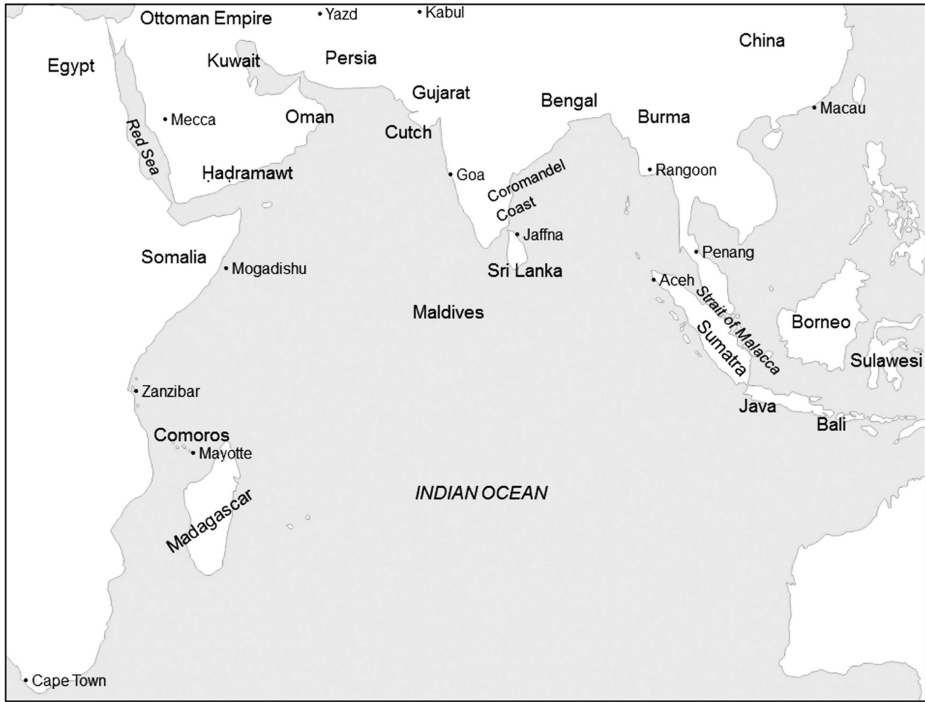


Figure 1. Geographical names mentioned in this article.

particular interest to us is a description of a rich merchant (*saudagar*) and, later in the text, of his armada:

In the beginning there was a merchant of Kaling by the name of Saudagar Mangkubumi. He was extremely rich and possessed innumerable warehouses, ketches (*keci*), decked ships (*kapal*), sloops (*salup*), flat-bottomed one-masters (*konting*), trading-cruisers (*pancalang*) and galleons (*galiung*) ... frigates (*pargata*), cargo-boats (*pilang*), galleys (*gali*), galleons (*galiung*), corvettes (*gurap*), galliots (*galiut*), *pilau*s, Siamese junks (*som*), Chinese junks (*wangkang*) and decked ships (*kapal*), (so many that) it looked as if they were off to invade a country.²³

Few documents could have demonstrated more vividly how outwardly oriented coastal life had become in early modern Southeast Asia. From the Portuguese, who were quick to employ Asian shipwrights to build their seafaring vessels,²⁴ various communities of Southeast Asia and elsewhere in the Indian Ocean world learned how to construct such ship types as the galley (*galé*), the galleon (*galeão*), and the frigate (*fragata*). British nautical influence is also reflected in texts like the *Hikayat Banjar*—which mentions “galliots,” “ketches,” and “sloops”—but not at the cost of local Indonesian boat types, such as the *pancalang*, *pelang*, and *konting*. Meanwhile, the *som* and *wangkang* might reflect southern Chinese influence, whereas the *pilau* and *kapal* presumably come from Tamil-speaking South India. The *gurap*, finally, was a galley-type vessel from the Middle East—reflecting the Arabic word *ghurāb*,

“raven”—commonly found across the Indian Ocean and already mentioned by the fourteenth-century traveller Ibn Baṭṭūṭa.

Needless to say, it is difficult to assess whether the rich variety of watercraft juxtaposed in the *Hikayat Banjar* is to be taken at face value. What can these types of ships tell us beyond the observation that the author of the text was aware of their existence? Did a ruling dynasty from southeast Borneo really possess European-built ships, were the vessels locally manufactured and based on European prototypes, or did the passage merely reflect a fictional desire to elevate the status of a local dynasty? In isolation, such social and economic inferences from literary texts may raise more questions than they answer. In combination with additional lexical data, however, they provide opportunities to examine the significance of otherwise elusive ship crews. In the words of Amitav Ghosh, “what really sets a sail ship apart from other machines is that its functioning is critically dependent on language: underlying the intricate web of its rigging is an unseen net of words without which the articulation of the whole would not be possible.”²⁵ What words, then, were used aboard the European-inspired and European-owned schooners, frigates, pinnaces, sloops, and other ships crewed by sailors from South and Southeast Asia? Information on this topic is scarce and often inaccurate, since few lexicographers were accomplished sailors. The missionary Benjamin Keasberry dedicated some pages of his Malay vocabulary to “nautical terms as used in country vessels manned by Malay or Javanese crew.”²⁶ It will no longer surprise us to find the vocabularies of the South Asian lascars echoed in those of their Southeast Asian colleagues, although the India-born author did not apparently notice their subcontinental provenance. So, the appropriate Malay command for “bracing around the head-yard” was *ferow agel* (Laskarī: *phirāo āgil*). When changing tack (“Ready about!”), the Malay-speaking captain would shout *tiyar jaga-jaga* (Laskarī: *taiyār jagah-jagah*). More detailed nautical dictionaries of Malay became available in the late nineteenth century.²⁷ These works contain detailed descriptions of the numerous parts of European-type vessels and especially their rigs, many of which contain further Laskarī loanwords originating from the ports of the Indian subcontinent. Nevertheless, it was not until recent times that the Laskarī impact on some of the nautical slangs of maritime Southeast Asia was (re)discovered. Horst Liebner—a professional sailor with a more than keen eye for linguistic matters—touches upon it in his lexical study of Sulawesi’s seafaring communities.²⁸ In nineteenth-century Malay, we can find several additional instances of Laskarī influence. Examples include *bara* for “main” (from *barā* “big”), *agil* for “fore” (*āgil*), *nice* for “lower” (*nice*), *upar* for “upper” (*ūpar*), and *dol* or *dul* for “top mast” (*dol* “mast”). Other words are from English, yet seem to have reached the Malay sailors through India: *bulin* from *būlin* “bowline,” *paslin* from *pāstīn* “parcelling,” *pelanjib* from *phalāne-jīb* “flying jib,” and *baksi* from *bāksī* “aback (of the sail),” the latter presumably consisting of “back” and the Hindustani adjectival suffix *-sī*. Several more Laskarī loanwords once in use among Malay-speaking sailors are listed in Table 1 (and see Figure 2 for an illustration of the parts a nineteenth-century European-type sailing ship).

Table 1. Nineteenth-century Malay and Laskarī nautical terms

Laskarī	Malay	Gloss
arkāṭī	arkati	“pilot, navigator”
ārsā	harsa	“strop” (rope surrounding a block)
ārvīl	arwil	“catharpin”
cikār	cekar	“to brace in”
farodī	perdi, ferudi	“stays”
gal-kāṭā	kalkata	“quarter-block”
godrī	gudri	“matting” (of sail)
mūrā	mura	“tack”
sār	sar	“truss”
sīsīdor	sidor	“leech lines”
tanī, tannī	tani	“horse” (foot rope supporting sailors’ feet)
yāhūm, yāhom	yahum	“fair” (of wind)

Beyond the Malay World, the presence—and, hence, lexical imprint—of South Asian lascars was felt in different littoral societies of the Indian subcontinent. Table 2 juxtaposes the shared vocabularies of sailors speaking Laskarī, Malay, Tamil, and Dhivehi.²⁹ Some terms were European introductions, such as *gāvī* “topsail,” *istīngī* “clewline,” *kālāpattī* “caulking,” *kamarā* “cabin,” *mantīla* “topping lift,” *phālkā* “hatch,” and *trikat* “foresail” from Portuguese (respectively *gávea*, *estingue* “brails,” *calafate* “a caulker,” *cámara*, *mantilha*, *falca* “bulwark, washboard,” and *traquete*) and *brās* “brace,” *būm* “boom,” *ghāī* “guy,” and *jīb* “jib” from English.³⁰

Other shared nautical terms found in multiple Indian Ocean ports betray Middle Eastern origins and are also attested in the Arabian Sea. Swahili, the most widely spoken language of coastal East Africa, features several of the Perso-Arabic nautical terms also found farther east (Table 3).³³

Terms for ship-related professions also display similarities across the Indian Ocean. In this realm, the Persian language was of key importance from at least medieval times (see Table 4), when nautical vocabulary from that language first found its way into Arabic texts and presumably into the languages of East Africa, South Asia, and the Malay World.³⁵ The word for “captain” is a case in point; it comes from the Persian compound *nāv-khudā* “ship-master” and is now found across the Indian Ocean. Other loanwords can be connected specifically to lascars from the Indian subcontinent. The most widespread Indian Ocean word for “sailor,” known in nineteenth-century Anglo-Indian as *classy*, acquired its nautical meaning on the Indian subcontinent from the original meaning of “freedom” (Arabic: *khalāṣī*); in the Arabic variety of Kuwait it was subsequently back-borrowed as *khalāṣī* “sailor.”³⁶

Having underscored the importance of the lascar, as he was known to Europeans, or the *khalāṣī*, as he called himself, it is now time to delve deeper into his cargo. The

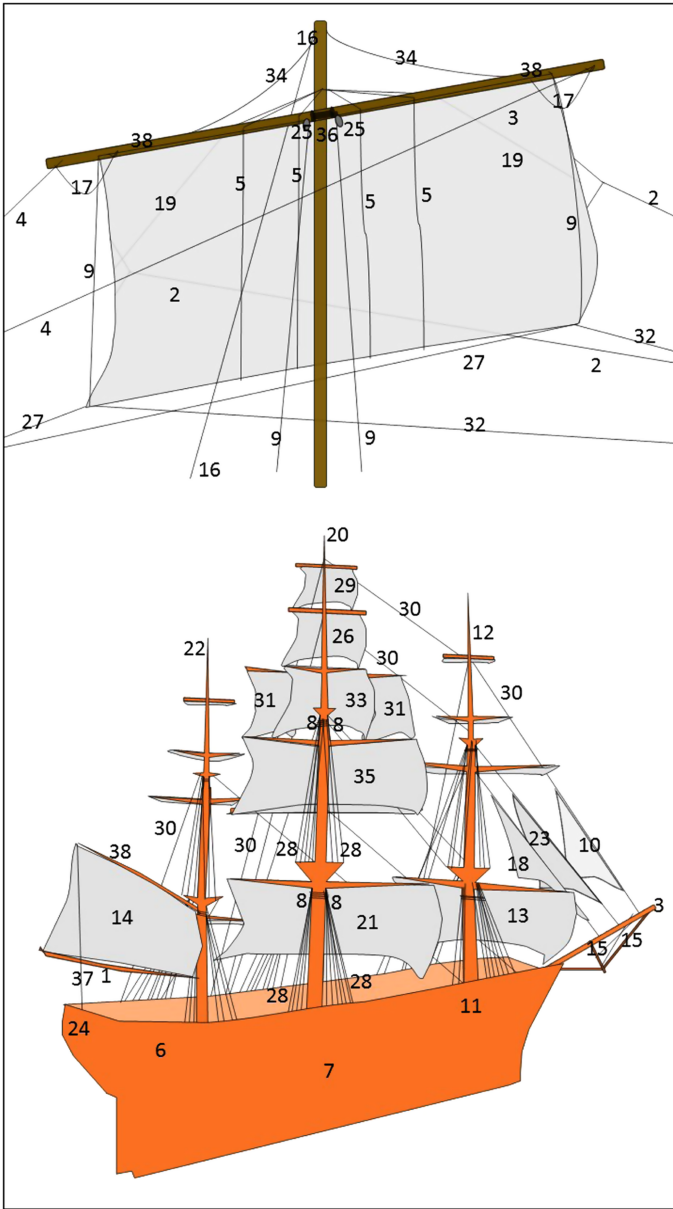


Figure 2. Ship parts mentioned in this article: 1. Boom, 2. Bowline, 3. Bowsprit, 4. Brace, 5. Buntline, 6. Cabin, 7. Cargo hold, 8. Catharpins, 9. Clewline, 10. Flying jib, 11. Forecastle, 12. Foremast, 13. Foresail, 14. Gaffsail, 15. Guy, 16. Halliard, 17. Horse, 18. Inner jib, 19. Leechline, 20. Main mast, 21. Mainsail, 22. Mizzenmast, 23. Outer jib, 24. Poop-deck, 25. Quarter-block, 26. Royal sail, 27. Sheet, 28. Shrouds, 29. Skysail, 30. Stays, 31. Studding sail, 32. Tack, 33. Topgal-lant sail, 34. Topping lift, 35. Topsail, 36. Truss, 37. Vang, 38. Yard.

Table 2. Laskarī terms in the eastern Indian Ocean

Laskarī	Malay	Tamil	Dhivehi	Meaning
bandar	bandar	pantar ³¹	bañdaru	“harbour, sea-port”
barā serh	barasel	vaṭacēṛ		“mainsail”
bāṭlī	badli	pārli		“buntlines”
brās	bras	viṛācu		“brace”
būm	bum	pūm-maram	bum	“boom”
dafra, daphra	dapra		dafaraa	“fender” (cushioning device on side of vessel)
dāman	daman	tāmān-pāl		“sheet”
dastūr	dastur	ṭastūr	(dassuura “bowsprit”)	“studding sail”
gāvī	gawe	kāvi	gaavii	“topsail”
ghāī	gai	kāyī		“guy”
gūsī	gusi		goosii	“gaff sail”
habes	habis	apēs		“to heave”
hanjā	anja	āncān	hanjaa	“halliard”
istiṅgī	setinggi	catiṅki	istiṅgi, istiṅgi	“clewline”
jīb	jīb	jīb	jiibu	“jib”
kālāpattī	kelepat	kalappaṛru		“caulking”
kamarā	kamera		kamaraa	“cabin”
kapī	kapi	kappi	kappi	“block” (pulley on a ship)
kilmī, kalmī	kalmi	kalimi-maram		“mizzenmast”
labrān	laberang	lavurān	lañburaan	“shrouds”
mantīla, mantel	mantela, mantel	mantil		“topping lift”
parvān	peruan	paruvān, paṛuvān	farumaanu	“yard”
phālkā, fālkā	palka	palukkā	falukaa	“hatch”
phanā	pana	payil-paṅṅā		“forecastle”
sabar	sabur	cavar-pāy	safaru	“topgallant sail” ³²
savāī	suai	cavāy	savaa	“stay”
tabar	tabur	ṭavarmaram	ṭafaru	“royal sail”
tarnāl	ternal	ṭaruṅal		“vang”
trikat, tirkat	tringket	tiruṅkaru		“foresail”
ūtārā	utara	uṭṭārā		“downhaul” (line for hauling down sail)

Table 3. Shared nautical terms in the western Indian Ocean

Arabic	Persian	Swahili	Laskarī	Meaning
bandar dafra (Kuwait)	bandar	bandari dafrau	bandar dafra, daphra	“harbour, sea-port” “fender” (cushioning device on side of vessel)
dāmin (Kuwait) dastūr	dāman dastūr	demani dasturi	dāman (dastūr “studding sail”)	“sheet” “bowsprit”
firmal, firman ghulamī gufiyya	farman qalamī gūfiya	foromani galmi gofia, kapi ³⁴	parvān kilmī, kalmī kapī	“yard” “mizzenmast” “block” (pulley on a ship)
kalfat		kalufati	kālāpattī	“caulking”

Table 4. Ship-related professions in the Indian Ocean

Persian	Arabic	Swahili	Laskarī	Tamil	Dhivehi	Malay	Meaning
khalāṣī	khalāsi (Kuwait)	kalasi	khalāṣī	kilācu	kalaasiin	kelasi	“sailor”
mu‘allim nākhudā	mu‘allim nākhōda	mwalimu nahodha	mu‘allim nākhudā	mālumi nakutā, nākutā	maalimii nakuvaa	mualim nakhoda	“navigator” “captain”
sarhang	sarhang, serhang	sarangi, sarange	sāraṅg	carāṅku, cirāṅku		serang	“boatswain”
shāh- bandar	shāh- bandar	shahabandari	shāh- bandar			syah bandar	“harbour master”

next section highlights a vital part of Indian Ocean commerce: items of dress. In doing so, it explores the extent to which sartorial vocabularies mirror nautical ones in their geographical distribution.

Coastal Customs and Costumes

In exploring the vocabularies of tailors, we must recall that South Asian communities played a central role matching the geographic centrality of the subcontinent. It is hardly an exaggeration to state that “India clothed the world”³⁷ due to its ancient pedigree in the export of cotton, silk, muslin, linen and wool.³⁸ Indian textiles show up by the fifth century CE in the archaeological record of the Red Sea and—roughly around the same time—in the Indonesian archipelago.³⁹ The reputation of India’s prestigious cottons remained spotless through the medieval period.⁴⁰ By this time,

three regions in particular had come to the fore as suppliers to almost the entire Indian Ocean: Gujarat, Bengal, and the Coromandel Coast—a situation that persisted into colonial times. These high-priced commodities were for long the prerogative of affluent coastal elites. In East Africa, for example, robes, sandals, and jewellery were largely confined to the elites and their enslaved domestics,⁴¹ which was presumably also common in other locations situated at some distance from the major textile production centres. The cultural orientations of the elites, it seems, were inspired by what came from the ocean rather than the hinterland.

The interconnectedness of Indian Ocean textile traditions has been the topic of prodigious scholarship,⁴² yet more can be done in terms of studying loanwords.⁴³ Before moving to a cross-linguistic comparison of sartorial terminology, it is important to first point out that India's vestimentary imprint on the world went beyond the mere distribution of mass-produced textile goods by mercantile communities. In some regions, the art of tailoring itself may have diffused in the wake of intensified contacts with India. A number of lexical borrowings into Malay and related languages of maritime Southeast Asia point to a subcontinental origin of this practice. The word for "tailor" in the *Sejarah Melayu*—a mid-sixteenth-century chronicle describing the history of the Malacca Sultanate and its relations to other lands—is *derji*, i.e., Hindustani *darjī* and ultimately Persian *darzī*. This loanword presumably entered Malay in the wake of intensified contacts with South Asian sultanates, with which commercial links had long been established and whose tailors may have set up shop farther east. Even earlier, we find the word for "cotton" travelling from South (Hindustani, Gujarati: *kapās*) to Southeast Asia (Malay, Javanese: *kapas*). Words for "spinning wheel," too, entered maritime Southeast Asia from the Indian subcontinent. Malay *jentera* goes back to Sanskrit *yantra* "machine, mechanical contrivance," which also denotes a "spinning wheel" in a number of modern Indian languages.⁴⁴ The Hindustani word *carkhā* "hand spinning wheel" (cf. Tamil: *carkkā*, Persian: *charkh*) also spread eastwards and was borrowed in the languages of North Sumatra (Acehnese: *jeureukha*, Gayo: *cerka*, Toba Batak: *sorha*, etc.). In the absence of datable textual references, however, the time depth of these transmissions is difficult to reconstruct.

The distribution of garments increased when the Indian Ocean became—as the expression goes—an "Islamic lake." Islamic law came with specific prescriptions for covering the male and female body, undoubtedly boosting the trade in sartorial items. It would be incorrect, however, to assume that shirts, jackets, and suchlike were absent in pre-Islamic times, or were only distributed within Muslim circles. In maritime Southeast Asia, a type of upper garment known as *baju* (from Persian and Hindustani *bāzū*) was used for ritual and military purposes before it eventually became widespread among all classes of men and women.⁴⁵ Trousers also entered the Malay World from South Asia; the widespread Malay names *seluar* and *celana* reflect respectively Hindustani *shalwār* "trousers, drawers" and Kannada or Tulu *callaṇa* "short breeches." In Java, this transmission took place in pre-Islamic times, again in connection with developments in military attire.⁴⁶

In terms of footwear, a North Indian word for “sandals” (Hindustani: *cappal*, Gujarati: *campal*) was borrowed both east (Malay: *capal*) and west (Swahili: *champal*), while Portuguese *sapato* “shoe” was adopted as Malay *sepatu*, Sinhala *sapattu*, Tamil *cappāttu*, and Ḥaḍramī Arabic *sfattū* (the latter via Malay). The Portuguese were also apparently responsible for the eastward distribution of a number of other garments. I suspect that Malay *kebaya* “loose garment worn by women” reflects Creole Portuguese *cabaia*, *cabai* (cf. Tamil: *kapāy*), which itself goes back to Sinhala *kabā-ya* “coat.”⁴⁷ Along similar lines, Portuguese *camisa* “shirt” must have given rise to Sinhala *kamisa-ya* and Malay *kemeja*. Similar-looking words such as Hindustani *qamīz* and Tamil *kamis* reflect Arabic *qamīs*, which is ultimately related to the Portuguese form through a shared etymology from Late Latin *camisia* “shirt.” Some articles of attire have spread even more widely across the Indian Ocean. Table 5 lists some sartorial terms found from East Africa to Southeast Asia.

Other items of dress display more specific patterns of distribution. In Aceh, we find woven cloths known as *lunggi*, which is evidently Hindustani and/or Bengali *lungī* “a coloured cloth” (from *lung* “a cloth worn round the loins”). It was also borrowed into Burmese as *lounji*, now regarded as the country’s national costume. Conversely, the Malay *sarung*, a cloth wrapped around the waist, spread westwards and was adopted in Sinhala as *saroma* and in Sri Lankan Tamil as *cāram*, among others.⁵⁰ In the seventeenth century, the then Dutch-controlled trading post of Pulicat became India’s most important centre to produce and export sarongs locally.⁵¹ In the Ḥaḍramawt region of present-day Yemen, the homeland of most of the Indian Ocean’s Arab diaspora, the cloth is known as *ṣārūn* in the local dialect. The latter form must have given rise to Swahili *saruni* in the same meaning.

Table 5. Textile terms in the Indian Ocean

Swahili	Yemeni Arabic	Persian	Hindustani	Tamil	Malay	Meaning
beramu (“banner, flag”)		bairam		vayiram		“k.o. fabric” ⁴⁸
chadari	shādir	cādar	cādar	cātar	cadar	“veil, fine shawl”
champal	shanbal		cappal		capal	“sandals”
doria			ḍoriyā	ṭōriyā	duria	“k.o. muslin cloth”
jamdani		jāmdānī	jāmdānī		jamdani	“flowered cloth”
juba		juba	jubba		jubah	“long coat or gown, surtout”
kamari	kamar	kamar	kamar		kemar	“belt, girdle”
kofia	kūfiyah				kopiah	“skullcap, fez” ⁴⁹
melimeli		malmal	malmal	mal	makmal	“muslin”
shali	shāl	shāl	shāl	shāl	sal	“shawl”
suruali		sirwāl	shalwār		seluar	“trousers”

The presence of Malay items of dress in Sri Lanka is not surprising in the light of the island's colonial history. Coterminous with the establishment of Dutch rule in seventeenth-century Sri Lanka, large numbers of "Malay" (yet in fact quite diverse) people arrived on the island as political exiles, soldiers, or personnel in service of the colonial regime.⁵² The Dutch East India Company (VOC) created another such colony in Cape Town, which was different in its political organisation but similar in its heterogeneous demography of convicts, military personal, and enslaved workers. In both places, intermarriage between "real" Malays, South Asian Muslims, and other groups was common. Unlike the Sri Lanka Malays, the so-called Cape Muslims eventually lost proficiency in Malay and their other ancestral languages to Afrikaans. Apart from religion, food was to become this group's most important identity marker.⁵³ This brings us to culinary traditions as an additional lens to examine cultural contact and the movement of its neglected brokers in the Indian Ocean.

Spice-Laden Foodscapes

From antiquity onwards, the regional food markets of the Indian Ocean were connected for pragmatic reasons, including the redistribution of food surpluses and the sustenance of diasporic communities.⁵⁴ Beyond basic necessity, imported culinary traditions also fuelled new cultural expressions, with food items brought in from afar enjoying greater prestige. We may therefore assume that cooks and their recipes started to travel between Indian Ocean ports the moment contacts became regular. The resultant mixed culinary landscape is illustrated in a mid-seventeenth-century Malay biography of Iskandar Muda, the sultan of Aceh in North Sumatra, called *Hikayat Aceh*. In a description of a wedding feast at the royal palace, the text juxtaposes numerous Persian, Arabic, and Hindustani terms for food-related items, many of which have now become obsolete in Sumatra. A literal translation of the relevant passage is provided first, before delving deeper into the actual dishes that were served.

The *sufra* was unfurled and the dishes were brought in, consisting of various types of food; *ta'am kabuli*, *berenji*, *syarba*, *'arisya*, *bughra* and *kasykia*; and various [types] of *dampuk* and *kebab*, and various types of *halwa berginta*, *halwa kapuri*, *halwa sabuni* and *halwa syakar nabati*; and various jugs of crushed *syarbat* with *yazdi* rosewater; some *syarbat* perfumed with eagle-wood and *mawardi*, and various *daksa* of *paluda* drenched with *'asal mas'udi*, and various *daksa* of beautiful fruits most delicious in flavour.⁵⁵

The use of these and other culinary terms as a frame of analysis brings to the fore specific instances of cultural contact. While the Indian Ocean never processed a unified cuisine, its foodways have emerged from centuries of gastronomic convergence. Loanwords reveal some of the communities involved in this process, as well as the directions of transmission. Let us consider the above citation. The word *sufra*, judged from the context, denotes a cloth on which meals were served. It is well known that table-cloths were indispensable during Mughal-era feasts,⁵⁶ likewise designated

in Hindustani as *sufra* (ultimately from Arabic *sufra* “dining table,” cf. the root s-f-r connected with “travelling”). The phrase *ta’am kabuli* presumably reflects Persian *kābulī ta’am* “a meal from Kabul.” Elsewhere in the text the more common *nasi kabuli* “Kabuli rice” is used in the same meaning, reflecting the famous Afghan dish of steamed rice-and-meat (*kābulī pīlāv*). The second rice dish listed is *berenji*, going back to Persian *birinj* “rice.”⁵⁷ *Syarba* almost certainly refers to a type of soup, reflecting Persian *shorbā* “salty stew” and found under this name across the Muslim world.⁵⁸ The term *arisya* presumably reflects *harīsa*, a Middle Eastern meat porridge with wheat and herbs. The dish known as *bughra* originally denoted a simple meat dumpling from Central Asia, named after the tenth-century ruler Satūq Bughrā Khān who has been credited with its invention.⁵⁹ *Kasykia* appears to be a misreading of Persian *kashkīna*, a dish made of barley or wheat.⁶⁰ I assume that *dampuk* goes back to Persian *dampukht* “a kind of *pīlāv*,”⁶¹ which remains to this date a popular dish in parts of the Indian subcontinent. *Kebab* is, of course, the Persian *kabāb*: roasted meat, typically on skewers.

The Acehese feast was equally abundant in sweet dishes. *Halwa berginta* seems to be a Malayisation of Acehese *halua meugeunta*,⁶² which is a triangular sweetmeat made of glutinous rice, grease, and sugarcane syrup.⁶³ *Halwa kapuri* presumably reflects (an unattested) Persian or Hindustani *ḥalwā kapūrī* “camphoraceous pudding,” possibly resembling or containing edible camphor. *Halwa sabuni* is the obsolete Mughal dish *ḥalwā ṣābūnī*, literally “saponaceous pudding.”⁶⁴ *Halwa syakar nabati* must have been a kind of sugary desert, as *nabāti sakkār* is the Persian word for “sugarcane.” *Syarbat* reflects Persian *sharbat*, a fragrant sweet beverage often containing fruits and ice (the English word “sorbet” ultimately goes back to the same etymon). The *yazdi* rosewater undoubtedly reflects Persian *gulāb yazdī* “rosewater produced in Yazd,” which was also enjoyed by the Mughals.⁶⁵ *Mawardī* is the Arabic word *māwardī* “rosewater.” Judged from the context, the word *daksa* is a type of vessel in which food is served.⁶⁶ *Paluda* is the Persian *pālūda*,⁶⁷ the name of a sweet beverage popular from East Africa to South Asia and already documented in medieval Arabic cookbooks.⁶⁸ The compound *asal mas’udi*, finally, is the famous *Mas’ūdī* honey exported from Mecca, which was also mentioned by the late twelfth-century Arabic geographer Ibn Jubayr.⁶⁹

Stumbling upon a similar dilemma as the array of boat names in the *Hikayat Banjar*, we may again ask how representative this arrangement of dishes was of culinary flows in Southeast Asia. Had the Acehese only heard of these dishes from Perso-Indian merchants who had frequented their country since precolonial times, or did they regularly enjoy them personally? In this case, it is important to point out that Islamic dynasties in the Malay World often sought inspiration from Ottoman and Mughal courtly cultures, including in the realm of literature, arts, religion, and scholarship.⁷⁰ Against the backdrop of these royal connections, it seems that sophisticated cookery was a *sine qua non* in the repertoire of any self-respecting palace. The court of Siam employed an Indian cook specifically to cater to foreign guests, as documented in the seventeenth-century *Safīna-i Sulaimānī*.⁷¹ This Persian

travelogue also tells us of the fondness of the Acehnesse sultan for Persian foods and sweets, which he implored rich merchants to bring him as they could not be prepared properly at his own court.⁷² Among the Mughals, a sumptuous variety of West, Central, and South Asian dishes had reached new heights under the supervision of professional cooks.⁷³ Even for seasoned European colonials (pun not intended), it was not unheard of to hire Indian kitchen personnel. Thomas Stamford Raffles, for example, had a *Kling* (South Indian) cook of whom he was apparently so fond that the latter was granted a considerable piece of land in West Java.⁷⁴ Singapore's founder was far from unique in his culinary preferences. It is illuminating in this respect to call attention to a popular 1875 cookbook titled *What to Tell the Cook; or The Native Cook's Assistant*, which was published half in English and half in Tamil and was also advertised in Netherlands Indies newspapers (figure 3). Outside the European sphere, large ships provided additional employment for the so-called sea cooks, known in Hindustani as *bhandārī*.⁷⁵ Remarkably, a cook at the royal court is known in classical Malay literature as *bendahari*,⁷⁶ which is evidently the same word. The related Acehnesse term *muenaroe* or *beunaroe* "cook of a royal kitchen," too, reflects a tradition of employing prestigious "master-chefs" from South Asia. It is uncertain how widespread this practice was across the Indian Ocean, but we know from the *Chronicle of Theophanes* that cooks from the Indian subcontinent were present at the Byzantine court as early as the eighth century.⁷⁷

One of the highlights of culinary cross-fertilisation in the Indian Ocean was without doubt a savoury flatbread known in Malay as *murtabak* (cf. Javanese: *martabak*, Acehnesse: *meutabak* or *meureutabak*, Thai: *mātābā*, Hyderabadī Urdu: *mutabbaq*, Tamil: *murtapā*). Across South and Southeast Asia, cooks specialising in this dish tend to be of Ḥaḍramī or Muslim South Indian ancestry. This savoury fried flatbread ultimately hails from parts of Saudi Arabia and Yemen, where it is known as *mutabbaq* "folded." In Kuwait this word usually refers to a dish of rice and fish (*mutabbaq*) and in other parts of the Arabic World to a sweet pastry (*mutbaq*), as is the case in medieval Arabic cookbooks. It was the meat-filled version that quickly conquered the Indonesian archipelago (figure 4). No better ode to this dish can be given than a description by the Eurasian author Tjalie Robinson, who praised the famous *murtabak* of a Jakarta-based Indian cook as follows:

[T]hey have a crispy fried wrapping on which no single drop of drawn butter (*minyak samin*) can be detected anymore. I always like to watch the *murtabaks* being fried. Mr. Ali rolls the dough out so thinly that the pastry strip is almost transparent. In a large mug he then prepares the fillings (egg batter, pieces of fat and mutton, vegetables, onions, etc.) and pours the mash into the middle of the pancake. He then folds it like an envelope, swings it around a couple of times, and tosses it onto the baking sheet. It is a true mystery that those dough envelopes never break. I always watch that jugglery with bated breath, but the envelope truly never bursts open. Anyway, as soon as the thing sits on the round baking sheet, drawn butter is carefully poured around it before a heavy dash of margarine is added. Would they also do it like that in Malabar? With that margarine? Whatever the case, the grease starts to simmer and crackle and

WHAT TO TELL THE COOK :

சமயற்காரனுக்குச் சொல்லத்தகுவது ;

OR அல்லது

THE NATIVE COOK'S ASSISTANT.

சமயற்காரனுக்கு உதவியான புத்தகம்.

BEING A CHOICE COLLECTION OF RECEIPTS
FOR INDIAN COOKERY, PASTRY, &c., &c.

இந்தியாவிலுள்ள துறை துறைசாணிமார்களுக்கு
முறையாய்ச்செய்யத்தகும்
பண்டினிகளும் மாவுபண்டங்கள் முதலியவையும்
இதில் காட்டப்படுகின்றன.

IN ENGLISH AND JAMIL.

இங்கிலீசும் தமிழும்.

SECOND EDITION.

இரண்டாம் பதிப்பு.



Madras :
HIGGINBOTHAM AND CO.
1875.

Figure 3. *What to Tell the Cook*. Photo by author.



Figure 4. *Murtabak* (Singapore). Photo by author.

15 minutes later that *murtabak* will land on your plate (*piring*), so big it protrudes on all sides, crisply fried and delicate in flavour.⁷⁸

One place where Indian and Malay cuisine merged never to be separated again is, paradoxically, just beyond the horizon of the Indian Ocean: Cape Town.⁷⁹ As mentioned previously, the city—established by the Dutch East India Company as a halfway station on the route to Asia—became home to the so-called Cape Muslims or Cape Malays. The latter ethnonym belies the group’s heterogeneity, with ancestors hailing from Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, Madagascar, and several parts of Africa.⁸⁰ This hybridity is particularly manifest in their cuisine, which is a rich mixture of Malay, South Asian, European, and African flavours.⁸¹ One finds in it dishes with recognisable Malay origins, like *blatjang* “k.o. chili sauce” (Malay: *belacan* “shrimp paste”), *bobotie* “curried meatloaf” (*bebotok* “spicy steamed fish or meat”), *denning vleis* “k.o. lamb stew” (*dendeng* “dried jerked meat”), *sosatie* “meat roasted on a skewer” (*sate*, *sesate*), and *penang curry* “a dry mutton curry” (*pindang* “dish prepared in salted and spiced sauce”).⁸² Other delicacies, such as *curry*, *roti*, and *biriyani*, reflect South Asian influence,⁸³ with lexical influence from a North Indian language (*barishap* “fennel” from *badīsep*, *dhunia* “coriander leaves” from *dhaniyā*, *jeera* “cumin” from *jīrā*), but also from Tamil (*naartjie* “citrus” from *nārattai*). Yet most Cape Malay dishes are a blend of several of the culinary traditions in contact.⁸⁴ The *murtabak* mentioned above, for example, developed into *muttabah*: a meat and spinach pie topped with cheese.⁸⁵ Unsurprisingly, Indian Ocean success stories like *falooda* (i.e., *pālūda*), *kebab*, and *kabuli rice* also made their way into Capetonian kitchens.

Another colonial-era “melting pot,” also just beyond the limits of the Indian Ocean, is the city of Macau, which belonged to Portugal from 1557 to 1999. Though

located off the coast of China, the culinary history of the Indian Ocean is palpable in the Macanese cuisine. Initially, the Chinese formed only a minority in this Portuguese colony, which was predominantly inhabited by Malay, Indian, and African traders, servants, and enslaved people.⁸⁶ Malay-inspired food names such as *balichão* “k.o. fermented fish sauce” (Malay: *belacan* “shrimp paste”)⁸⁷ and *bebinca* “coconut-milk cake” (*bebingka*) form an integral part of the city’s culinary tradition,⁸⁸ even though their Southeast Asian origins are not necessarily realised by all of its inhabitants. The first two dishes were also introduced by the Portuguese—or, rather, by their Asian cooks—to Goa on India’s west coast (*balchão* and *bebinca*), while *sambal* can be found wherever Malay and/or Javanese diasporas established themselves. Like Cape Town, Macau also features several pan-Indian Ocean dishes. Macanese *lacassá* is a bowl of noodles in shrimp broth. The Southeast Asian version (*laksa*) is a spicy soup with rice noodles and seafood, while in Cape Town it refers to vermicelli (*laxa*) used in sweet desserts. All terms originate from the Persian noodle dish *lākhsha*.⁸⁹ The triangular-shaped fried snacks known in Macau as *chamuças* reveal an equally interesting transoceanic journey. They already feature in medieval Arabic cookbooks as *sanbūsaj*, reflecting Middle-Persian *sambōsag*.⁹⁰ The fritters also occur as Swahili *sambusa*, *semusa*, Somali *sambuusa*, Hindustani *sambūsa*, *samosa*, Sinhala *samosā*, Tamil *camōcā*, Malay *samosa*, *sambosa*, Burmese *sāmuhsa*, and Turkish *samsa*.

This culinary tale would not be complete without also giving attention to yet another Indian Ocean melting pot: the Swahili coast. The palpable North Indian element in Swahili cooking has not gone unnoticed.⁹¹ Some dishes, however, turn out to be of a more pan-Indian Ocean distribution. Pickles are a case in point. Known as *achari* or *achali* in Swahili and typically made with mangos, lemons, or other sour fruits or vegetables, pickling was—and is—a safe and easy means of food-preservation. We find the word as *ācār* or *acār* in North Indian languages, Persian *ācār*, Sinhalese *accāru*, Tamil *accāru*, Dhivehi *asaara*, Malay *acar*, Creole French *achards*, Afrikaans *atjar*, and Yemeni Arabic *ushshār*, among others. Other culinary highlights of transregional allure, such as *faluda*, *kababu* (i.e., *kabāb*), *kabuli*, *pilau* and the aforementioned *sambusa*, have also found their way into Swahili cuisine.

Most of these historically connected words have diverged semantically over time, with dishes in the diaspora often differing significantly from what is known by the same name in the “motherland.” Some inherited recipes have blended with the cooking style of the recipient society, creating a “fusion” cuisine *avant la lettre*. It is equally possible that more archaic versions of a certain dish have disappeared everywhere but in the diaspora. A case in point is the aforementioned side-dish *sambal*, a spicy condiment inseparable from Malay or Indonesian meals. Across the archipelago, chili peppers—originally from the New World—constitute the default ingredient of *sambal*; other ingredients depend on the region and on the specific type of *sambal* being prepared. Chilies are less prominent or even absent in the earliest exported versions of the dish. Among the Jaffna Tamils in northern Sri Lanka, *campāl* is similar to South Asian chutney and often contains grated coconut,⁹² whereas the Sinhalese version can be made with coconut (*pol sambōl*), caramelised

onion (*sīni sambōl*), or dried fish (*kattā sambōl*). Macau has its “eggplant sambal” (*sambal de bringella*), which is a sautéed dish without chili.⁹³ In the Ḥaḍramawt region, *ṣanbal* is the word used for “fried vegetable (with shrimps).” To the Cape Muslims, *sambal* is “usually a highly seasoned relish of grated raw fruits or vegetables, squeezed dry, mixed with pounded chili, and moistened with vinegar or lemon juice for a sweet-sour taste.”⁹⁴ Back in Indonesia, raw or sautéed vegetables are no longer central to *sambal*, yet the Balinese “raw sambal” (*sambal matah*) reflects this earlier tradition.

Besides the names of dishes, it is noteworthy that the dining traditions across the Indian Ocean come with similar names for dishware (Table 6).

If Asian cooks and the dishes they prepared already fell beyond the scope of most (European) commenters, people belonging to the underclasses of colonial cities effectively inhabited an alternate universe. At the same time, we cannot hope for anything but a rudimentary understanding of interethnic contact without recognising its profane elements. The final section, therefore, calls attention to lexical borrowing in criminal or otherwise undesirable slang. While the relevant words rarely made it into high literature or dictionaries, they speak volumes about the full breadth of interaction between peoples and languages on the margins.

Rogues, Prostitutes, and Undesirables

Vulgar or subversive expressions of language can provide unique insights into the daily politics of urban centres,⁹⁷ yet remain an underexplored topic. Nevertheless, swearing in particular should be seen as crucial to the study of cultural contact; not incidentally it ranks among the first things fresh language learners tend to specialise in. Like sexual and criminal slang, swearwords fall within the realm of expletive language and as such need to be replaced regularly in order to maintain their expressive power. Languages in contact tend therefore to be fruitful sources of inspiration to insult people innovatively, and the ports of the Indian Ocean form no exception to this generalisation.

The remarkable mobility of swearwords explains why, for example, the Malay invective *puki* “female genitals” found its way into Sinhala, Dhivehi, and Malagasy

Table 6. Dishware across the Indian Ocean

Swahili	Persian	Hindustani	Tamil	Malay	Meaning
kuza	kūza	kūza	kūcā	koja	“ewer, pitcher”
piala	piyāla	piyāla	pēlā	piala	“cup, goblet”
pingani ⁹⁵	pingān	pingān	pīṅkāṅ	pinggan	“porcelain bowl or cup”
piringi	piring ⁹⁶	piring		piring	“plate”

(Mayotte dial.) as *pukkī*, *fui*, and *pòky* respectively.⁹⁸ Travelling in the opposite direction is nineteenth-century Malay *bancut*, glossed in a nineteenth-century dictionary as a “whore’s child” (*hoerekind*),⁹⁹ yet in fact reflecting the Hindustani swearword *bahancod* “sisterfucker.” This common term of abuse also entered the Anglo-Indian lexicon as *banchoot*, which—as the compilers of a famous Anglo-Indian dictionary warn us with no shortage of Victorian prudishness—occupies a class of words “we should hesitate to print if their odious meaning were not obscure ‘to the general.’ If it were known to the Englishmen who sometimes use the words, we believe there are few who would not shrink from such brutality.”¹⁰⁰ In reality, as a nineteenth-century Laskarī dictionary informs us, it was hardly uncommon for sailors “heaving up” the anchor to endure it as part of a broader repertoire of obscenities unleashed by their superiors: *Habes sālā! Bahancod habes! Habes ḥarāmzāda!*¹⁰¹ The infamous swearing habits of the lascars were noted not only by prim and proper British commenters, but also, for example, by the Persian traveller Abū Ṭālib Khān. In his early nineteenth-century autobiographical *Masīr-e Ṭālibī*, he complained precisely about their abusive language while heaving the anchor.¹⁰²

Predictably, such colourful curses proved prone to imitation in broader circles. The abovementioned Laskarī swearword *ḥarāmzāda* “bastard”—of Hindustani and ultimately Persian origins—regularly features in classical Malay texts (*haramzadah*). Equally common in literary Malay are the loan-insults *bodoh* “stupid,” *candal* “immoral,” *nakal* “mischievous,” and *bisi* “indecent; shameless,” respectively from Hindustani *buddhū* “idiot,” *candāl* “an outcast,” Tamil *nakkal* “mockery,” and *vēci* “courtesan; whore.” A renowned Malay dictionary further lists *sur* and *tahi-uli* as terms of abuse.¹⁰³ I suspect the former is from Panjabi *sūr* “pig” and the latter from Tamil *tāyōli* “motherfucker,” which also made its way into eighteenth-century Afrikaans—presumably through (Cape) Malay—as *tajolie*.¹⁰⁴ Other profanities did not even make it into the dictionaries. From personal knowledge, I can say that the Malay slang of West Malaysia exhibits the insults *conek* “penis,” *pundek* “vagina,” and *kamjat* “lowbred,” respectively from Tamil *cuṇṇi*, *punṭai*, and Hindustani *kamzāt*.

In Penang, one of the British Straits Settlements, both Hindustani and Tamil left their imprint on the local Malay dialect. From 1790 to 1873 the island was used as a settlement for transported Indian convicts, many of whom became part of its general population after serving their sentence.¹⁰⁵ Penang’s origins as a penal destination thus left a distinct imprint on the city’s linguistic landscape, which displayed a decidedly Indian character before Chinese settlers eventually outnumbered them from the late nineteenth century. By that time, a local variety of Hokkien—a southern Chinese language—gradually became the city’s dominant mother tongue, obscuring the prior existence of a heavily Indianised Malay dialect.¹⁰⁶ Some of its archaic words seem to go back to Hindustani:¹⁰⁷ *lucah* “shameless, indecent,” *gabar* “boastful, arrogant,” *gabra* “scared, confused,” and *kacera* “rubbish” come from *luccā*, *gabbar*, *ghābrā*, and *kacrā*.¹⁰⁸ These idioms indubitably reflect the historical presence on the island of convicts (Malay: *banduan*, from Hindustani *bandhuvā*) from the Indian subcontinent.

This is further supported by contemporaneous Straits Malay terms such as *argari* “hand-cuffs” from Hindustani *hath-karī*, and *kanjus* “cell in police station; lock-up,” either from Hindustani *kāñjī-hauz* or directly from Anglo-Indian “congee-house”—named after the regimen of rice-gruel (Hindustani: *kāñjī*) fed to those unfortunate enough to end up inside. Of considerably more gastronomic sophistication, it should be added, are the many North and South Indian dishes that flavour Penang’s culinary landscape into the present.¹⁰⁹

In the arena of prostitution, too, the Penang Malay dialect reveals now-erased influence from the Indian subcontinent. From the late nineteenth century, prostitution in this city was controlled by Chinese and Japanese syndicates,¹¹⁰ but South Asians seem to have played a significant role in earlier times. For instance, the word for “brothel” was *cakela* (Hindustani: *caklā*), while a “pimp” was known either as *barua* (Hindustani: *bharuā*) or *kuteni* (Hindustani: *kuṭnī* “procuress”). This marks a significant contrast with the Netherlands Indies, where much of the terminology surrounding prostitution came from Hokkien. In contemporaneous Malay literature published in Java, hence, we find *suhian* “brothel,” *bah-tao* “procuress,” and *cabo* “prostitute,” respectively from *su-hian* (私軒), *bâ-thâu* (娼頭), and *cha-bó* (查某).¹¹¹

This excursus to Penang is but one example of the trajectories of unrefined or marginalised language across the multiethnic ports encircling the Indian Ocean. I will not attempt here to go beyond the Malay World—for example to Zanzibar, Mogadishu, Jaffna, or Rangoon—for the simple reason that I do not possess the necessary linguistic skills to discuss those locations with an equal degree (or, perhaps, assertion) of authority. Similar examples can surely be found elsewhere by scholars prepared to look for them in and beyond the sources left to us by Europe’s imperial undertakings.

Examining Lexical Connectivities

Hopefully this study has provided some inspiration for a language-centric approach to cultural contact across the Indian Ocean, in particular between non-European societies. Through its focus on lexical borrowing, it has reconstructed connections no longer obvious—or deemed relevant—at present, while corroborating better studied ones. As such, it has highlighted specific settings of cultural contact between Indian Ocean ports, without finding much reason to treat the broader Indian Ocean as a linguistically homogenised area beyond the well-known adoption of Arabic as the language of Islamic practices. Today, only a minority of people in the ports of East Africa or the Malay World would understand Hindustani, Gujarati, or other languages from the subcontinent, yet the echoes of India’s once influential lascars reverberate in obscure nautical dictionaries. Malay, too, has long ceased to be a language of significance in the Indian Ocean, yet the well-seasoned culinary heritage of Sri Lanka, Cape Town, and the Ḥaḍramawt region are testimony to Southeast Asia’s forgotten influences westwards. Maritime, sartorial, and gastronomic traditions—now perhaps replaced by more recent ones, yet preserved in the lexical and

literary heritage of the Indian Ocean ports—all contain clues to the historical interdependence of ports, peoples, and products. The transregional flows discussed in this paper were facilitated by maritime communities and accepted by port-dwelling urbanites who looked to the cosmopolitan ocean rather than the rural hinterland for their sense of cultural belonging. In other ways, however, culture is only a secondary part of this story. More than anything the availability of new garments, utensils, food items, and other commodities started off as a matter of harsh capitalism and international trade. The borrowings outlined here, then, are to be considered primarily a consequence of cross-cultural entrepreneurship and forced replacement, rather than uninhibited enthusiasm for other cultures.

Central to this study stand a series of loanwords connecting the coasts of East Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. A considerable number of these lexical items turn out to be of ultimately Persian origin, even though their distribution was often carried out by South or Southeast Asians. To some extent, the connectivities outlined here also stretched beyond the Indian Ocean, marking a departure from scholarship that sees this geographical space as an integrated world. Ports just beyond its horizon—such as Cape Town in the west and Macau in the east—were significantly influenced by developments initiated in the Indian Ocean, as is clearly reflected in the culinary heritage of these cities. On the other hand, certain regions *within* the Indian Ocean display much less of a shared cultural vocabulary with the ports outlined in this study. This seems to be the case for Madagascar, Somalia, and Myanmar, among others, although more research on their linguistic history may challenge these generalisations; not much work has been done on the marginalised slang of these regions, especially in colonial times. These unresolved issues notwithstanding, this study has added some depth to a long line of scholarship on the importance of maritime connections and international ports for the dispersal of ideas and traditions across the Indian Ocean. Its chief novel contribution is the assertion that lexical borrowing is a powerful and effective tool to approach, quantify, and qualify these contact-induced exchanges.

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Notes

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the languages and societies of the Indian Ocean in precolonial times, bringing together data and insights from different disciplines. His current book project is a language history of Indonesia's Chinese minority in late-colonial times.

1 Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies*.

2 Badings, *Woordenboek voor de Zeevaart*, 156.

3 The term "Hindustani" is used here to refer to the lingua franca of nineteenth-century northern India, bearing in mind that it is not used much at present. Within the Hindustani continuum, the variety written in Devanāgarī script and relying on Sanskrit for lexical enrichment is known as "Hindi," whereas the mutually intelligible variety drawing from the Perso-Arabic script and lexicon is known as "Urdu." See Rahman, "From Hindi to Urdu," for more discussion on the terminological nuances of this macro-language.

4 See Fisher, "Finding Lascar"; Ahuja, "The Age of the 'Lascar'"; Ahuja, "A Freedom Still Enmeshed in Servitude" on lascars and maritime labour under British colonialism. The origin of this word is from Persian *lashkar* "army." As many of them professed Islam, the word *lascar* became synonymous for "Muslim" in the French-based creoles of Mauritius, Réunion, and the Seychelles.

5 Metcalf, *Imperial Connections*; Anderson, *Subaltern Lives*.

6 "Culture words" are good indicators of language contact, as they tend to be borrowed more easily than what linguists call "basic vocabulary," such as body parts, kinship terms, low numerals, natural phenomena, etc.

7 Das Gupta and Pearson, *India and the Indian Ocean*, 1–24; Pearson, *The Indian Ocean*, 27–45; Pearson, "Littoral Society"; Ray and Alpers, *Cross Currents and Community Networks*.

8 Hawley, *India in Africa, Africa in India*; Sheriff and Ho, *The Indian Ocean*.

9 See Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*; Hourani, *Arab*

Seafaring in the Indian Ocean; Campbell, *Economic History of Imperial Madagascar*; Toussaint, *History of the Indian Ocean*; Bose, *A Hundred Horizons*; Metcalf, *Imperial Connections*.

10 For examples of language-centric studies on the Indian Ocean's past, see Pollock, *Language of the Gods*; Ghosh, "Of Fanás and Forecastles"; Larson, *Ocean of Letters*; Hoogervorst, *Southeast Asia in the Ancient Indian Ocean World*; Lambourn, "Borrowed Words in an Ocean of Objects."

11 While the topic of language is by no means ignored altogether, the only part of the Indian Ocean where linguistic findings are routinely incorporated into historical research is Madagascar, which displays close links with southern Borneo. See Dahl, *Malgache et Maanjan*; Adelaar, "Towards an Integrated Theory."

12 Oonk, *Settled Strangers*; Machado, *Ocean of Trade*; and Akhtar, *The Khōjā of Tanzania*.

13 Peacock, "Notes on Some Persian Documents."

14 European-authored nautical vocabularies include Roebuck, *The Hindoostanee Interpreter*; Badings, *Woordenboek voor de Zeevaart*; Kriens, *Hollandsch-Maleisch technisch Marine-Zakwoordenboek*. Persian nautical glossaries appeared around the same time; see Mohebbi, "A Persian Nautical Glossary." More general (comparative) vocabularies include Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*; Dalgado, *Glossário Lusó-Asiático*.

15 Ghosh, "Of Fanás and Forecastles," 56.

16 Broeze, "The Muscles of Empire."

17 Balachandran, "South Asian Seafarers," 186. For colonial-era sailors from the Indian subcontinent see Fisher, "Finding Lascar"; Ahuja, "The Age of the 'Lascar'"; and Ahuja, "A Freedom Still Enmeshed in Servitude"; on contemporary Indian seafaring communities see Varadarajan, "Traditions of Indigenous Navigation"; Simpson, *Muslim Society in the Western Indian Ocean*.

- 18 On the nature and development of Indian Ocean port cities, see Broeze, *Brides of the Sea*; Kathirithamby-Wells and Villiers, *Southeast Asian Port and Polity*; Hall, *Secondary Cities and Urban Networking*.
- 19 Both dress and food habits are briefly mentioned, but not elaborated on, in Chaudhuri's *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*.
- 20 Westrip, "Some Persian Influences"; Sen, "Feasts and Fasts," 179–207. It should also be pointed out that the court cuisine of fourteenth-century China was also heavily influenced by Persian culinary traditions (Sabban, "Court Cuisine").
- 21 Kahane et al., *Lingua Franca in the Levant*; Hartley, "Historical Sketches."
- 22 Platts, *A Dictionary of Urdu*, 1049.
- 23 Ras, *Hikajat Bandjar*, 229, 253.
- 24 Mathew, *Portuguese Navigation in India*; Subrahmanyam, *Improvising Empire*; Manguin, "Lancaran, Ghurab, and Ghali."
- 25 Ghosh, "Of Fanás and Forecastles," 58.
- 26 Keasberry, *Vocabulary of the English and Malay Languages*, 135–42.
- 27 Badings, *Woordenboek voor de Zeevaart*; Kriens, *Hollandsch-Maleisch technisch Marine-Zakwoordenboek*.
- 28 Liebner, "Remarks on the Terminology of Boatbuilding."
- 29 Dhivehi is spoken in the Maldives Archipelago, southwest of the Indian subcontinent. The Dhivehi words and glosses given in this paper are from Reynolds's *Maldivian Dictionary*, whereas the Tamil words are taken from the *Tamil Lexicon*. Kuiper, in "A Malay Word in Tamil," already calls attention to the origins of a small number of nautical terms in Tamil.
- 30 Portuguese *câmara* "cabin" is also reflected in Persian *kamra* "compartments for keeping the tools" and Arabic *qamara*. The etymology of *mantilha* "topping lift" was first proposed by Liebner, "Remarks on the Terminology of Boatbuilding," 28; the more common Portuguese word is *amantilho*, but *mantilha* is indeed attested in some dialects (cf. Chermont de Miranda, *Glossário paraense*, 52) and Persian *mantil* seems to go back to the same source. Portuguese *falca* "bulwark, washboard" is also reflected in Swahili *falka* or *faluka* "cargo hold of a ship," whereas *traquete* "foresail" has been borrowed into Persian as *tarkūt* "small mainsail." The English "jib" features in Persian as *jīb* and in Swahili as *jibu*.
- 31 According to the *Tamil Lexicon*, *pantar* is "an ancient sea-port famous for pearls," yet the ultimate etymon can be identified as Persian *bandar* "port" (cf. 'Ālim, *Arabic, Arwi, and Persian*, 2–3).
- 32 These Indian Ocean words for "forecastle" appear to be related to Arabic *fanna* "poop-deck." As pointed out by Ghosh, "Of Fanás and Forecastles," 60, the common precursor seems to be Hindustani *phanā* "snake's hood," which has a similar shape to the forecastle.
- 33 Here and elsewhere, the Arabic data in this study reflect the 'Omānī dialect as given in Agius, *Seafaring in the Arabian Gulf* and the Ḥaḍramī dialect as given in al-Saqqaf, "The Linguistics of Loanwords in Hadrami Arabic." Words marked as belonging to Kuwait are taken from Johnstone and Muir, "Some Nautical Terms." The Persian data are taken from Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary* and Mohebbi, "A Persian Nautical Glossary."
- 34 The Swahili term *gofia* "block" appears to be a Perso-Arabic loan, while *kapi* in the same meaning may have entered Swahili through a South Asian language. These words appear to be connected, although I am not sure in what way.
- 35 Ferrand, "l'Élément persan"; cf. Sheriff, "Navigational Methods in the Indian Ocean."
- 36 Johnstone and Muir, "Some Nautical Terms," 307 n32.
- 37 Riello and Roy, *How India Clothed the World*.
- 38 Ghosh and Ghosh, *Indian Textiles*.

- 39 See Wild and Wild (“Textiles,” 14–5) on the Red Sea; Cameron et al., “Asbestos Textiles from Batujaya” on the Indonesian archipelago.
- 40 Varadarajan, “Indian Textile Technology”; Ramaswamy, *Textiles and Weavers*.
- 41 Rothman, “Indian Ocean Trading Links”; Glassman, “The Bondsman’s New Clothes,” 310–12.
- 42 See Bühler and Ebenhard, *The Patola of Gujarat*; Barnes, *Textiles in Indian Ocean Societies*; Wisseman Christie, “Texts and Textiles in ‘Medieval’ Java”; Clarence-Smith, “Locally Produced Textiles.”
- 43 The names of numerous South Asian fabrics occur in the productions of colonial lexicographers, but descriptions are often so incomprehensive that we are now at a loss to identify many of them.
- 44 Turner, *A Comparative Dictionary*, #10412.
- 45 Jákl and Hoogervorst, “Custom, Combat, and Ceremony.”
- 46 Jákl, “The Loincloth.”
- 47 The suffix *-ya* in Sinhala marks singularity. Hence, the Sinhala word *kabā-ya* “coat” appears to go back to Hindustani or Persian *qabā* “k.o. tunic, long gown” and ultimately Arabic *qabā’* “an outer garment with full-length sleeves.”
- 48 This particular fabric is also attested in medieval Javanese texts as *berēm* (see Jákl and Hoogervorst, “Custom, Combat, and Ceremony”).
- 49 The Swahili and Malay words for “cap, fez” are derived from Arabic *kūfiya*, which (at present) denotes a headdress fashioned from a piece of cloth. Ultimately, the word goes back to Italian *cuffia* “a cap.” It is also known as *koofiyad* in Somalia and traditionally as *kofia* amongst the Muslims of Cape Town and Madagascar.
- 50 Hoogervorst, *Southeast Asia in the Ancient Indian Ocean World*, 112.
- 51 ‘Ālim, *Arabic, Arwi, and Persian*, 40.
- 52 Hussainmiya, *Lost Cousins*.
- 53 Baderoon, “Catch with the Eye.”
- 54 Alpers, *East Africa and the Indian Ocean*; Boivin et al., “Indian Ocean Food Globalisation.”
- 55 The original Malay is given in Iskandar, *De Hikajat Atjéh*, 112. Note that a German translation leaves most food items untranslated (Penth, *Hikajat Atjeh*, 107–8).
- 56 Schimmel, *The Empire of the Great Mughals*, 189.
- 57 Persian also exhibits the form *birinjī* in such combinations as *kofta-birinjī* “rice meatballs” and *nān-birinjī* “rice cookies.” Designating a particular rice dish, this word travelled across the Indian Ocean world; in Swahili we find the related word *birinzi*, denoting a spicy dish of meat and rice. In South India, “brinji rice” (Tamil: *piriñci cātam*) refers to a flavourful vegetarian rice dish. In the Kapampangan-speaking region of the Philippines, a similar dish known as *biringhi* contains glutinous rice and coconut milk.
- 58 Perry, “*Shorba*.”
- 59 The history of *bughrā* has been documented in the seventeenth-century *Shajara-i Tarākima* (Kononov, *Rodoslovnaja Turkmen*). Persian exhibits *bughrā* or *bughrā khānī* “quadrangular sections of paste, dressed with gravy or milk” (Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary*, 192). Among the Mughals, it contained meat, flour, ghee, chickpeas, vegetables, and spices (Schimmel, *The Empire of the Great Mughals*, 191).
- 60 Bausani, *Note sui vocaboli Persiani*, 30.
- 61 Iskandar (*De Hikajat Atjéh*, 112) believes *dampuk* to be an unidentified fruit. I find this unlikely, as the word is mentioned amidst an inventory of meat and cereal-based dishes.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 112.
- 63 Djajadiningrat, *Atjèsch-Nederlandsch woordenboek*, 554.
- 64 Rashid, *Society and Culture in Medieval India*, 49. Medieval Arabic cookbooks document a similar dish under the name *ṣabūnīya* (Perry, “The Description of Familiar Foods,” 417; Arberry, “A Baghdad Cookery Book,” 84). Also consider the Turkish equivalent *helva-yı sabuni*.

- 65 Khan, "The Mughal Elite," 134.
- 66 I suspect the word *daksa* is a hyper-Malayisation of Acehnese *do'sa* "porcelain bowl (to serve dishes)." Some nineteenth-century Malay dictionaries list the now obsolete word *dopsa* "large bowl, shallow tray," allegedly from a North Indian language.
- 67 Bausani, *Note sui vocaboli Persiani*, 30.
- 68 For example, *pālūda* is described in the *Kitāb Wasf al-Aṭ'ima al-Mu'tāda* (Perry, "The Description of Familiar Foods," 283) and the *Kitāb al-Ṭabīkh* (Arberry, "A Baghdad Cookery Book," 85). The word used in these texts is *fālūdḥaj*, which reflects an earlier form of its Persian etymon: *pālūdag*.
- 69 Jubayr et al., *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, 118.
- 70 Milner, "Islam and the Muslim State"; Peacock and Gallop, *From Anatolia to Aceh*.
- 71 O'Kane, *The Ship of Sulaimān*, 68–9.
- 72 *Ibid.*, 177.
- 73 See Westrip, "Some Persian Influences"; Sen, "Feasts and Fasts," 179–207; Husain, *The Emperor's Table*; and especially the early sixteenth-century *Baburnāma* for iconographic depictions of Mughal feasts.
- 74 Rogge, "Het landgoed Pondok Gedé," 60–1.
- 75 See Varadarajan, "Traditions of Indigenous Navigation"; Qaisar, "From Port to Port" on the culinary practices aboard traditional Indian ships. The word's Tamil equivalent is *paṇṭāri*.
- 76 The word *bendahari* "cook at the royal court" occurs in the Malay *Hikayat Sang Kancil* (Dussek, *Hikayat Pelandok*, 36, 38).
- 77 Turtledove, *The Chronicle of Theophanes*, 76.
- 78 Robinson, "Over terompa's, tekenkunst en moertabak," 476 (my translation from the original Dutch).
- 79 On the historical interconnections between Cape Town and the Indian Ocean World, see Ward, "Tavern of the Seas?"; Worden, "VOC Cape Town as an Indian Ocean Port."
- 80 Bradlow and Cairns, *The Early Cape Muslims*. See Jeppie, "Re-classifications," on the different labels given to this community.
- 81 Baderoon, "Catch with the Eye," 121. Also see Baderoon, "Regarding Muslims," 46–65, on contemporary attitudes to South Africa's Muslim cuisine.
- 82 Williams, *The Cape Malay Cookbook*.
- 83 A culinary history of curry and biryani is given in Collingham, *Curry*.
- 84 Despite sporadic claims that the influence from South Africa's mixed Malay-Indian cuisine on that of the country's white population tends to be overstated (Claassens, *Die geskiedenis van Boerekos*), it is beyond doubt that the VOC employed enslaved Asians in their kitchens (Shell, *Children of Bondage*, 187; Baderoon, "Regarding Muslims," 46–65), making the latter undeniable agents in these culinary exchanges.
- 85 Williams, *The Cape Malay Cookbook*, 29.
- 86 Chang, *Sino-Portuguese Trade*, 97; Souza, *The Survival of Empire*, 32–3.
- 87 The Malay word *belacan* "shrimp paste" was also adopted into Burmese, where we find it as *balachau*, a dish with dried shrimps. In the Ḥaḍramī dialect of Arabic, the condiment has been borrowed as *blēshān*.
- 88 Jackson, *Taste of Macau*.
- 89 Perry, "Notes on Persian Pasta." This West Asian dish also spread to Eastern Europe (cf. Russian: *lapsha* "noodle soup"), before being replaced back in Persia by a similar dish called *rishtā* in the thirteenth century.
- 90 Perry, "The Description of Familiar Foods," 379.
- 91 Lodhi, *Oriental Influences in Swahili*; Losleben and Jafferji, *Swahili Kitchen*.
- 92 Thangarajah, *Odiyā Kool*, 35.
- 93 Jackson, *Taste of Macau*, 94.
- 94 Williams, *The Cape Malay Cookbook*, 58.

- 95 Besides *pingani* “porcelain bowl or cup,” Swahili also exhibits the synonym *finjani* (borrowed through Arabic *finjān*). Both forms ultimately go back to Persian *pingān*.
- 96 The original meaning of Persian *piring* is “copper,” hence a “copper plate.” Borrowed into Malay as *piring* “plate,” this word also gave rise to Ḥaḍramī Arabic *fīrīn* and Afrikaans *piring*.
- 97 Dumolyn and Haemers, “A Bad Chicken Was Brooding,” illustrate in vivid detail how hegemonic discourses were continuously challenged by the lower social classes in a Medieval European context. Also see Adhikari, *Straatpraatjes*, on vernacular language in late-colonial Cape Town.
- 98 Hoogervorst, *Southeast Asia in the Ancient Indian Ocean World*, 112.
- 99 Wall, *Maleisch-Nederlandsch Woordenboek*, 272.
- 100 Yule and Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, 56; Ghosh, “Of Fanás and Forecastles,” 62 n20.
- 101 From Roebuck, *The Hindoostanee Interpreter*, 184 (spelling adjusted by TH). The Hindustani word *sālā* “brother-in-law” provides a resourceful way of implying that the speaker has had sexual intercourse with the addressee’s sister, *bahancod* “sisterfucker” gets an equally carnal point across, whereas the use of *ḥarāmzāda* “bastard” impugns the chastity of the addressee’s mother.
- 102 Stewart, *The Travels of Mirza Abu Taleb Khan*, 49–50.
- 103 Wilkinson, *A Malay-English Dictionary*, 157, 418.
- 104 Fritz Povelis translates it as “turd” (*Development of Afrikaans*, 104), possibly by false analogy with the Malay expletive *tahi* “shit,” yet the precise meaning of this now obsolete term is difficult to reconstruct.
- 105 Sandhu, “Tamil and Other Indian Convicts”; Turnbull, “Convicts in the Straits Settlements”; Langdon, *Penang*.
- 106 Hamilton, “Penang Malay.”
- 107 Hoogervorst, “Tracing the Linguistic Crossroads,” 268–9, gives examples of Tamil and Malayalam loanwords in this dialect. Note that the contemporary Penang Malay dialect has lost most of these Indian loanwords (cf. *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Glosari dialek Pulau Pinang*).
- 108 Besides Penang, the Hindustani loanword *lucah* “shameless, indecent” is also known in Indonesia. As for *kacrā* “rubbish,” it is worth mentioning that this expletive term has also found its way into Swahili (*kachara*), Burmese (*kachala*), and Yemeni Arabic (*kashrah*).
- 109 See Zaine, *Kompilasi masakan Penang*, for an inventory of traditional dishes and recipes.
- 110 Khor et al., *The Penang Po Leung Kuk*.
- 111 Hoogervorst, “Manliness in Sino-Malay Publications,” 292.