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**Domestic Space in the Colonial Fiction
of Joseph Conrad and his
Contemporaries (1890–1920)**

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PhD

2022

**Domestic Space in the Colonial Fiction
of Joseph Conrad and his
Contemporaries (1890–1920)**

James William Ward

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Abstract

My thesis examines the presentation of domestic space in the colonial fiction of Joseph Conrad and his contemporaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I show how these writers used domestic space to think through and challenge, or alternatively uphold and reinforce, the dominant assumptions and beliefs about the colonial enterprise and about the local populations of colonised territories overseas. Across a variety of settings – including the trading station, the hotel and the ship – I show that, rather than being merely the neutral background to events, the domestic space was deeply implicated in the dominant discourse which underpinned these narratives. By exploring the shared concerns of spatial and postcolonial theory I offer new readings of familiar and unfamiliar works that explore Conrad's critical engagement with the colonial fiction genre, whilst also highlighting the shared scepticism of some of his contemporaries concerning the official narrative of colonialism as 'civilising mission'. At the same time, I also show how Conrad's use of domestic space contrasts with that found in more conservative forms of colonial fiction of the period. This thesis therefore brings to light a relationship between domestic space and the colonial discourse within which these fictions operated, a relationship which has, until now, been overlooked. By drawing our attention to the diverse ways that domestic space functions in the work of these writers, this study therefore offers a fresh perspective on the work of Joseph Conrad and his contemporaries, whilst bringing to light the fundamental significance of domestic space for postcolonial studies in discussions of colonial fiction from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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Declaration

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

I declare that the Word Count of this Thesis is **77,795** words

Name: James Ward

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Introduction

This is a project which investigates what the various living spaces which feature in the colonial fiction of Joseph Conrad and his contemporaries – the trading station, the hotel, the ship, the family home, both the colonial and the indigenous – might tell us about colonialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Official narratives of the time promoted the colonial project as a civilising mission, an enterprise intended to bring the benefits of Western civilisation, advances in science and technology, religion and philosophy, to the supposedly uncivilised areas of the world. This was predicated on a set of beliefs which made clear distinctions between the civilised and the savage, the West and the East, the domesticated and undomesticated. How these writers upheld or challenged these beliefs through the presentation of domestic space in the colonial setting is the subject of this thesis.

Critics rarely discuss representations of living spaces in colonial fiction explicitly in relation to the paradigm of domestic space. In one respect, of course, we tend to think of the terms ‘domestic’ and ‘colonial’ as antithetical, the domestic (as in ‘domestic front’) is ‘over here’, the colonial (frontier) ‘over there’. Certainly the domestic and the colonial were the defining themes of two very distinct genres of literature in the period, the novels of Victorian domestic realism distinct from the highly masculinised imperial romance genre.¹ The colonial fictions of Robert Louis Stevenson and Joseph Conrad appeared strange or problematic to critics and audiences alike precisely because they failed to conform to this familiar pattern, and fused elements of romance and realism in a way that seemed to question the simplistic and stereotypical kinds of representation found in the popular colonial fictions of the day. Their narratives presented a rather bleak picture of life in everyday domestic settings very different from the triumphalist narratives of imperial

¹ Roslyn Jolly cites a letter of Stevenson’s written to W. E. Henley in 1884 in which he bemoaned the fact that he ‘lived in an age of realism’ and that the sort of adventure fictions which he preferred had fallen out of favour. In a column titled ‘What should be’ Stevenson placed such made-up titles as ‘The Filibuster’s Cache’, ‘Jerry Abershaw’ and ‘Blood Money: a Tale’. In a second column titled ‘What is’ were the similarly fictional ‘Aunt Anne’s Tea Cosy’, ‘Miss Brierly’s Niece’ and ‘Society: A Novel’. Jolly notes that ‘the novel is coded as feminine and domestic, concerned with family relationships and social minutiae, while romance is associated with a masculine world of crime and violence, but also of liberating adventure’. Roslyn Jolly, ‘Stevenson’s “Sterling Domestic Fiction”: “The Beach of Falesá”’, *Review of English Studies*, 50.200 (1999), 463–82, (p. 469).

romance which presented foreign lands as an exotic spectacle. As Roslyn Jolly notes, in Stevenson's Pacific fiction 'a South Sea island is not a dream landscape mapping the Western unconscious, in which the dark powers outlawed by Western rationality still flourish, but a real place in which ordinary people work out their domestic and political problems'.²

It may be the case that no comprehensive study of the domestic space in colonial fiction exists because the kinds of living space depicted in these narratives rarely conform to a traditional idea of the domestic. Most of the examples in Briganti and Mezei's *The Domestic Space Reader* (2012) proceed from the idea that domestic derives from the latin *domesticus*; *domus*, and signifies 'of/belonging to the home, house or household'.³ Similarly, each of the nine essays in Inga Bryden and Janet Floyd's influential collection *Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth-Century Interior* (1999) focus on the family home in one form or another, from studies of Ruskin and Stevenson's childhood interiors, to an examination of the working class family home in the mid-nineteenth century, as seen through the eyes of the district visitor.⁴ The more recent collection, *Our House: The Representation of Domestic Space in Modern Culture* (2006) is, according to editors Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft, 'a book about houses'.⁵ By contrast, the living quarters of the colonial traders and merchants depicted in these narratives rarely resemble the homes or households that we would find in the metropole.

What makes the living space in colonial fiction interesting as an object of study are the inconsistencies and contradictions which become apparent *when* we think of them as domestic spaces. They prompt us to ask: to what extent did the emissaries of colonising powers in these fictions seem to be *at home* in foreign lands? It is a question that seems worth asking because against the dominant image of the home as a supposedly feminised zone we often find a distinctly masculine form of domesticity in these narratives in which women are notable by their absence. Similarly, against the domestic ideals of privacy, permanence and stability we find spaces of mobility (the ship), homes which also function as work spaces (the trading

² Ibid., p.468.

³ Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei (eds), *The Domestic Space Reader* (London: University of Toronto Press, 2012) p. 3.

⁴ Linda Bryden and Janet Floyd (eds), *Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth-Century Interior*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999)

⁵ Gerry Smyth and Jo Croft, *Our House: The Representation of Domestic Space in Modern Culture* (New York: Rodopi, 2006) p. 11.

station), or commercialised spaces (the hotel), where the distinction between the public and private is often blurred. Moreover, the inherent transience of these spaces, certainly the ship and the hotel, seem at odds with a process that was thought to bring about irreversible change for the good. Consequently these settings offered writers a way to explore the tensions, contradictions and inconsistencies within the larger narrative of colonialism itself. To put it another way, if we think of these sites as discursive spaces which instantiated the colonial structures of the time, they become sites through which we see writers questioning the stability of the larger discourse within which these fictions operated.

This study therefore sets out to address a gap in studies of colonial fiction by drawing our attention to the significance of domestic space within these narratives. I show, with a particular emphasis on the work of Joseph Conrad, that these writers often presented living spaces in the colonial setting as unstable domestic spaces in a way that questioned the dominant narrative of colonialism as civilising mission and undermined the stability of the dominant discourse which underpinned the colonial project. In the process, this thesis therefore seeks to raise the domestic space to a position of prominence within postcolonial studies in discussions of the colonial fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Domestic space and feminist criticism

The more obvious reason that domestic space has not figured very prominently in discussions of colonial fiction from the period is, of course, because of the centrality of domestic space to feminist scholarship. The colonial as a milieu and a genre thought to be predominantly masculine failed to invite much interest from critics whose concerns were, so to speak, metropolitan, feminine, domestic ones. This is because, in simple terms, for many in the period during which these works were written, the ‘domestic space’ and ‘woman’s place’, were the same thing. We need look no further than the first two points of Lord Curzon’s ‘15 Good Reasons Against the Grant of Female Suffrage’, from a speech first delivered in 1909, to find a potent example of domestic discourse in the period:

- (1) Political activity will tend to take away woman from her proper sphere and highest duty, which is maternity

(2) It will tend by the divisions which it will introduce to break up the harmony of the home.⁶

Faced with the increasing militancy of the members of the Women's Social and Political Union, Curzon, the former Viceroy of India, evoked the seemingly timeless notion of the 'separate spheres' to disparage any demand for political or social reform. In Curzon's view the domestic space was not only the natural place for women, it was also one where they were obliged, by virtue of their biological difference, to remain and fulfil their maternal role, rather than interfere with the masculine world of politics. Furthermore, the health of society, which rested on the stability and harmony of the home, seemed to depend on this natural order of things being maintained. Curzon's 'common-sense' view of the home as the proper place for women, and the public sphere of business, politics and education as the natural place for men, had, for men like Curzon, prevailed, since antiquity, and was, therefore, sacrosanct.⁷ Perhaps even more incendiary from a feminist perspective was Curzon's fourth point, which reminded the British public why women were unsuited to public life: '(4) Women have not, as a sex, or a class, the calmness of temperament or the balance of mind, nor have they the training, necessary to qualify them to exercise a weighty judgement in political affairs'.⁸ In this light, it is easy to understand why domestic space as a critical paradigm became central to feminist scholarship in the 1970s and, as Cieraad notes, 'contributed to the conceptual framework of the newly initiated women's studies, which thrived on male/female opposition'.⁹ This work traced the particular shift which occurred in the organisation of social space in Western societies in the advent of industrialisation and urbanisation, in which the domestic as a private sphere became increasingly gendered as feminine, in opposition to the male world of business and politics. Briganti and Mezei describe a 'long tradition of feminist work [which] has pursued

⁶ George Curzon, 'Fifteen Good Reasons Against the Grant of Female Suffrage', <https://digital.nls.uk/suffragettes/media/1461/Source_24.jpg> [accessed 2.1.21] Curzon delivered this speech on a number of occasions in his capacity as chair of the League Against Female Suffrage.

⁷ Mary Ann Tétrault suggests that the ideology of the separate spheres can be traced back as far as ancient Greece, 'the first human culture to develop a highly articulated ideology around the notion of public and private spheres'. Mary Anne Tétrault, 'Frontier Politics: Sex, Gender, and the Deconstruction of the Public Sphere', *Alternatives*, 29 (2001), p. 53.

⁸ Curzon, p. 1.

⁹ Ibid.

the disruption of the resonances of tranquility so usually associated with home and has exposed the home as the site of exploitation, oppression, and violence'.¹⁰

Similarly, Linda Bryden and Janet Floyd note that, 'in the scholarship of the 1970s [the domestic space became] a site for the discussion of feminine conformity and the imprisoning oppression visited on women in the nineteenth century'.¹¹

In the book *Imperial Leather* (1995) Anne McClintock offers an alternative way of thinking about domestic space which moves us away from its traditional associations with the household and family. McClintock notes that until recently 'the verb to domesticate also carried as one of its meanings the action "to civilise"'.¹² Domestic spaces in these terms are ones which serve the purpose of civilising individuals, something which has obvious racial and political implications in the colonial context. The effect is also to enlarge the scope of the term 'domestic space' beyond the bounds of the household to accommodate larger institutions and alternative venues. Rachel Bowlby makes a similar observation in her essay 'Domestication': 'In one French usage, *domestiquer* means quite simply the subjugation of a tribe to a colonising power. To "domesticate" is to bring the foreign or primitive or alien into line with the "domestic" civilisation and power.'¹³ Along similar lines McClintock notes that,

In the colonies the mission station became a threshold institution for transforming domesticity rooted in European gender and class roles into domesticity as controlling a colonised people. Through the rituals of domesticity [...] women and colonised peoples were wrested from their [...] state of "savagery" and inducted through the domestic progress narrative into a hierarchical relation to white men.¹⁴

By applying these secondary meanings of the term 'domesticate' our attention is drawn to the idea of a domestic space as one produced through a process of domestication, something which McClintock employs to explore how the colonial project, which invariably involved the violent occupation of lands and the

¹⁰ Briganti and Mezei, p. 328.

¹¹ Bryden and Floyd, p. 2.

¹² Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather, Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, (London: Routledge, 1995) p. 35.

¹³ Rachel Bowlby, 'Domestication', in *Feminism Beside Itself*, ed. by Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman, (London: Routledge, 1995) pp. 71–91, (p. 75).

¹⁴ McClintock, p. 35.

subjugation and exploitation of indigenous people, was constructed in the popular imagination as a force for good. Surveying a range of advertising for domestic products in the late nineteenth century, specifically an advert for Pear's Soap (promoted as 'a potent factor in brightening the dark corners of the earth as civilisation advances'), McClintock notes how such narratives figure 'imperialism as coming into being through *domesticity*'.¹⁵ Domestication thus becomes synonymous with colonisation, domestic spaces ones which serve the purposes of the colonising power. This approach therefore has value in encouraging us to think of the ways that a dominant culture might be registered in these narratives on the level of the everyday, through the organisation of the built environment, the material artefacts depicted within these spaces, and through the behaviours and practices of individuals within the home or larger dwelling, such as the trading station or hotel.

The limitations of McClintock's version of domesticity, which draws on Feminist, Marxist and Freudian psychoanalytical models to explore the nature of colonial discourse, is that it tends to see the domestic space as invariably a site of colonial domination. Domestication is a process employed by colonisers to civilise the native peoples of colonised territories. Like Said's model of Orientalism which I discuss later in this introduction, this is a process which only works one way, and which does not invite us to consider the ways that this process might be resisted, challenged or subverted by the very people it is intended to control. To think of the domestic space in these latter terms requires an alternative model which rethinks the process of 'colonisation as domestication' and encourages us to think of the ways that colonial authority is never entirely successful in securing its aims. Such an approach can be found in the work of poststructuralist philosopher Michel de Certeau.

Michel de Certeau and the domestic as practiced place

In the book *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988) de Certeau makes a distinction between 'place' and 'space'. A 'place', he suggests, 'excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location [...] A place is [...] an instantaneous configuration

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 32–33.

of positions. It implies an indication of stability'.¹⁶ A place therefore is the physical object; the house, the garden, the street, the living room, the boat, measurable and inhabitable. Space, on the other hand, 'exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities and time variables [...] It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it [...] in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken'.¹⁷ By these terms space is determined 'by the actions of historical *subjects*'.¹⁸ Places which appear to have a fixed function and identity become transformed into various kinds of space through the actions or behaviours which happen within their designated boundaries. As de Certeau suggests: '*space is a practiced place*. [...] Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers'.¹⁹ De Certeau therefore offers a useful way of thinking about how spaces, rather than having a preordained value or status, are actually produced, modified and transformed by individuals. This assigns much greater significance to the individual rather than to a dominant authority in determining the nature of a space and has fundamental significance in the colonial context where domestication, as McClintock suggests, is an instrument of colonial authority. If we think of domestic space as always *in process*, as dependent upon the actions of individuals, this raises the possibility that this authority may be unstable. Domestic space thus becomes the site where colonial authority might be both imposed *and* resisted or subverted by the colonised. It also encourages us to think of domesticity as practice outside of the traditional parameters of the home.

A passage in Leonard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle* (1913) provides a useful illustration of the implications of this approach. In the novel a family of natives make a pilgrimage from their village in Southern Ceylon, Bedagamma, to the distant Bergama, the site of a religious festival where they hope that the head of the family, Silindu, will be freed from a curse. Leaving the poverty of their village, they encounter other pilgrims from remote parts of the island, share their food and listen to their tales as they rest for the night. The scene is focalised through Silindu's daughter Hinnihami:

¹⁶ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (London: University of California Press, 1988) p. 117.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 118.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 117.

For the first time the bareness and fear and wildness of life
had fallen from her [...] All about them were other little fires,
around which sat groups, like themselves, of pilgrims eating
the evening meal [...] Hinnihami grew heavy with sleepiness.
A great peace came upon her.²⁰

The scene is significant because it marks a change of setting in the novel, the first movement away from the routines of village life which are structured around the cultivation of the *chena* fields, a system which is sanctioned and overseen by the colonial authorities. Woolf shows this system to be injurious to the inhabitants of Bedagamma as it leaves them open to exploitation from their wealthier neighbours and rarely supplies them with enough food to survive. The pilgrimage thus signifies a shift into liminal terrain, a movement outside the clear boundaries of the systems and laws which structure village life. In this space the pilgrims are shown to produce a space – oriented around the family, the sharing of food, the shared oral traditions of the tribe – which seems transformative to Hinnihami and imbues her with a sense of belonging, a feeling of being at home. In many respects this setting appears to have the function and characteristics of a domestic space, even though she is not 'at home' but is dislocated by the act of pilgrimage. In this way Woolf vividly illustrates how the indigenous population have been displaced within their own lands by the effects of colonisation – Hinnihami has an experience which seems inaccessible within the structures imposed and maintained by the colonial authorities. In leaving behind her sense of wildness she appears to be becoming socialised, or domesticated, except in this moment domestication carries none of the traces of domination or Bowlby's sense of *domestiquer*. Instead, the scene offers a way of thinking about how the indigenous people of colonised territories can be shown to initiate and produce their own spaces of belonging outside colonial structures. By drawing on De Certeau's formulation of 'space as practiced place', domestication as practice therefore provides us with a set of ideas and orientations that enable us to discuss the possibility of indigenous agency within the colonial text, an issue of key significance for postcolonial studies.

It should not go unnoticed, of course, that an alternative reading would be available of this scene which focusses more on the fact that Hinnihami is a young woman. Whilst it might be laudable to find ways of foregrounding the agency of 'indigenous people', such a discussion, as many critics have suggested, becomes

²⁰ Leonard Woolf, *The Village in the Jungle* (London: Eland, 2008), p. 65.

problematic if it fails to pay attention to questions of gender difference.²¹ Jane Miller pointedly remarks on the significance of this kind of oversight: ‘Such an omission simultaneously separates, subsumes and subordinates the category of women. It also takes women for granted – paternalistically, no doubt – as undifferentiated elements of a collective humanity’.²² In the case of Hinnihami it is not merely indigenous agency that is significant here but female agency more specifically. The colonial structures that are the cause of Hinnihami’s subjugation are, so to speak, man-made. In other words she experiences what Rutherford and Peterson have referred to as a ‘double colonisation’, being subjected to the oppression of both colonialism and patriarchy.²³ Indeed, *The Village in the Jungle* is a book that deals explicitly with the abuses inflicted upon women and girls within a male-dominated society and a more nuanced reading from a feminist perspective would be available which focussed on the experience of those whom Benita Parry describes as ‘doubly-oppressed native women who [are] caught between the dominations of a native patriarchy and a foreign masculinist-imperialist ideology’.²⁴ However, my reading, and the others that follow in this study, are not explicitly feminist per se, although they do serve to illustrate how certain critical practices can be complimentary and share similarities in some of their aims and objectives. What postcolonial and feminist scholarship share, of course, is that they are both, in the words of Chandra Talpade Mohanty, ‘a mode of intervention into particular hegemonic discourses’.²⁵ Perhaps unsurprisingly, one of the values of reading these fictions in a way that explores the shared concerns of spatial and postcolonial theory is that it often tends to foreground the agency of

²¹ For example, Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government*, (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), Sara Mills ‘Gender and Colonial Space’, *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 3.2 (1996) 125-148 (p. 126). Chandra Talpade Mohanty also explores more specifically the problems of using terms such as ‘patriarchy’ ‘without their specification in local cultural and historical contexts’. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, ‘Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses’, in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, ed. by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, (London: Routledge, 2013) pp. 196–220 (p. 196).

²² Jane Miller, *Seductions: Studies in Reading and Culture*, (London: Virago, 1990) p. 133.

²³ Kirsten Holst Petersen and Anna Rutherford (eds) *A Double Colonisation: Colonial and Post-Colonial Women’s Writing* (Oxford: Dangaroo Press, 1986) p. 9.

²⁴ Benita Parry, ‘Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse’ in *Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, (London: Routledge, 2005) pp. 36–44 (p. 36).

²⁵ Mohanty, p. 196.

native women in a way that troubles the designs of colonial authority. Mrs Makola in Conrad's 'An Outpost of Progress', Fa'avao and Uma in Stevenson's 'The Beach of Falesa', and Taloi in Louis Becke's short story 'Pallou's Taloi', are all native girls and women who emerge as active agents in these narratives, undermining assumptions of white, male authority.

The significance of this is that it opens up a fresh perspective on these texts which challenges previous scholarship which has viewed Conrad and Stevenson as largely unsympathetic to feminist concerns.²⁶ Whilst some influential studies have been published, such as Susan Jones's *Conrad and Women* (1999), which challenge the prevailing image of Conrad as 'a man in a man's world, occupying an exclusively masculine tradition', critics have tended largely to see Conrad's women as one dimensional and under-developed.²⁷ As I have suggested, shifting our attention to the question of practices offers an alternative way of thinking about the role of individuals within a text, in a way that assigns agency to a character on the basis of what they do, rather than how they appear. In this respect the figure of Mrs Makola who remains largely out of sight in 'An Outpost of Progress' and is described in a rather derogatory or limited way, can be seen to be instrumental in the narrative in terms of what she does and of how her behaviour undermines the assumed authority of the European traders within the trading station compound. Similarly, in Stevenson's 'The Beach of Falesá', Uma might be read as a rather stereotypical exotic female on the level of characterisation, but when seen in light of ideas about spatial practices has a significant role in the narrative in destabilising the European narrator Wiltshire's Eurocentric view of colonised space. That these are both non-European women also enables us to address previous criticism which has seen both Conrad and Stevenson as largely conservative in their views on race and stereotypical in their representations of natives, views which still carry much weight,

²⁶ Robert Hampson notes, for example, that Conrad's 'reputation has sustained damage from feminist criticism of his supposed attitude towards women, based largely on Marlow's comments in "Heart of Darkness"'. Robert Hampson, *Joseph Conrad* (London: Reaktion Books, 2020) p. 13.

²⁷ Susan Jones, *Conrad and Women*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p.1. Similarly, some critics have suggested that Stevenson attempts to move beyond sexual stereotyping in 'The Beach of Falesa'. See Katherine Bailey Linehan, 'Taking up with the Kanakas: Stevenson's Complex Social Criticism in "The Beach of Falesá"', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 33.4 (1990), 407-422.

particularly in relation to Conrad.²⁸ This shift of perspective therefore enables us to gain fresh insights into these texts in a way that complicates previous criticisms which have often been damning in their assessment of these writers' works in relation to questions of race and gender.

My method throughout this thesis is to situate these readings firstly in the context of debates within Conrad studies, but to then open out the discussions to considerations of works by Conrad's contemporaries. Whilst I look in detail at works by Robert Louis Stevenson, Louis Becke, Leonard Woolf, Frank Swettenham, and William Carleton Dawe, I use Conrad as a way of structuring the discussions throughout, using these writers in dialogue with Conrad's works to consider the variety of ways that domestic space functions in these narratives. As I have indicated above with the example of Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle*, my aim is to explore the shared concerns of postcolonial and spatial theory to illustrate the significance of domestic space in these works, in a way that often reads the domestic as a potential site of resistance and subversion and, correspondingly, as a site of colonial anxiety. Whilst Conrad provides a focal point for these discussions, the focus of the thesis overall is not so narrow as to be confined merely to adding to the body of scholarship which amounts to a defense of Conrad. What unifies my discussions is a consideration of the larger colonial discourse within which these fictions operate. I discuss these works on the basis that 'colonial discourse' or 'colonial discourses' are enabling terms which relate to a pattern of effects and similarities in the kinds of representation which we find in these fictions, despite the fact that they relate to colonial situations as diverse as Ceylon, West Africa, Macao, Samoa and Tahiti. Such an approach accords with Sara Mills' description of discourse in the colonial context as one which enables us to identify and discuss 'the surface regularities which can be traced across a range of texts occurring within a certain context'.²⁹ My interest lies in the way that these works, in various ways and in varying degrees,

²⁸ Chinua Achebe's analysis of Conrad in the paper 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', published in 1977, concluded that '*Heart of Darkness*' was 'an offensive and deplorable book' and that Conrad was a 'bloody racist'. Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's "*Heart of Darkness*"' in, Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York: W. W Norton and Co., 2006), p.343–44. Hampson notes that Achebe's paper 'has become the lens through which Conrad's work as a whole is often introduced and unjustifiably dismissed'. Hampson, p. 14.

²⁹ Sara Mills, *Discourse*, (London: Routledge, 1997) p. 106.

seem to reinforce or challenge the dominant colonial discourse of the time. The larger aim of this study is to show how domestic space is central to these narratives.

A useful example can be found in the short story 'Falk' (1903), which shows how Conrad's work is, in the words of Edward Said, 'exemplary for [its] attention to the detail of everyday existence defined as situation, event, and the organisation of power'.³⁰ 'Falk' begins in a 'small river-hostelry' on the banks of the river Thames, some distance outside of London. Looking out through the wide windows of the rather grubby establishment, the narrator's attention is momentarily arrested by an uncommon sight on the river.³¹ A wooden barque passes by and on deck there can be seen 'a woman in a red hood, quite alone with the man at the wheel [...] with the grey wool of some knitting in her hands'.³² Whilst the colour of the woman's garment clearly catches the eye of the narrator, his attention is also drawn to what she is doing. The ship, being a barque, is clearly a space of work yet the woman is engaged in an activity which would ordinarily be associated with the domestic sphere. The deck of the ship appears to be a hybrid of two things – a space of work and a domestic space. If this image strikes the narrator as incongruous, for his companions it is an indicator of another kind of difference: "'German I should think," muttered one. "The skipper has his wife on board," remarked another'.³³ Whilst this appears to be a flippant comment it betrays an underlying anxiety within the assembled crowd of English sailors. Earlier in the narrative we are told that the riverside restaurant lies twenty miles 'from that shallow and dangerous puddle to which our coasting men give the grandiose name of "German Ocean."'.³⁴ Germany,

³⁰ Edward W. Said, *The World, The Text and The Critic* (1983; London: Vintage, 1991), p.27. Many critics have explored Conrad's singularity with reference to this particular characteristic, something Jacques Berthoud identified as Conrad's 'richly dense prose style' and the 'extraordinary plenitude' of Conrad's writing. (Jacques Berthoud, in Joseph Conrad, *Nostromo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p.x–xi.) Similarly, Robert Hampson alludes to 'the fine grain of Conrad's writing'. (Hampson, *Joseph Conrad*, p.) Hugh Epstein, discusses how the vast range of voices and vocalisations in the novel *The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897) is typical of the 'sensory fabric Conrad's writing creates' and alludes to the detailed descriptions of 'the material world which Conrad's writing so celebrates' (Hugh Epstein, 'Review of *Conrad's Decentered Fiction* by Johan Warodell (Cambridge University Press, 2022)' <http://www.josephconradsociety.org/conradian_review_epstein11.html > [accessed 13.08.22])

³¹ Joseph Conrad, *Typhoon and Other Tales* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008) p. 77.

³² Ibid., p. 78.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 77.

then, has already figured in the narrative as a presence which is uncomfortably close to the imperial centre and represents a threat both territorially and culturally to the boundaries which define English identity. Importantly, the female on board the ship and the question of the domestic space figure as disruptive to the dominant male perspective which frames the narrative. This fleeting image of domesticity thus connects to larger concerns which link ideas about space to constructions of masculinity and cultural identity. It is this link between these small details of domestic life and the larger narrative of colonialism which is the focus of this study.

Domestic space in the colonial setting

Whilst the opening scene of 'Falk' registers a sense of imperial anxiety on the domestic front, the works which I look at throughout this thesis are stories set on the extreme colonial periphery, far distant from the European centres of power. Conrad's first two novels, *Almayer's Folly* (1895) and *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896) were set in a remote upriver settlement in North East Borneo, based on a location he visited during his time as first mate on the *Vidar* in the late 1880s. Robert Louis Stevenson's 'The Beach of Falesa' (1893) and 'The Ebb-Tide' (1894), were written in the final years of his life when, seeking relief from numerous physical ailments, he settled in Samoa, and was inspired to write fictions which reflected his knowledge of colonial activity in the South Seas. Katherine Bailey Linehan describes Stevenson's relocation as a move from 'the self-confident centre of Empire in Victorian England to its battered international fringes in Samoa'.³⁵ Samoa was also a location familiar to the Australian writer Louis Becke (1855–1913) from his years spent working as a commercial trader in a range of locations across the South Pacific. We might think of these locations as threshold spaces, at the very edge of the known world to the metropolitan, European reader. The colonial situation which we find in these narratives is also distinctly different from the settler colonialism which provides the backdrop, for example, for Katherine Mansfield's account of colonial life in New Zealand in the early twentieth century or Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) which depicts the lives of European settlers in Southern Africa. Writing specifically about the British empire Patrick Steer notes that 'throughout the

³⁵ Bailey Linehan, p. 415.

Victorian era, Britain and its settler empire were linked by flows of capital, population, material goods, and culture that were seen at the time to be qualitatively different from exchanges with other parts of the empire'.³⁶ It is these 'other parts of the empire' which I am concerned with in this thesis, although, importantly, the stories also reflect the non-settler parts of the Dutch, French, Belgian and German empires. Here we find a colonial situation which was distinctly unsettled, in which isolated traders depended on a regular supply of goods and resources from a native population, and on the efficient operation of transportation networks by distant commercial companies. The peripheral nature of this kind of location is vividly illustrated in Conrad's 'An Outpost of Progress' (1896) in which the two Belgian traders slowly deteriorate physically and psychologically when, stranded in a remote trading outpost in the heart of Africa, the long-awaited steamer from the Great Trading Company which employs them fails to materialise. The particular type of milieu that these writers present is one in which existence is precarious, shaped by the ebbs and flows of the imperial market. Any question of a stable domestic life is thus seriously undermined by the circumstances within which these protagonists struggle to survive.

As the range of countries listed above also indicates, these narratives were largely set in regions where, historically, territory was contested. Lord Pembroke's description of his first encounter with Louis Becke provides a vivid illustration of this kind of geopolitical instability on the colonial frontier in the preface to *By Reef and Palm*:

When in October, 1870, I sailed into the harbour of Apia, Samoa, in the ill-fated *Albatross*, Mr. Louis Becke was gaining his first experiences of island life as a trader on his own account by running a cutter between Apia and Savaii. It was rather a notable moment in Apia for two reasons. In the first place, the German traders were shaking in their shoes for fear of what the French squadron might do to them, and we were the bearers of the good news from Tahiti that the chivalrous Admiral Clouet [...] had decided not to molest them.³⁷

³⁶ Philip Steer, *Settler Colonialism in Victorian Literature: Economics and Political Identity in the Networks of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) p. 2.

³⁷ Louis Becke, *By Reef and Palm & The Ebbing of the Tide* (London: T.Fisher Unwin, 1914) p. 9.

The image of the German traders ‘shaking in their shoes’ illustrates the kind of uncertainty which marked the lives of the commercial trader in these locations, who in this instance appear to be living under the threat of either expulsion or something more serious altogether. The sense of being in contested territory is something that we also find in *Almayer’s Folly*.³⁸ Indeed the ‘Folly’ of the title is a building which Almayer is in the process of constructing beside his family home on the basis of a rumour that an English chartered company may soon be arriving in the settlement of Sambir, thereby supplanting the predominant Dutch presence currently in a position of authority. Sensing a commercial opportunity Almayer constructs this home for a potential clientele which, as it transpires, never arrives. The fluctuations of the imperial market and questions over territorial influence provide a backdrop for these narratives which shapes domestic life, something which *Almayer’s Folly* vividly illustrates. The home in this instance becomes emblematic of the instability of the territory, and the lives of the colonial subject, in the midst of colonial expansion.

An important feature of these narratives is a tendency towards a greater degree of realism than would ordinarily have been found in the literature of Empire. We find a greater attention to the material details of everyday life in the work of Conrad, Becke and Stevenson for example, in contrast to the simplistic representation of foreign lands found in the imperial romance novels of the time. The living quarters of the colonial trader are presented in a way that foregrounds the mundane realities of life on the colonial frontier in contrast to the kinds of fiction which presented foreign lands as exotic spectacle. On a simple level many of the writers I explore in this study used images of domesticity to question the larger narrative of colonialism as bringing order and stability to colonised territories. The general incompetence of men on the level of the everyday in these narratives seemed

³⁸ see Katherine Isobel Baxter, ‘Geography and Law in *Almayer’s Folly*’, *Conradiana*, 49.2-3 (2017), 67–84. Baxter shows how the novel ‘illustrates the inconsistencies that emerge in the process of putting international and transnational law into practice in the indeterminate spaces of colonial geography’ (p. 67). See also Roslyn Jolly, ‘Piracy, Slavery, and the Imagination of Empire in Stevenson’s Pacific Fiction’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 35 (2007), 157–73 (p.157). Jolly describes the location of Stevenson’s late fictions as being part of the ‘unofficial empire’. Whilst there was a substantial British presence in the South Pacific in the latter half of the nineteenth century, in the form of traders, planters and missionaries, Britain had little intention of taking on the cost of colonial administration, or to challenge the claims of rival colonising powers in the region. Consequently ‘successive British governments in the nineteenth century turned down offers of protectorates and other opportunities to colonise Pacific lands’. p.157.

to provide an ironic commentary on the prevailing idea of European colonisers as a force for civilisation and progress. In 'An Outpost of Progress', for example, the traders' house is 'littered with the belongings of the white men, town wearing apparel, old boots; all the things dirty, and all the things broken, that accumulate mysteriously round untidy men'.³⁹ In contrast to Makola, the methodical and circumspect African assistant at the station, the traders are presented as careless and disorganised, their European assumption of cultural superiority undermined by their slovenly ways. In 'Long Charley's Good Little Wife' by Louis Becke, Long Charley's remote location on commercial trading routes and his consequent failure to attract a native wife leads this 'white man in dirty pyjamas' to a state of desperation when it becomes clear he cannot look after himself in the home.⁴⁰ When he is finally able to resume trading and acquire a wife he gets drunk whilst his 'good little wife' proceeds to 'bash out the mosquitoes from the nuptial couch with a fan'.⁴¹ Like Charley, the white men in these narratives are often shown to be entirely dependent upon native women to help with the business of day to day living. This is particularly apparent in 'An Outpost of Progress', where Kayerts and Carlier are unable to function when the women of Father Gobila's tribe cease to supply them with food. In Conrad's first novel *Almayer's Folly* (1895) Almayer is untidy and unkempt, his pretensions of nobility and refinement thrown into relief by the grubbiness of his dilapidated home where 'a general air of squalid neglect' pervades the place.⁴² As Linda Dryden notes, 'in direct conflict with assumptions that European colonisers impose cleanliness and order on the picturesque but haphazard domestic arrangements of the East, it is a European, Kaspar Almayer, who corrupts his exotic environment'.⁴³ Similarly, in the backroom of Case's trading station in Stevenson's 'The Beach of Falesá' (1893), the narrator Wiltshire encounters the grotesque Captain Randall who is 'crawled over by flies [...] the mosquitoes hummed about the man like bees'.⁴⁴ Besides Randall, Wiltshire also notes the unappealing condition of the room which appears distinctly undomesticated, finding 'the three men's beds [...]

³⁹ Joseph Conrad, *Tales of Unrest*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987) p. 83.

⁴⁰ Becke, p.73.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 75.

⁴² Joseph Conrad, *Almayer's Folly*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p. 14.

⁴³ Linda Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and The Imperial Romance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) p. 55.

⁴⁴ Robert Louis Stevenson, *South Sea Tales*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 8.

on the floor and a litter of pans and dishes', whilst the goods in the store characterise the space as a particularly masculine one, 'the only thing well represented being the contraband, firearms and liquor'.⁴⁵ The absence of a traditionally feminised domestic space here points to the reality of the colonial project being underpinned by male violence and motivated by commercial gain. On the level of their realism, then, these narratives present an image of a miserable masculinised domesticity which belies the civilising ideals of colonialism.

Domestic space and colonial discourse

The domestic space can also be seen to be of key significance in these narratives when read in light of ideas of colonial discourse. Beyond their realism, which, as I have suggested, serves as a commentary on the official narrative of colonialism, the domestic space can also be seen to have a discursive function within the colonial text. Said's model of colonial discourse, as elaborated in *Orientalism* is of value in offering ways of thinking about how this works. Central to Said's conception of Orientalism was the formation of a series of binary oppositions which contrasted the modernity of the West with the primitive ways of the East, juxtaposed Western rationality and enlightenment with Eastern superstition.⁴⁶ Discussing the hegemonic distinction between the Western and the Arab world, for example, Said claims that 'on the one hand there are Westerners, and on the other there are Arab-Orientals; the former are [...] rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these things'.⁴⁷ The binarism which Said proposes as central to the structure of colonial discourse provides us with a way of thinking about the representations of domestic space in these fictions and of how, on the level of the mundane, writers questioned colonialist views about Western superiority and cultural difference. For example, the squalor that we find in the homes of these individuals clearly troubles the dominant civilised/uncivilised opposition. Similarly, Almayer's household which is populated by moths, mosquitoes, lizards and a monkey complicates the distinction between culture and nature. In Leonard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle*, this binary is unsettled from

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Classics, 2019) p. 46.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 49.

the very beginning of the narrative when we are told ‘the village was in, and of, the jungle’.⁴⁸ The landscape itself is often a dominant presence in these narratives, such that any attempt to construct a private space, one that is clearly differentiated from the outside world or from the space of nature, appears superfluous, and becomes an indicator of the colonisers’ impotence and foolishness. Conrad uses the natural landscape in this way in ‘An Outpost of Progress’ and *Almayer’s Folly*. Thinking in light of Said’s model of Orientalism also enables us to see how the domestic space is much more than mere setting or of secondary importance to the more overt layers of meanings in the text, but is deeply implicated in the larger discourse within which these fictions operated. For example, in the work of certain writers we can see how the domestic can be read as a discursive space which upholds an idea of Western racial and cultural superiority. In Frank Swettenham’s *Malay Sketches* (1895), we find native houses which serve as a venue for a seance to contact the dead, living quarters which are replete with arms and ammunition to ward off rival tribes, or homes of powerful princes and sultans housing their many wives and mistresses. In depending for their novelty and dramatic interest on some attribute of non-European culture which was notably different from Western norms, the domestic space in these stories helped to contribute to the formation of a stereotype of non-Western people which appeared to reinforce ideas about the essential difference and inferiority of the non-European. An image is formed of indigenous people as excessively violent, irrational, impulsive and depraved in contrast to the omniscient and detached imperial gaze of the implied narrator. By extension an image is also constructed of the larger native society as unstable, corrupt or degenerate which has a legitimating function in relation to the European presence in colonised lands. Carleton Dawe’s use of the hotel in the short story ‘Fan-Tan’, as I discuss in chapter four, serves to construct an image of the hybrid society of Macao as degenerate and unstable. Said’s work is productive, therefore in inviting us to consider how the domestic space operates within an Orientalist (or colonial) discursive framework.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Woolf, p. 9.

⁴⁹ My intention here is to stress that Said’s model, which has been central to postcolonial studies, offers a way of identifying how particular strategies of representation function within the larger discourse. As has been well documented, Said’s model has fundamental flaws and limitations but is still frequently used as a touchstone in contemporary scholarship. See Dennis Porter, ‘Orientalism and its Problems’, in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, pp. 150–61, and Robert Young, ‘Edward Said and Colonial Discourse’, in *Postcolonialism: A Historical Introduction*, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2001) pp. 383–94.

An alternative reading and approach is available, however, which would encourage us to read these manifestations of the supernatural, the unsettling, or savage, within the domestic space, as indicators of colonial anxiety. Thinking about these representations in a different way might suggest that these signs of otherness are actually projections of repressed desires and anxieties which say more about colonial authority than they do about their ostensible subject, the colonised other. As David Huddart notes, ‘the coloniser creates monstrous stereotypes that [...] actually point to anxiety at the heart of his identity’.⁵⁰ The strange domestic spaces which the non-Europeans inhabit actually give us a sense that colonisers feel distinctly ‘not at home’ in the colonial setting and that these representations of otherness indicate a sense of displacement, a splitting in the apparently stable and secure identity of the coloniser. The question of displacement is central to Homi Bhabha’s approach to the colonial situation, and offers an alternative to Said’s theories of colonial discourse as something which repeatedly contains the colonised within a system of representation which maintains them as inferior and Other. Amongst the range of concepts and ways of thinking about colonial discourse which Bhabha has elaborated, which include the associated ideas of mimicry, ambivalence and hybridity which I draw on throughout this thesis, has been his re-writing of Freud’s notion of the uncanny. Freud described ‘Das Unheimliche’ in these terms: ‘the uncanny is that species of frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar’.⁵¹ To Josh Cohen the uncanny also signifies the presence of ‘something which is familiar and old-established in the mind [but] which has become alienated from it through the process of repression’.⁵² Leo Bersani captures the more sinister and unsettling quality of the uncanny in describing it as ‘the danger of being haunted by alien versions of the self’.⁵³⁵⁴ Bhabha’s appropriation of the concept, which draws

⁵⁰ David Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006) p. 77.

⁵¹ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 124.

⁵² Josh Cohen, *How to Read Freud* (London: W.W. Norton, 2005), p. 66.

⁵³ **Leo Bersani**, *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston & Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1976) **p. 203**

⁵⁴ In their seminal work *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar draw on the *unheimliche* to explore recurring themes and concerns in works by nineteenth-century women writers which articulate a resistant attitude to the prevailing idea of the home as one of sanctuary or refuge: ‘Images of enclosure and escape, fantasies in which maddened doubles function as asocial surrogates for docile selves, metaphors of physical discomfort manifested in frozen landscapes and fiery interiors [...] could be explained by a common, female impulse to struggle free from social and literary confinement through strategic redefinitions of self, art, and

on poststructuralist theories of language, invites us to think of colonial authority as similarly haunted by its doubles, as similarly divided and de-centred, yet at the same time maintaining a pretence of stability. As he suggests ‘the ‘unhomely is a paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition’.⁵⁵

Bhabha draws our attention to the way in which the process of colonisation, which involves the uprooting and transplanting of a culture or way of life from one part of the world to another, is profoundly alienating to the coloniser. To Bhabha the question of being ‘at home’ is shown to be tenuous and fragile, in part because it involves a disordering or suspending of the traditional boundaries of public and private. In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha describes this as ‘the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations’.⁵⁶ Bhabha uses the example of Isabel Archer in Henry James’s *Portrait of a Lady*, to capture the sense of the dislocation which corresponds to his reading of the uncanny: ‘In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting’.⁵⁷ Bhabha’s version of the uncanny is of value, then, in encouraging us to look for those moments in colonial fiction where there appears to be some form of tension or anxiety around the traditional division between the public and private. We are invited to see the domestic space as the site in which those anxieties and uncertainties which haunt the colonial presence become visible, colonial authority unsettled at the point where the public and the private spheres meet.

‘Challis the Doubter’ and the unstable home

I have suggested that the living spaces in the colonial setting offer a way of thinking about the larger colonial project because they are unorthodox domestic spaces. The trading station, the hotel and the ship function as homes, provide shelter and

society’. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (London: Yale University Press, 1979), p.xi.

⁵⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 9.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

protection for their inhabitants, yet at the same time have secondary functions, as workplaces, as commercial entities, or as mobile vessels which transport their inhabitants from one trading outpost to the next. They are, in other words, unstable spaces, whose status as private dwellings is always under threat from those forces which circulate through and around these sites, be they the shifting territorial boundaries of rival colonial powers, the circulation of capital, or the alternative models of social organisation which shape the indigenous cultures in colonised lands. Their status as a home which is also not-a-home encourages us to think of them as uncanny spaces, as sites where ‘the borders between home and world become confused’.⁵⁸

A useful example can be found in Louis Becke’s short story ‘Challis the Doubter’. In the story, which begins in ‘an Australian city’, Challis confronts his scornful, ‘violet-eyed’ wife when the discovery of a letter from an admirer arouses in him ‘a wild flood of black suspicion’.⁵⁹ Abandoning her and his suburban home he sets sail for a tropical island in the North-west Pacific where we next find him some four years later, alone in his trading station home, and still preoccupied by his wife’s possible infidelity. He awaits the return of his native wife Nalia, who is busy collecting goods from the home of a fellow trader elsewhere on the island. Surprised at his strength of feeling for her (“By God, I can’t be such a fool as to begin to *love* her in reality”) Challis seeks assurance of Nalia’s honesty, love and fidelity when she returns.⁶⁰ Asking “Nalia, hast thou ever told me any lies?” she replies, “Nay, I fear thee too much to lie. Thou mightst kill me.”⁶¹ The story ends with Challis finally abandoning all thoughts of returning home, whilst enjoying ‘a curious feeling of satisfaction’ that he is the object of desire to Nalia and the other native girls. We are left with an image of the ‘the little white flecks’ of Challis’s letter to his wife carried away on the breeze towards the beach.⁶²

On one level the story works as an antidote to the kind of adventure tale, common in the period, in which men seek their fortune on the colonial frontier and prove their manhood in heroic feats of strength and daring. Challis, after all, is no imperial hero, but a cuckold, and has chosen to flee from his wife whilst avoiding

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Becke, p. 20.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 25.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., p. 27.

confrontation with her possible suitor. But we might also read this as a tale of the uncanny. It is, after all, the story of an anxious man who is haunted by a fear of betrayal. If the uncanny signals a return of the repressed then we see it here in Challis's fear that Nalia, like his wife in Australia, may also be guilty or capable of infidelity. Challis's thoughts of his Australian wife, and his return to the 'real' world, always threaten to uncannily intrude upon his exotic idyll. We also see a fear registered in this story that Challis may be losing a grip on his identity and falling into a state of degeneracy. Looking out from his house 'through the vista of cocoanuts that surround his dwelling' he thinks "The devil! [...] I must be turning into a native".⁶³ Having been so long in the tropics Challis fears he is losing his sense of self and regressing into a more primitive state of being.

However, the story also registers the sense of spatial disturbance which Bhabha alludes to in writing about the disordering of the public and private. We might see that on one level the story is also about what happens when the dominant gendering of social space is strangely inverted in the colonial setting. Challis travels to the colony to reclaim the sense of authority which he has lost at home, only to find himself at a disadvantage, ensconced in the house while his wife, at home amongst the local community, is busy in the public sphere. The relocation to colonised lands is presented, ironically, as emasculating to the agents of colonial authority. Challis's need for reassurance from Nalia arises in part because she has been out in the world and out of his sight, whilst he has been consigned to the domestic sphere. His actions seem to indicate a desire to establish control over this uncertainty, to establish order and stability in the face of the unknown. Other indicators of this kind occur in the mention of Nalia's appearance. The description of her clothing seems to indicate a need, on the part of the European coloniser, to control native female sexuality. We are told that a 'white muslin gown, fastened at the throat with a small silver brooch, was her only garment, save the folds of the navy-blue-and-white-*lava lava* round her waist which the European garment covered'.⁶⁴ This registers, then, an apparent intention on Challis's part to domesticate Nalia, to wrest her from her condition of assumed savagery or licentiousness. This too is apparent in Challis's line of questioning, "Before thou became my wife, Nalia, hadst thou any lovers?", indicating a need to assert control over her past.⁶⁵ Challis's desire to settle down with

⁶³ Ibid., p. 21.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

Nalia, and to make a home with her, are registered in these images of control and domestication.

Yet these ideals belie the fundamental purpose of the trading station. Nalia's desire for Challis is not based on any romantic or emotional attachment but on the goods and produce that he keeps at the station. When Challis asks "Nalia, dost thou love me?" her reply indicates that her love is based on the material advantages that her marriage brings her. This is because she, as 'the lucky one', has access to the things that all of the other girls in the village desire, something made clear when in the final scene of the story Letia, 'the "show" girl of the village', visits them and marvels at the silk dress that Nalia is stitching. "Thy husband is indeed the king of generosity".⁶⁶ This raises the prospect that she and they may well move on, if the flow of trade dries up. The unpredictable nature of commerce in this instance figures as a threat to the domestic ideal of stability. The trading station is, then, a place where we find two opposing forces pulling in different directions, a site where the commercial and the familial, the public and the private, become confused. In this light it is unsurprising that Challis's sense of self seems unstable: Can he *really* be in love with this native girl? Is he the *same* man he was at home? Challis's 'doubt' can therefore be read as a manifestation of colonial anxiety, the trading station as an ambivalent, uncanny site, split between the competing forces of commerce and domesticity.

The example of 'Challis the Doubter' is not exceptional. Throughout these narratives we repeatedly find manifestations of anxiety which occur on the boundary between public and private space. We find it in 'The Methodical Mr Burr of Majuru' from the same collection. As I illustrate in chapter five, Mr Burr's response is to police the border between the store and the home ruthlessly, culminating in an act of spectacular violence which serves to assert his authority over the local community. Such measures nevertheless betray Burr's underlying sense of anxiety at being relocated to an alien, disorienting location, and the fear that the public sphere is beyond his control. We see it too in Conrad's 'An Outpost of Progress' where the world beyond the compound is presented as threatening and unknowable to Kayerts and Carlier, who respond by making superficial improvements to the interior of their home, changes which are designed to assuage their sense of dislocation in frightening, unfamiliar territory. This aspect of the short story neatly corresponds to

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

Anthony Vidler's summation of the uncanny as 'the contrast between a secure and homely interior and the fearful invasion of an alien presence'.⁶⁷ The narrator of 'Karain: A memory' discursively constructs the interior of the schooner as a private space, distinct from the exotic world which lies without, yet is repeatedly unsettled by the sensation that the world outside seems 'full of noiseless phantoms, of things sorrowful, shadowy, and mute, in whose invisible presence the firm, pulsating beat of the two ship's chronometers ticking off steadily the seconds of Greenwich Time seemed to me a protection and a relief'.⁶⁸ Colonial authority thus appears to be highly unstable in these narratives, the home frequently becoming the site of fear and paranoia about what lies outside the imagined boundaries of the private domain.

Hybridity in the domestic setting

The domestic space is also shown to be permeable in other ways, that seem to challenge essentialist ideas about cultural identity. In the article 'Verdi in Berau', Robert Hampson notes how, in *Almayer's Folly*, Almayer's supper, which comprises 'a plateful of rice and fish, a jar of water, and a bottle half full of geneva' provides a 'simple indication of the cultural hybridity of the area'.⁶⁹ This is due in part to the presence of Europeans travelling north from Australia into the Malay Archipelago for trade and adventure, but also because of the rich diversity of non-Europeans who populate the region, including 'Sulus, Dyaks, Bugis [...] Arabs [and] Chinese'.⁷⁰ It is one of numerous examples which illustrates how the process of trade between European and non-European is registered on the level of the everyday, in the food and drink people consume, and in the objects and artefacts which can be found in their dwellings. We find this kind of material detail everywhere in Conrad's colonial fiction. For example, the curtain, which divides the Raja Lakamba's strangely exotic home in *Almayer's Folly*, is made of 'heavy stuff of European manufacture'.⁷¹ We

⁶⁷ Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1992), p. 21.

⁶⁸ Conrad, *Tales of Unrest*, p. 43.

⁶⁹ Robert Hampson, 'Verdi in Berau' in *Conrad's Century: The Past and Future Splendour*. ed. by Laura L. Davis. Conrad: Eastern and Western Perspectives, Social Science Monographs. Gen. ed. Wieslaw Krajka. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 81–92 (p. 81).

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Conrad, *Almayer's Folly*, p. 58.

are also told that in another part of the room stands a 'European lamp with a green shade'.⁷² There are numerous mentions of 'Japanese lanterns' hanging in the grounds of Schomberg's distinctly European hotel in *Victory*.⁷³ We also find a passing reference to Hollis's 'dry sarong [...] hanging up in the bathroom' in 'Karain'.⁷⁴ The complexion of the domestic space has been shaped by the buying and selling of goods, the movement to and from one specific geographical destination and the next. This has particular significance in the context of colonial fiction because it troubles those stereotypical modes of representation which we find throughout these narratives, by drawing our attention instead to the processes of history, the possibility of change, and the fact that cultural identity is provisional. As I suggest in chapter one, the passing mention of the European curtain in Lakamba's residence introduces a note of dissonance into the rather stereotypical evocation of the Eastern interior, which presents Lakamba's home as a place of darkness and exotic sensuality. According to Said's model, colonial discourse operated according to a structure of difference, fixing the colonised in binary opposition to their European superiors. In contrast to the agents of Western modernity, Non-European peoples were invariably presented as existing in a different order of reality altogether. As Mills notes, 'the colonised culture was [...] differentiated from the colonising culture through being represented as existing on a different timescale to the colonisers'.⁷⁵ Yet we repeatedly find those material details within the domestic space which draw our attention to the ways that European and non-European are coeval, connected in time through the processes of economic and cultural exchange. The domestic space thus becomes a site which, in the words of Homi Bhabha, 'is continually under threat from diachronic forms of history and narrative, signs of instability'.⁷⁶

In this respect we are invited to read the domestic as a hybridised space, in a way that extends beyond simple material details. The living spaces in these narratives are populated by Europeans and non-Europeans; there are masters and servants, the white figures of authority on board the ship and their native crew, the traders in their store and home and the natives who visit or live alongside them within the larger compound. These dwellings might be better understood as sites of negotiation or

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Joseph Conrad, *Victory* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2004) p. 53.

⁷⁴ Conrad, *Tales of Unrest*, p. 28.

⁷⁵ Mills, *Discourse*, p. 111.

⁷⁶ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 71.

contestation, where colonial authority is not always as stable as it seems. Central to Bhabha's critique of Said's account of Orientalism is the fact that 'there is always [...] the suggestion that colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the coloniser'.⁷⁷ Bhabha's conception of hybridity calls for a shift in our way of thinking which asks us to consider how this might not always be the case:

If the effect of colonial power is seen to be the *production* of hybridisation rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions, then an important change of perspective occurs. The ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority enables a form of subversion, founded on the undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention.⁷⁸

In these terms we might think of the domestic space, in a way that has clear affinities with a De Certeauian model of spatial practices, as a product of the interactions and negotiations between European and non-European. In Louis Becke's story 'Pallou's Taloi' the Polynesian Taloi enters the trader's home and displays a knowledge of English domestic etiquette and social norms, based on her convent school education. The white narrator is incredulous when 'instead of squatting on a mat in native fashion she sank into a wide chair, and lying back inquired, with a pleasant smile and in perfect English, whether I was feeling any better'.⁷⁹ In this instance the modes of behaviour and practices which produce the European domestic space have been appropriated, in an act of colonial mimicry, by the non-European Taloi, revealing the domestic space to be hybridised. The 'effect[s] of colonial power' in this instance are distinctly unsettling to the European narrator whose surprise at Taloi's behaviour points to an uncertainty about his feelings of racial superiority. By thinking in terms of hybridisation we can read the domestic space as a site in which colonialist assumptions of racial difference are undermined.

To see the Almayer household as hybridised is to recognise the ways that Nina, who frequently crosses the boundary which separates her Sulu mother and Dutch father, undermines her father's colonial gendering of social space. This is

⁷⁷ Homi Bhabha, 'Difference, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism' in *The Politics of Theory*, ed. by Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, Margaret Iversen and Diana Loxley (Essex: University of Essex, 1983), pp. 194–207. (p. 200).

⁷⁸ Bhabha, p. 112.

⁷⁹ Becke, p. 51.

evident in Almayer's attitude to the noises that emanate from behind the red curtain, which marks the border between the feminised private sphere and the masculinised space of the veranda, when he says 'It is nothing just some women'.⁸⁰ Nina's constant negotiation of her own hybrid identity, which is presented as a choice between her father's European identity and her mother's Sulu heritage, can also be read in spatial terms, the house hybridised in a way that undermines her father's assumptions of cultural and racial superiority. Nina becomes central to the narrative on these terms, her father the marginal figure relegated to the periphery of the veranda.

To think of the ship the *Farallone*, in Stevenson's 'The Ebb-Tide', as hybridised, is to draw attention to the diversity of the ship's crew who are 'are all men of alien speech even to each other' which is an indication of their own cultural specificity and possible autonomy. Similarly, the whites' rejection of the native cook's meals, raises the possibility that the cook is serving food reflective more of his own native traditions than those of his colonial superiors.⁸¹ This privileging of the native perspective is to read against the homogenising and racist assumptions of Davis, Herrick and Huish, who assume that their crew are savages and racially inferior. Hybridisation thereby effects a shift in the kinds of information we privilege when looking at representations of these mixed-race domestic spaces, encouraging us to see the practices of the marginalised or colonised as signs of agency or resistance. Rather than employing a critical model which is only attentive to the stereotypical strategies of representation at work within the text we can instead think more of the ways that the domestic space is produced through myriad practices, in a way that blurs the line between coloniser and colonised.

The domestic space thus presents us with an opportunity for identifying the various ways that colonial authority is manifested on the level of the everyday or, to recall McClintock, how these narratives figure colonialism as 'coming into being through domesticity'.⁸² At the same time it offers a lens through which we can see how these writers challenged the kinds of discourse which upheld colonisation in the period, where the clear binary oppositions which structured dominant ways of thinking about the non-Western Other were, when viewed at close quarters, less secure than was widely assumed. The purpose of this thesis is, then, to show how the

⁸⁰ Conrad, *Almayer's Folly*, p. 42.

⁸¹ Stevenson, p. 168.

⁸² McClintock, p. 32–33.

domestic space was central to these narratives in illuminating the workings, the absurdities, and the failings of the colonial enterprise in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rather than being, in the words of Michel De Certeau ‘merely the obscure background to social activity’, I illustrate how domestic space, when viewed in light of the shared concerns of postcolonial and spatial theory, can be seen as a site of key significance in the colonial fiction of Joseph Conrad and his contemporaries.⁸³

Thesis structure

The thesis is structured thematically around a number of specific sites or venues. In chapter one I explore the theme of the family home in relation to Conrad’s *Almayer’s Folly*. By drawing our attention to the domestic space as both a practiced place and one which is shaped by larger economic forces I show how Conrad uses the home to think through and challenge dominant ways of thinking about the East during the period. In chapter two I draw on Said’s theories of Orientalism to suggest that the indigenous domestic space is a key site in which official attitudes about the efficacy and legitimacy of the colonial project are most clearly visible, particularly in the book *Malay Sketches* by Frank Swettenham. I also suggest that these stories reveal the deepest anxieties and doubts about the superiority of Europeans and Western civilisation in comparison to that of the Far East. In contrast, I show how Conrad troubles the traditional binary division between East and West by presenting domestic space as something which comes into being through individual agency, both indigenous and European, in the short story ‘The Lagoon’. In chapter three I draw on theories of the domestic as a ‘set of material and social practices which were used to discipline, ameliorate and normalise spaces of mobility’ to explore how Conrad used the ship to question prevailing ideas of racial superiority and cultural difference.⁸⁴ I also suggest, by comparing ‘Karain’ to Stevenson’s ‘The Ebb-Tide’ and ‘The Fate of the Alida’ by Louis Becke, that we see a notable shift towards a greater self-reflexivity and self-consciousness in ‘Karain’ that signals a break from the conventions within which Becke and Stevenson were working. In chapter four, I

⁸³ de Certeau, p. xi.

⁸⁴ Jonathan Stafford, ‘Home on the Waves: Domesticity and Discomfort Aboard the Overland Route Steamship, 1842–1862’, *Mobilities*, 14.5, (2019), 578–95. (p. 583).

examine the use of the hotel as setting in Conrad's *Victory* and Carleton Dawe's short story 'Fan-Tan'. I illustrate that there are clear links between the instability of the hotel as space and the larger discourse of empire within which these fictions operated. I show that these writers used the ambivalent nature of the hotel, as a simultaneously commercial and domestic space, to reinforce or challenge the kinds of discourse which upheld colonisation in the period. Chapter five explores the trading station as setting in the short stories 'The Methodical Mr Burr of Majuru' and 'The Doctor's Wife' by Louis Becke, Conrad's 'An Outpost of Progress', and Stevenson's 'The Beach of Falesa'. I argue that Becke, Conrad and Stevenson present the trading station as a hybrid space, in which the traditional distinction between the public and the private is troubled in the colonial setting, in a way that both questions the civilising ideals of the colonial enterprise and illustrates the instability of colonial authority. In chapter six, by drawing on a secondary meaning of the term domesticate as 'to cultivate', I examine two very different representations of agriculture, the first in Leonard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle*, the second the short story 'The Planter of Malata' by Joseph Conrad. I show how Woolf used the cultivated space to express deep anxieties about the efficacy of colonial rule in Ceylon. However, whilst the novel can be read as a compelling critique of British rule it also registers a deep ambivalence about indigenous peoples, often reinforcing many of the assumptions of colonial discourse which prevailed in the period. In contrast Conrad uses the plantation to challenge dominant ways of thinking about the colonial venture, contrasting a public-spirited and collective sense of imperial endeavour with a more speculative and opportunistic form of commercial enterprise.

By ranging my discussion across a variety of settings my intention is to illustrate the productive potential of the domestic space as an approach to reading colonial fictions of the period. Each successive chapter is oriented towards a particular aspect or aspects of the domestic space in order to explore the concept to its fullest potential. The discussion of the family home in chapter one, for example, focusses more on the material and gendered aspects of the home whilst the chapter on the indigenous domestic space looks more at its cultural aspects. Both are exploring the domestic space within a context of discourses of race. Both the chapter on the ship and the hotel explore the psychological or ontological dimension in thinking about how the domestic space is discursively constructed, either by the unnamed narrator of 'Karain' or by the churlish hotelier Schomberg. The trading station chapter places an emphasis again on the gendered aspects of the domestic

space but also on the political in terms of thinking about the operations of colonial power, or its insufficiency, in colonised territory. The closing chapter on the land is intended to broaden the scope of the project by exploring other etymological possibilities contained within the idea of the domestic. Taken as a whole, this series of studies serves to illustrate the fundamental significance of the domestic space to these writers and to these narratives, a significance which has, until now, been largely overlooked.

In Chapter Eight of *Almayer's Folly* two Dutch naval officers visit Almayer in his dilapidated riverside home. They are in pursuit of Dain Maroola, a Balinese prince whom they suspect of smuggling gunpowder, and believe Almayer will know of his whereabouts. As Almayer looks down from the verandah at the lifeless body concealed in the rear courtyard, which he believes to be that of Dain, his 'domestic-slave' Ali is depicted preparing the dining table for Almayer and his guests:

Behind them Ali moved noiselessly laying the table, ranging solemnly the ill-assorted and shabby crockery, the tin spoons, the forks with broken prongs and knives with saw-like blades and loose handles. He had almost forgotten how to prepare the table for white men. He felt aggrieved; Mem Nina would not help him. He stepped back to look at his work admiringly, feeling very proud. This must be right; and if the master afterwards is angry and swears, then so much the worse for Mem Nina.⁸⁵

The sudden shift of focus from a moment of dramatic tension to the quotidian and mundane is a characteristic feature of the novel, illustrating Conrad's innovative blending of the modes of imperial romance and realism. As such it is a moment which invites closer attention. One reading of this scene, for example, might see it as a stereotypical, and problematic, representation of the non-European subject. The simple task of arranging tableware appears fraught with difficulty for the childlike indigenous male. His efforts to arrange the crockery and cutlery suggests that, as a non-European, he is unaccustomed to a rational, ordered way of thinking.⁸⁶ His emotions are emphasised over his intellect, and his need of Nina's help suggests that he is insufficiently manly. His pride in accomplishing his task suggests that the process of instructing the 'natives' in the formalities of Western culture is also desirable and improving, legitimating the European presence in the East. Ali appears to acquire self worth through the practice of Western domesticity. It is a representation that seems to conform to many of the features of the colonial stereotype which Edward Said claimed were typical of 'Orientalism' in the late nineteenth century.

⁸⁵ Conrad, *Almayer's Folly*, p. 93.

⁸⁶ Said suggests that this was a common indicator of difference in Orientalist accounts of the East: Said, *Orientalism*, p. 49.

There is, however, a clear ambiguity in this display of European civility. The crockery is shabby and the cutlery is falling apart, undermining any assumption that the formalities of dining in Almayer's house reflect a more civilised way of life. His broken and unhygienic tableware suggests that he has fallen far short of the imperial ideal of domesticity. There is ambiguity too in Ali's anxious repetition of this domestic routine. He is aggrieved at the lack of help from Nina because he fears making a mistake, reminding us that this display of refinement is only maintained by the threat of violence, in this case Almayer's anger and verbal abuse. Almayer's ideas of good housekeeping appear to be maintained by the threat of punishment.

Thinking about Homi Bhabha's sense of the ambivalence of colonial discourse can also make us attentive to those things which seem to undermine the negative stereotype of the non-European. Bhabha asks us to consider how the language of colonialism was inherently unstable, particularly concerning the question of how such stereotypes could be sustainable over millennia, as Edward Said claimed in his seminal study of Orientalism.⁸⁷ For example, the passage registers the processes of *time* in various ways. The crockery and cutlery are subject to a process of decay and misuse. Ali is trying to recall his memory of the correct ordering of the tableware. The fact that he had 'almost forgotten' how to lay the table reminds us that sustaining the colonial presence requires a constant effort of memory. Similarly, imperial authority has no transcendental status when it is shown to require constant maintenance, continual duplication and reassertion of its patterns and structures of domination, which, as the decaying crockery and cutlery illustrates, do not exist outside of history. We might also consider that if colonial discourses presented a view of the Eastern 'other' as primitive and unchanging, the passage actually suggests that Ali *can* be altered in some way through his accumulation of knowledge of Western culture. In these ways we can see that the text seems to register what David Huddart describes as 'those hidden gaps and anxieties present in the colonial situation'.⁸⁸ Thus Conrad uses the domestic space, with its constant need for upkeep and maintenance, its continual performance of domestic routine, to explore the contradictions and anxieties at the heart of the colonial enterprise.

I use this scene as an example because it provides a useful illustration of the different ways that *Almayer's Folly* might be interpreted when we pay close attention

⁸⁷ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 71.

⁸⁸ David Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002) p. 2.

to the small details of everyday life which are everywhere in the novel. Whilst, as many critics have noted, Conrad makes use of stock characters which appear little different from those which we would find in the pages of more conservative colonial fiction in the period, there are other layers of meaning at work in the text which complicate or question such stereotypical representations.⁸⁹ In this case the environment, the setting, plays a part in undermining assumed differences between the civilised European and his colonised other by illustrating how the idea of a domestic space is itself open to interpretation. In other words, the instability of the spaces within which individuals operate problematises the stereotypical mode of representation on the level of characterisation. This has particular relevance to the home of Almayer which, as this scene suggests, is in such a state of decay and instability that we might question whether it could be thought of as a domestic one at all. If Europeans were considered to be civilised and superior in comparison to their colonial others, is there a point, this scene seems to ask, at which this belief no longer holds? This scene also illustrates the way that a place can be practiced in order to produce a certain kind of space, in this case a domestic one. But it also shows how that process is a fundamentally unstable one, always subject to the processes of change. Moreover, scenes like this one illustrate the point at which the concerns of spatial theory, certainly de Certeau's notion of 'space as a practiced place' which draws our attention to the way that individuals fashion and influence spaces, intersects with the concerns of postcolonial discourse theory and questions of representation. The idea of spatial practices as always in process can work as a useful tool in questioning the fixity of colonial discourse. In this light the table-laying scene provides a valuable illustration of the way that Conrad uses the home in *Almayer's Folly* to blur the line between the civilised European and uncivilised native.

Alice Meynell and the question of the 'Decivilised'

Indeed, this questioning is central to Conrad's introduction to the novel. Omitted from the original publication of *Almayer's Folly*, this introduction responded to the

⁸⁹ See, for example, Baxter, 'Geography and Law in *Almayer's Folly*', and Linda Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and The Imperial Romance*, p. 69.

article ‘Decivilised’, first published in 1891, in which the influential poet and critic Alice Meynell expressed her distaste for the kinds of exotic literature, and the authors, whose popularity was on the rise in the final years of the nineteenth century. Without identifying any specific writer the article nevertheless refutes apparent claims that such literature could possess a freshness or vitality otherwise lacking in metropolitan culture. Indeed Meynell disdains the imagined figure of the ‘colonial writer’ as naive and unsophisticated: ‘He writes, and recites, poems about ranches and canyons; they are designed to betray the recklessness of his nature and to reveal the good that lurks in the lawless ways of a young society. He is there to explain himself, voluble, with a glossary for his own artless slang. But his colonialism is only provincialism very articulate’.⁹⁰ To Conrad, Meynell’s article also seemed to register an aversion to the sorts of people which such literature depicted. Meynell’s use of the blanket term ‘decivilised’ suggested to Conrad that ‘not only the tales but, I apprehend, the strange people and the far-off countries also, are finally condemned in a verdict of contemptuous dislike’.⁹¹ In response Conrad questioned Meynell’s apparently reductive and secondhand idea of the non-European world and its inhabitants. ‘The critic and the judge seems to think that in those distant lands all joy is a yell and a war dance, all pathos is a howl and a ghastly grin of filed teeth, and that the solution of all problems is found in the barrel of a revolver or on the point of an assegai. And yet it is not so’.⁹²

Conrad was well qualified to challenge this stereotypical and simplistic view of the East which could be found in Meynell’s article, and more commonly in the pages of the imperial romance fiction of the day, having spent significant time in the Far East during his time in the English merchant navy. Challenging the stereotypical view of the East, Conrad asserted instead that there was ‘a bond between us and that humanity so far away’, and rather than viewing ‘the strange people and the far-off countries’ with distaste, he offered a rather different perspective: ‘I am content to sympathise with common mortals, no matter where they live: in houses or in tents, in the streets under a fog, or in the forests behind the dark line of dismal mangroves that fringe the vast solitude of the sea’.⁹³ The kinds of dwelling that people inhabited,

⁹⁰ Alice Meynell, ‘Decivilised’, *The Rhythm of Life and Other Essays* (London: John Lane, 1896) p. 8.

⁹¹ Conrad, p.3.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

Conrad implied, was no measure of how civilised or ‘decivilised’ they were. Instead Conrad appeared to advocate a different way of thinking which resisted the generalising tendencies evident in Meynell’s article which made a neat division between the civilised West and the ‘decivilised’ East.

As the table-laying scene illustrates, Conrad was concerned to use the setting of the home to question the kinds of discourse which upheld colonisation. And as Conrad’s reference to European and non-European dwellings in the introduction suggests, we might find further evidence of scepticism towards the dominant beliefs of the time concerning questions of racial difference when we pay close attention to the depiction of the various homes which feature in *Almayer’s Folly*. After all, the narrative that follows this introduction is one which is largely set in and around the dwellings of the inhabitants of Sambir, a fictionalised version of Tanjung Redeb, a riverside settlement located near the North East coast of Borneo which Conrad had visited a number of times in the 1880s. At a time when readers were accustomed to the far away places of Empire represented as exotic spectacle or pre-historic fantasy, *Almayer’s Folly* presented a far less romantic world where everyday life was shaped by the realities of imperial commerce. As Linda Dryden notes, ‘unlike the escapism of the imperial romance, Almayer’s world is governed by forces that dominate the real world’.⁹⁴ Whilst much critical attention has been paid to the way that Conrad subverts the conventions of the imperial romance through a more realistic rendering of the colonial setting, less attention has been paid to how Conrad uses the family home throughout the novel as a site to question some of the fundamental assumptions which underpinned colonial discourses in the period.⁹⁵ For example, in addition to the dilapidated home of Almayer and his family there are many other homes or dwellings which are key settings in the narrative. On the opposite bank of the river to Almayer is the residence of the rajah Lakamba and his ‘prime minister’ Babalatchi which provides the setting for the whole of chapter six. Another important setting is the home of Bulangi, a native of Sambir who shares his home with his three wives and their Siamese domestic slave Taminah. Overlooking the settlement is the imposing home of the Arab, Abdulla bin Selim, who monopolises trade in Sambir. The home of Almayer’s mother and father in Java also plays an important role in the narrative, as does the Vinck’s family home in Singapore where Nina lives for ten

⁹⁴ Dryden, p. 55.

⁹⁵ See also Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979)

years before being expelled by Mrs. Vinck. We might also think of the convent which Mrs Almayer was sent to as a young woman and Abulla's nephew Reshid's home, resplendent with luxurious European goods, as other significant spaces in the story. In this chapter I argue that Conrad presents the home in *Almayer's Folly* in a variety of ways which question stereotypical ways of thinking about racial difference. By drawing our attention to the domestic space as both a practiced place and one which is shaped by larger economic forces I show how Conrad uses the home to think through and challenge dominant ways of thinking about the East during the period of high imperialism.

Mimicry and menace in the Almayer parental home

At the beginning of chapter one, resisting the call of his wife to return to his house for supper, Almayer thinks back to happier times when he first arrived in Macassar to work in the shipping firm of old Hudig:

His father, a subordinate official employed in the Botanical Gardens of Buitenzorg, was no doubt delighted to place his son in such a firm. The young man himself was nothing loth to leave the poisonous shores of Java, and the meagre comforts of the parental bungalow, where the father grumbled all day at the stupidity of the native gardeners, and the mother from the depths of her long easy-chair bewailed the lost glories of Amsterdam, where she had been brought up, and of her position as the daughter of a cigar dealer there.⁹⁶

There are two key details here which register a degree of scepticism towards the idea of Europeans as essentially civilised in comparison to their colonial others. The first is the reference to 'meagre comforts'. There is a limit to the degree to which Mr and Mrs Almayer have succeeded in domesticating this space, given that it is comfortable, but only to a point. This may be attributable to Mr Almayer's limited income, given that he is only a 'subordinate official' at the Botanical gardens of Buitenzorg. If this is the case, then it raises the question of whether the degree to which a people are civilised is more a measure of material wealth than any inherent

⁹⁶ Conrad, p. 6.

or transcendent quality. By this measure, the quality of being civilised appears more contingent upon questions of economics rather than some other, ahistorical criteria.

The second detail is that if the Almayers have only partly succeeded in domesticating the interior of their home, then the exterior garden is equally problematic. As we shall see with the short stories 'An Outpost of Progress' and 'The Planter of Malata', Conrad explored various aspects of the colonial enterprise through depictions of the cultivation of the land. The failure to cultivate the land effectively was, in the case of Kayerts and Carrier, both indicative of their general incompetence and emblematic of their lack of engagement or investment with the land and the local population, despite official claims about the civilising aims of the colonial enterprise. Similarly, the advent of a more aggressive form of commercial imperialism, which signified the emptiness of any claims to the civilising ideals of colonial powers, was explored through the cultivation of artificial silk fibre in 'The Planter of Malata'. The cultivation of the land in these stories, which I read more broadly as a form of domestication, is used to explore the efficacy and legitimacy of the colonial enterprise. That the Almayers' family garden is symbolic of colonised territory on a larger scale is evident in the nature of Mr Almayer's employment in 'the Botanical Gardens of Buitenzorg'. This kind of garden was, of course, not created as a space of recreation for colonial employees but was instead utilised by the Dutch government for horticultural and agricultural testing in order to maximise their economic returns. The Almayer family garden, it is implied, is merely an extension of the Dutch colonial project, in miniature. Mr Almayer's plans to transform this place from, we might assume, a condition of wild nature, into a garden organised in line with European ideas, are evidently frustrated by the 'stupidity' of the gardeners. The process of cultivating a space in the correct way is unstable because it seems to depend upon the understanding and cooperation of the natives, or the required degree of skill by the colonisers to translate their wishes into clear and understandable instructions. Either way, the process of imposing a dominant culture within colonised space appears to be fraught with difficulty. At the same time, Mr Almayer's hostility towards the native gardeners appears to call into question the idea of the Dutch presence as a civilising and improving force. It appears instead, like Almayer's threat of physical violence towards Ali, to be indicative of the latent aggression that underpins the colonial enterprise.

To return to the question of native 'stupidity', we might also read this as a sign of the difficulty inherent in the process of colonisation which creates the

potential for deliberate misinterpretation or subversion. Mr Almayer assumes that the native gardeners will effectively participate in a process of mimesis, a seamless duplication of colonial ideas and ideals. Yet his recourse to racist stereotypes in blaming the gardeners and describing them as ‘stupid’ also reflects an anxiety that his own sense of identity, which is also linked to his competence as a professional ‘gardener’, is under threat. Furthermore, the language that he uses is unstable because it must be translated, interpreted, and understood, creating the possibility of slippage between his intentions and designs and their realisation by the colonised. Within this process of mimicry, as Bhabha has suggested, lies the possibility for menace.⁹⁷ By being instructed by their Western superiors, the colonised are afforded the ability to re-appropriate the language of the colonisers in a way other than that originally intended. As Bill Ashcroft suggests, ‘when colonial discourse encourages the colonised subject to “mimic” the coloniser, by adopting the coloniser’s cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits’.⁹⁸ Seen in this light we might detect signs of resistance or subversion in the actions of the native gardeners. What Mr Almayer, confident in his assumption of racial superiority, assumes to be native stupidity, might actually be a conscious resistance to colonial authority. The gardeners may well understand what Mr Almayer wants but choose instead to frustrate his efforts to transform the space in a way he deems aesthetically pleasing and appropriate to European norms. Thus Conrad presents the domestic space as constructed through practices to highlight the flaws and contradictions within the discourses which upheld colonisation.

Domesticity as performance in the Almayer residence

Whilst Almayer’s parental home provides some subtle indication of the instability of colonial authority, registered in the minor frustrations arising from the process of establishing and maintaining a family home in colonised territory, all such subtleties are cast aside in the case of Kaspar Almayer’s home in Sambir. As an image of the colonial presence Almayer’s decaying riverside home suggests that the dominant European culture is barely there at all. The house is notably porous and insubstantial;

⁹⁷ Bhabha, p. 91.

⁹⁸ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 125.

there are ‘torn rattan screens’ and ‘no ceiling’; there is an absence of solidity to the structure, open sides, indeterminate boundaries, shadowy corners.⁹⁹ As he approaches the house near the beginning of chapter one, Almayer is disconcerted by the sight of his rival Abdulla bin Selim’s dwellings which overlook the settlement. In comparison to Almayer’s home, which appears unstable and cluttered, Abdulla’s residence is ‘founded solidly on firm ground with plenty of space’.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, the dwellings of Abdulla’s compound have ‘a suggestion of paraffin and lamp glasses’ that seem more modernised and domesticated than Almayer’s dilapidated house. In contrast, the half-light emanating from the uncovered paraffin lamp which lights Almayer’s verandah is ‘lost [...] in the obscurity amongst the rafters’.¹⁰¹ Similarly, the dusty door with its ‘half obliterated words – ‘Office: Lingard and Co.’, illustrates how a once vital presence no longer seems to be of any importance.¹⁰² In addition, the Almayer home signifies the blurring of the dominant binary opposition of culture/nature which is central to colonial discourse. If the home was once a symbol of Lingard’s dream to establish a site of culture, commerce and civilisation on the banks of the Pantai river then it has long been overrun by the forces of nature, hosting the ‘high revels’ of an ‘assembly of moths’, the ‘spirited music’ of swarming mosquitoes and a monkey who ‘peer[s] and grin[s]’ at Almayer.¹⁰³¹⁰⁴ The attribution of human qualities to the insect and animal life undermines the privileging of human agency in the Almayer family home.

That Almayer’s house does not correspond to any dominant standard of domesticity is evident. On a simple level the standard of Almayer’s dwelling serves to question the dominant triumphalist narrative of European colonial expansion, indicating instead that the life of the colonist was not necessarily one of unbridled wealth and success. In *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*, Linda Dryden

⁹⁹ Conrad, p. 14.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁰³ Although Tom Lingard is a relatively peripheral figure in this novel, he is the recurring protagonist in the ‘Lingard Trilogy’ which begins with *Almayer’s Folly*. The trilogy-in-reverse also includes Conrad’s second novel *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896) and *The Rescue* (1920) and chronicles the declining fortunes of Lingard & Co’s commercial enterprise on the banks of the Pantai river in North East Borneo. Tom Lingard is partly based on the English trader Captain William Lingard, who established a trading post in Tanjong Redeb in 1886. (see Allan Simmons, *Joseph Conrad: Critical Issues* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 26-27).

¹⁰⁴ Conrad, p. 14.

illustrates the extent to which the realistic presentation of domestic conditions in *Almayer's Folly* signals Conrad's deviation from the conventions of the popular colonial fiction of the time. The dirt and squalor which characterises the Almayer home undermines assumptions that it is Europeans who bring a higher standard of living to the East. As Dryden notes, 'in direct conflict with assumptions that European colonisers impose cleanliness and order on the picturesque but haphazard domestic arrangements of the East, it is a European, Kaspar Almayer, who corrupts his exotic environment'.¹⁰⁵ Whilst, undoubtedly, Conrad's realism can be seen to challenge the kinds of discourse which underpinned imperial romance, my interest here lies more in the way that Conrad consciously draws our attention to domesticity *as a performance*. The squalid condition of the family home is shown to be in marked contrast to the formality of the behaviour which Almayer, and his servants, display. In other words, whilst the physical structure of the home might appear to be falling apart, it is apparent that there are clear modes and patterns of behaviour which seem to be firmly in place. Part of Conrad's ironising of Almayer's situation comes in the contrast between these two aspects of the narrative. An example of this comes when the old maid first appears from behind the red curtain to serve Almayer's meal. We are told 'an old Malay woman [...] busied herself in setting upon the table a plateful of rice and fish, a jar of water, and a bottle half full of geneva. After carefully placing before her master a cracked glass tumbler and a tin spoon she went away noiselessly'.¹⁰⁶ The important detail to note is the juxtaposition of the 'cracked glass' and 'tin spoon' and the *careful* placement by the old Malay woman. The mode of behaviour is more overtly mannered and refined than seems necessary given the condition of the home. It seems likely too that the old woman has been instructed to display this kind of decorum by Almayer, if we recall that Ali has also been trained to adhere to a set of European domestic practices. The condition of being civilised is therefore presented as more a question of a practice which must be sustained and repeated than any natural or inherent quality. By showing how the Almayer home is maintained through domesticity as a form of performative social practice Conrad challenges prevailing ideas of European cultural superiority as an inherent and essential condition.

¹⁰⁵ Dryden, p. 55.

¹⁰⁶ Conrad, p. 15.

A further example can be found in chapter seven in the account of Mrs Almayer's re-appropriation of Almayer's curtains and his furniture. We are told that there is nothing to sit on in the large interior room that opens out on to the verandah because 'Mrs Almayer in her savage moods, when excited by the reminiscences of the piratical period of her life, had torn off the curtains to make sarongs for the slave girls, and had burnt the showy furniture piecemeal to cook the family rice'.¹⁰⁷ Earlier critics of the novel have read this display of wilful destruction as expressions of Mrs Almayer's essentially 'savage' nature. Anne Tagge, for example, sees Mrs Almayer as a type of Malay woman common in colonial fiction who is presented as 'supremely vengeful and lawless'.¹⁰⁸ More recently however Susan Barras has offered an alternative reading which sees Mrs Almayer's act of vandalism as a more complex and knowing manifestation of native resistance to colonial authority. Whilst the tearing down of curtains and burning of furniture is undoubtedly an act of violence 'it can also be interpreted as a contrastingly silent protest by Mrs Almayer, using the medium of costume to express contempt not only for her European husband but also for European culture in general'.¹⁰⁹

If there is a performative quality to Mrs Almayer's act of vandalism then we can also find evidence of performance in the narrative regarding Almayer's description of the interior of the home. Almayer refers to 'the big room, opening on the verandah [as] his sitting-room when, in the company of white men, he wished to assert his claims to the commonplace decencies of civilisation'.¹¹⁰ Almayer assumes that his whiteness confers on him a quality of racial difference and superiority which transcends his actual physical circumstances. The interior of the home is a more refined or respectable place simply because Almayer likes to think it is and he uses a term which appears to afford it a special quality. Yet the presence of dirt, insects and animals makes Almayer's display of respectability absurd. Our attention is drawn in this instance to the way that the domestic space is produced through verbal performance. The 'sitting room' is actually no more civilised or refined than the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁰⁸ Anne Tagge, "'A Glimpse of Paradise': Feminine Impulse and Ego in Conrad's Malay World", *Conradiana*, 29.2 (1997) p. 109.

¹⁰⁹ Susan Barras, "'Sly Civility?': Mrs Almayer's and Mrs Willems's Performances of Colonial Resistance in *Outcast of the Islands* and *Almayer's Folly*' in *Joseph Conrad and the Performing Arts* ed. by Katherine Isobel Baxter and Robert Hampson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) pp. 29–44. (p. 35).

¹¹⁰ Conrad, p. 69.

verandah or the cooking shed, and the idea of it being special in some way is only constructed through the practice of naming. It is a moment that calls to mind the hotelier Schomberg's habit of calling the unremarkable patch of ground bordering his dining room in Conrad's *Victory* (1915) a 'piazza'. The condition of gentility is, as in the case of Schomberg's piazza, something which exists only in Almayer's imagination; the border which he constructs between himself and the exotic landscape which surrounds him is exposed as simply artificial. Conrad ironises Almayer's assumption of cultural superiority by repeatedly drawing our attention to the gap between the form and the substance of his domesticity.

Signs of commerce in the family home

I have suggested that a key feature of *Almayer's Folly*, which distinguishes it from the popular adventure fiction of his day, was a perspective which Conrad outlined in the introduction to the novel which posited that Europeans and non-Europeans were bound by a common humanity. Critics have often cited as evidence a passage in the text focalised through Almayer's daughter Nina who, having returned to Sambir after spending ten years in a European family home in Singapore, is left disabused of any notions of European cultural and racial superiority or essential difference. Reflecting on the assumed differences between the European and non-European, 'Nina saw only the same manifestations of love and hate and of sordid greed chasing the uncertain dollar in all its multifarious and vanishing shapes'.¹¹¹ As Allan Simmons notes, 'far from simply contrasting the European and Oriental races, *Almayer's Folly* demonstrates their essential similarities, in particular their shared rapacity, a theme Conrad inherits from Balzac'.¹¹² The primacy of economics over other concerns as shaping influences on the community of Sambir is something that Katherine Baxter also explores in 'Geography and Law in *Almayer's Folly*'. Baxter details the uncertain legal status of Sambir in light of competing claims by the British and the Dutch in the period which, for a brief period, saw the possibility of the British extending territorial claims into the region of Eastern Borneo in which *Almayer's Folly* is set. Once British plans for expansion are aborted the territory falls instead into the nominal hands of the Dutch, although the settlement is of little significance

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 35.

¹¹² Simmons, p. 36.

to them. The novel illustrates the way that the Dutch were more interested in dealing with Sambir expediently as an economic problem or opportunity rather than as one over which they might exercise political or legal influence in any meaningful way. This is illustrated in the novel when the Dutch 'make clear their preference for trade with Almayer's Arab rival, Abdulla, rather than legal and administrative support for the lone resident Dutchman. Trade trumps citizenship and statehood for the Dutch officials in Sambir, despite the rhetorical symbolism of their flag-bearing visit'.¹¹³

That the community is acutely sensitised to the powerful economic forces which circulate outside this insular riverside settlement is evident when Dain Maroola first appears in Sambir. The question of trade dominates discussion in the homes of both the impoverished and the wealthy within the settlement: 'What would he sell? What would he buy? Those were the questions broached eagerly by the inhabitants of the bamboo houses built over the river. Even in more substantial buildings, in Abdulla's house, in the residences of the principal traders, Arab, Chinese and Bugis, the excitement ran high, and lasted many days'.¹¹⁴ Gossip about the prospect of trade pervades the homes of the community, irrespective of class or ethnicity. Conrad also shows how commerce shapes the materiality of the home in a way that troubles an otherwise stereotypical representation of the non-European. A valuable example can be found in chapter six when Dain visits the residence of the Rajah Lakamba. On one level the scene constructs an image of the fearsome native ruler of Sambir which is little different from the kind of stock character common to the popular colonial fiction of the day. The description of Lakamba's house, located in a stockade behind a water-gate which features 'beams blackened by the smoke of many torches' and 'groups of armed men in the dark shadows', creates the impression of a distinct and sinister 'otherness' of the non-European residence.¹¹⁵ Inside the audience chamber we are told there is 'a rude arm-rack, with three rifles with fixed bayonets in it'.¹¹⁶ Dain is greeted by the sight of Lakamba's sleeping bodyguard 'in a confused heap of brown arms, legs and multicoloured garments'. Lakamba then emerges in a state of semi-nakedness from a large curtain behind which 'there was a burst of feminine chatter'.¹¹⁷ There is clearly little distinction

¹¹³ Baxter, p. 74.

¹¹⁴ Conrad, p. 44.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 58.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 59.

between the public and private within Lakamba's residence. The combination of these features tends to conform to a stereotypical mode of representation which would have been familiar to Conrad's late-Victorian readers: the overt sensuality of the non-European, the representation of the natives as undifferentiated and passive, the presence of arms signifying the underlying threat of violence and barbarism. This is certainly a home which appears uncivilised in contrast to European norms and emphasises the essential otherness of Lakamba and his domestic arrangements.

Yet this stereotypical mode of discourse is troubled by details which remind us that Malay and European are mutually implicated in the world of commerce. The audience chamber, for example is 'curtained off, by heavy stuff of European manufacture, for that purpose' and is lit by a 'European lamp with a green shade'.¹¹⁸ The commercial relationship in this example appears to be one that is equivocal or mutually beneficial ('of European manufacture, for that purpose') rather than one which explicitly suggests a dynamic of exploitation and subjugation. Lakamba's home is better understood less as 'decivilised' than as hybridised as a consequence of the commercial relationships that have developed in the region between European and Malay. Just as we see in the 'table-laying' scene in Almayer's home, in Lakamba's residence we find a combination of the stereotypical and the historically contingent. Thus Conrad shows how the realities of commerce infuse the lives of both European and Malay in a way that mitigates any dominant view of racial difference.

Almayer and the gendered spaces of the home

Cedric Watts has identified how the narrative of *Almayer's Folly* can actually be read as a sub-plot within a larger 'covert plot' which concerns the hidden machinations of Almayer's more powerful rival, Abdulla bin Selim.¹¹⁹ Abdulla's desire for commercial dominance intersects with Dain Maroola's challenge to Dutch rule in Bali, and these two elements form 'the matrix of local politics upon which the narrative is constructed'.¹²⁰ In other words the narrative is focused on a situation and

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 58.

¹¹⁹ Cedric Watts, 'The Covert Plot of *Almayer's Folly*: A Structural Discovery', *Conradiana*, 15.3 (1983), pp. 227-230.

¹²⁰ Robert Hampson, 'Verdi in Berau', p. 88.

a character which are actually extremely marginal to the locus of power in the region. Jacques Berthoud sees this as an illustration of Conrad's radical departure from the conventions of imperial romance: 'One could say that [*Almayer's Folly*] has no protagonist, in the sense that all its characters, even the most insignificant, are presented as the protagonists of their own lives'.¹²¹ Robert Hampson extends this idea further by comparing *Almayer's Folly* to Jean Luc Godard's *Letter to Jane* (1972), a film in which we are never quite sure where the focus of our attention should lie. As Hampson notes, 'Almayer's dreams and domestic problems are foregrounded in the narrative but Almayer proves to be a marginal figure even in his own household'.¹²²

This marginalisation can be seen in the disparity between Almayer's assumption of authority which is expressed in his explicit gendering of the various spaces of the home, and his actual control over events as they proceed in the narrative. Through Almayer Conrad uses the home to show how the imperial presence is uncritically guided by ideology. As we have seen, Michel De Certeau encourages us to see space not as monolithic or unified but constituted by divergent practices. One individual's idea of how a space is meant to function or operate may not align with another's. In *Almayer's Folly* our attention is repeatedly drawn to the disparity between Almayer's conception of the home as Eurocentric and patriarchal, as evidenced through his words and actions, and the way that it is perceived and practiced by those around him. As the opening description of Almayer's house makes clear the home is divided physically into the accessible verandah where Almayer sleeps and the women's room in the interior. This reflects the gendered division of social space in which the verandah corresponds to the public world of work and the interior feminised space corresponds to the private sphere. Valerie Mashman describes how the verandah or *ruai* in a traditional Malay home was considered to be the male or public area whilst the interior *bilik* or family room was designated as female.¹²³ For Almayer this represents a natural and hierarchical division of social space in which the important business of work and politics is

¹²¹ Jacques Berthoud in Joseph Conrad, *Almayer's Folly* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) p. xxii.

¹²² Hampson, p. 88.

¹²³ Valerie Mashman, 'Warriors and Weavers: A Study of Gender Relations among the Iban of Sarawak' in *Female and Male in Borneo: Contributions and Challenges to Gender Studies* ed. by Vinson H. Sutlive Jr. (Williamsburg, VA: Borneo Research Council, 1991) vol. 1. pp. 231-70.

conducted by men in the public sphere whilst women remain largely subservient and out of sight in the interior of the home. Almayer conducts his business dealings in the public space of the verandah with Dain, Abdulla and the Dutch officers, and considers the feminised space of the house to be of little consequence. For example, when Dain enquires as to the source of the noise which emanates from behind the red curtain Almayer dismissively states that 'It is nothing just some women'.¹²⁴ Almayer believes that 'all you women are crazy' and that his wife and daughter should be excluded from the sphere of business and politics on the basis of their irrationality: 'I want you both to keep away from the house, and let me tend to my business in peace'.¹²⁵ He privileges this masculinised space as the centre of meaning within the home. Furthermore, he assumes a role of patriarchal authority and is constantly tended to by his domestic slaves and Nina. We are told for example that Nina is called 'to minister to her father's wants, as was her wont every evening'.¹²⁶

Yet Conrad creates some critical distance between the reader and Almayer by showing how his assumptions about the way that the home functions are misplaced and illusory. After all, whilst Almayer assumes that all matters of consequence take place in front of the curtained-off section of the house we are told that he is 'unaware of what was going on on the other side'.¹²⁷ Almayer's blinkeredness is further evidenced in a later scene when he returns to the home following Nina's escape with Dain. Approaching the boundary between the verandah and the interior Almayer hesitates and, even in the absence of the women of the house, appears reluctant to breach the imaginary gendered boundary within the home: 'He went over to the doorway where the red curtain hung down in motionless folds, and hesitated for a moment before pushing it aside with his shoulder as if breaking down some solid obstacle'.¹²⁸ This ideological boundary has the force of a physical barrier to Almayer. His hesitation seems to register the fear that there is something that lies behind the curtain which threatens his Eurocentric, imperialist worldview and that drawing back the curtain will reveal a world which functions on entirely different terms to the one that he inhabits. Perhaps we might see this as the boundary between colonial and post-colonial space. In the previous chapter of the novel, Almayer's

¹²⁴ Conrad, p. 42.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 44.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 50.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 41.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 148.

inability to accept Nina's difference is expressed by an attitude which maintains a division between European and Malay. Begging Nina to stay Almayer insists that Dain is a 'savage': 'Between him and you there is a barrier that nothing can remove'.¹²⁹ Now back in his home Almayer halts before the curtain because the space behind it contains the secret of Nina's racial identity, a hybrid identity which Almayer has routinely refused to accept throughout the narrative. As Hampson notes, one aspect of Almayer's 'folly' is his inability 'to take into account the implications of his daughter's hybridity'.¹³⁰ The home represents, then, a different kind of space in which Almayer's assurance of his own originary identity is exposed as merely imaginary. It is instead the kind of space which Bhabha suggests we might think of as 'continually, *contingently*, "opening out", remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference – be it class, gender or race'.¹³¹

As I have suggested, in simple terms Almayer's conduct and rhetoric construct the verandah as the centre of power within the home, yet the narrative, much of which is set within those assumed marginal spaces (the cooking shed, the concealed corridor leading to the women's room, the rear courtyard), undermines those assumptions. The manner in which the place is practiced, through Mrs Almayer's and Nina's habit of eavesdropping on Almayer, Nina's discreet meeting with Dain in the trees at the rear of the compound, and Mrs Almayer's frequent plotting with Babalatchi in the cooking shed, overrides the assumed gendered boundaries signified by the physical demarcation of space. This is something which I will suggest Conrad depicts elsewhere in his fiction. In relation to 'An Outpost of Progress' I show how Mrs Makola negotiates space in a way that transgresses the restrictive gendered boundaries of the home. Whilst she remains largely out of sight and appears to be consigned to undertaking menial domestic duties within the Makola home, her influence is visible beyond those discrete boundaries through, for example, the way that she indicates a knowledge of the territory beyond the traders' compound in her negotiations with the tribe of 'strangers'. Her presence and agency is indicated in terms of the effect that she has on events within the compound which belies her assumed subordinate status. Susan Barras has similarly explored how Mrs Almayer transgresses the gendered boundaries of the home through acts of non-

¹²⁹ Ibid., p.134.

¹³⁰ Hampson, p. 85.

¹³¹ Bhabha, p. 219.

verbal resistance. Mrs Almayer's general demeanour of hostility, her 'witch-like' appearance and destructive behaviour might at first glance create an impression of her as irrational or unthinking. Instead Barras draws on Erving Goffman's theories of impression management and James C. Scott's model of the 'public' and 'hidden' transcript to examine the various ways that her behaviour might be explained instead as a more conscious and knowing performance of resistance and subversion. Whilst she may be contained physically within the marginalised spaces of the interior, her actions transgress those boundaries. And, whilst her verbal displays of hostility are clearly intended to communicate her dissatisfaction with Almayer to her immediate neighbours, her outbursts 'under cover of socially sanctioned disruptive patterns of behaviour, provides a hidden transcript of protest which can be read as aimed more generally at colonial domination'.¹³²

Babalatchi's navigation of the separate spheres

If Almayer shows how the imperial presence is uncritically guided by ideology, Babalatchi shows an acute awareness of how such authority operates and how it can be disrupted. When a corpse is discovered floating in the river Babalatchi admonishes the men who have gathered with their wives and children to catch a glimpse of the 'dead stranger': "Go away," he said sternly, "and send your women to their cooking fires, which they ought not to have left to run after a dead stranger. This is men's work here".¹³³ Importantly Almayer is amongst those gathered at the water's edge who hear Babalatchi speak. Here, in the public sphere, Babalatchi articulates a perspective which aligns with a dominant view of social space: women belong in the home by their 'cooking fires', whilst the important work of business and politics is conducted by men in the public sphere. In Scott's terms we might think of this as Babalatchi complying with the public transcript of female (and native) subordination. The social order which appears to be temporarily disrupted by the congregation of women in the public sphere, eager to discover the identity of the corpse in the water, needs to be quickly restored. Yet throughout the narrative Babalatchi carefully negotiates and prioritises those feminised spaces, such as the

¹³² Barras, p. 36.

¹³³ Conrad, p. 74.

rear courtyard where the women ‘under Mrs Almayer’s superintendence’ cook the daily rice and the hidden corridor which leads to the women’s room in the Almayer house, which are deemed, at least in Almayer’s eyes, to be of no significance or interest.¹³⁴ We are told for example that Babalatchi is seen ‘strolling about in an abstracted way on the verandah, skulking in the passages, or else popping round unexpected corners, always willing to engage Mrs Almayer in confidential conversation’.¹³⁵ Like Heyst’s servant Wang in *Victory*, Babalatchi seems to possess an almost supernatural ability to manoeuvre his way around the living spaces of his ‘superiors’. Accordingly, he carefully maintains a performance of deference and compliance with a dominant designation of space which, when Almayer is in the company of the Dutch officers, is both gendered and racialised. We are told, for example, that after listening in on negotiations between the Dutch and Almayer in the hidden corridor with Mrs Almayer, he discreetly leaves from the rear of the house and approaches the verandah ‘slowly and cautiously’ and is careful not to encroach on to the verandah, taking his place discreetly on the top step ‘his feet on the steps below, ready for flight should his presence prove unwelcome’.¹³⁶ Conrad thereby draws our attention to the way that the domestic space is simultaneously constructed in line with dominant ways of thinking and repeatedly subverted through the practices of the native individuals in a way that undermines colonial authority.

The ‘white nest’ of Mrs Vinck

Conrad also uses the family home to ironise the civilising ideals of European colonists. In chapter two we are told of Lingard’s decision to take the six-year-old Nina with him away from Kaspar and Mrs Almayer in Sambir to Singapore to the family home of his ‘good friends’ the Vincks who will ‘take care of her and have her taught properly’.¹³⁷ Some ten years later Nina unexpectedly returns on a steamer under the care of Captain Ford having been expelled from the Vinck’s family home by Mrs Vinck. Having attracted the attentions of a ‘young fellow from the bank who used to ride to the Vinck bungalow early and late’, Nina is blamed for the unwanted

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 46.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 103-4.

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

attentions she brings on the Vinck's home and is forced to leave, whilst also being subject to racist abuse by the Vinck sisters.¹³⁸ On a simple level the narrative undermines the idea of the European family home in Singapore as being any more civilised than the homes of the inhabitants of Sambir. Captain Ford indicates that Mrs Vinck has expelled Nina because of wounded pride and jealousy rather than any higher ideals as she was shocked that the 'young fellow' was interested in Nina instead of 'that Emma of hers'.¹³⁹ He holds a similarly dim view of the Vinck sisters who he describes as 'no better than dressed up monkeys'.¹⁴⁰ Singapore, it seems, is no higher up the evolutionary scale than Sambir. Similarly, the narrator adopts an ironic tone when describing the 'virtuous Mrs Vinck's indignation' and her 'virtuous resolve'.¹⁴¹ Moreover, even though Nina has been resident in Singapore for some ten years it takes little time for the 'civilising' work to which she has been subjected to quickly ebb away. She sees 'with vague surprise the narrow mantle of civilised morality, in which good meaning people had wrapped her young soul, fall away and leave her shivering and helpless as if on the edge of some deep and unknown abyss'.¹⁴² The dominant narrative of the colonial mission as inaugurating a process of permanent and irreversible progress is thereby called into question through Nina.

Thinking of the Vinck's home as a space which is produced by practices that, to use De Certeau's words 'orient it, situate it, temporalise it', the home is meant to perform the function of civilising Nina.¹⁴³ We might read the Vincks' as a house of mimicry, a discursive space in which Nina will be brought up to think and behave like a European. Yet the swiftness with which Nina is expelled from the home points to a deep anxiety amongst the European colonisers, specifically Mrs Vinck, and the fundamental ambivalence at the heart of the discourses which uphold colonisation. Whilst Nina may be provided with all the benefits of an 'advanced' civilisation, and she is being conditioned to behave like a European, she is, at the same time, prohibited from ever being considered equal to her white peers, particularly the Vinck sisters. This is something that Nina appears to have been well aware of for some time, discerning that the attentions she receives are an affront to Mrs Vinck's assumptions of racial superiority: 'there was no doubt in her mind that the principal

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 33.

¹⁴³ De Certeau, p. 117.

cause of Mrs Vinck's indignation was the thought that such a thing should happen in a white nest, where her snow-white doves, the two Misses Vinck, had just returned from Europe'.¹⁴⁴ The home is a space which is designed to include and exclude Nina simultaneously. Yet this process of civilising Nina appears to have afforded her a power which Mrs Vinck's is no longer able to contain and that her own authority is therefore under threat. The process of making Nina 'almost the same, *but not quite*' has exposed what Ashcroft describes as 'a crack in the certainty of colonial dominance'.¹⁴⁵ In other words, whilst Mrs Vinck may feel humiliated on a personal level that her white daughters are considered less desirable than the 'half-caste' Nina, her reaction registers a deeper anxiety at the heart of colonial authority.

Nina and the othering of Taminah

Nina returns from Singapore, as we have seen, stripped of any illusions of the superiority of European culture, seeing only 'the same manifestations of love and hate' in the lives of both European and Malay.¹⁴⁶ Her presence in Sambir also connects the Vinck's home in Singapore to the home of a native Malay, Bulangi, his three wives and children and their domestic slave Taminah. This point of equivalence is drawn in the narrative through the bond that Nina forms with Taminah, a detail of some significance in the plot which has attracted little critical attention. Taminah is presented as an abject and pitiful figure, the subject of verbal and physical abuse at the hands of Bulangi's wives whose home she shares, and the subject of unwelcome sexual attentions from Babalatchi. As Katherine Baxter has noted, the characterisation of Taminah might be seen as problematic to the extent that, in being described as possessing the 'strange, resigned apathy of half-savage womankind' she appears to reinscribe stereotypes of gender and race.¹⁴⁷ Yet Taminah is also Siamese, a detail which frames the abuse that she suffers from Bulangi's Bornean wives within a geographical and historical context which complicates the representation of life in the Bulangi home as one of stereotypical savagery. Significantly, Taminah's only meaningful relationship is, at least in the early part of

¹⁴⁴ Conrad, p. 34.

¹⁴⁵ Ashcroft, p. 125.

¹⁴⁶ Conrad, p. 35.

¹⁴⁷ Baxter, p. 16.

the novel, with Nina. It is clear that Nina has singled Taminah out specifically because whilst she speaks to Taminah ‘the other inhabitants of Sambir seldom or never heard the sound of her voice’.¹⁴⁸ We might ask why Nina would take pity on Taminah when it seems that nobody else in the settlement does. The most obvious explanation is that Nina recognises that Taminah is the object of abuse and discrimination within the Bulangi household, just as she was herself in the Vinck’s home in Singapore. Thinking of the domestic space as produced through practices rather than being defined in terms of ethnicity or race encourages us to notice points of correspondence or patterns of equivalence in the way that the space is practiced. Our attention is therefore drawn to the similarities in their circumstances, Nina being the subject of racial abuse and discrimination by the Vinck family. Both have a shared experience of othering within the home based on race or ethnicity. By creating this kind of symmetry in the text, Conrad draws our attention to the fact that similar forms of exclusion and oppression exist in both the homes of the colonisers and the colonised. Conrad’s desire to foreground ‘a bond between us and that humanity so far away’ also extends in this instance to depicting the more unsavoury aspects of human nature that both European and Malay appear to share. In both cases, the tension within the home reflects an underlying anxiety about the threat that the Other produces within the dominant social group.

‘Pallou’s Taloi’ and the unhomely in the colonial setting

I want to turn now, briefly, to a comparable moment of colonial anxiety in the work of Louis Becke, which occurs within a domestic setting, and provides a useful point of comparison with the Vinck’s home in *Almayer’s Folly*. Interestingly the story ‘Pallou’s Taloi’, from Becke’s first published collection *By Reef and Palm* (1894) shares some features of the plot of *Almayer’s Folly*.¹⁴⁹ The light skinned Taloi, for example, is ‘adopted by a gentleman in Papeite’ who sends her ‘to Sydney to

¹⁴⁸ Conrad, p. 30.

¹⁴⁹ Whilst there is evidence that Conrad was an admirer of Becke’s early short stories and some critics have identified similarities in the earlier stories of Becke and some of Conrad’s later fictions (see Ann Lane Bradshaw, ‘Joseph Conrad and Louis Becke’, *English Studies*, 86.3 (2005), 206–225) the details highlighted here are coincidental. Conrad began *Almayer’s Folly* in 1889 and it is unlikely that he would have been familiar with Becke’s stories prior to their publication in 1894 (see Ian Watt in Conrad, p. xix.)

school'.¹⁵⁰ This is similar to the account of Tom Lingard's 'adoption' of Mrs Almayer and her subsequent education in a Samarang convent. Similarly, Taloi's expulsion from the school after a fight with a racially abusive white girl has echoes of Nina's expulsion from the Vinck's house. Like Mrs. Vinck, the unnamed 'Misses' who run the school think of Taloi as 'downright wicked' and are happy to see her leave.¹⁵¹ Taloi has also been exposed to European forms of education and instruction, and although she identifies with her Polynesian heritage ('I belong to Apatiki, and was born there') reflects, like Nina, the hybridised culture of the region.¹⁵²

The narrator first encounters Taloi as he recuperates in the home of his trader friend Tom Oscott. Her husband Pallou has murdered her French suitor and they are on the run from the French authorities. Assuming that she is a stereotypical South Sea Islander the narrator is instead taken aback by her manner and conduct as she enters the home:

[She] was a dainty little creature with red lips, dazzling teeth, hazel eyes, and long, wavy hair. The first thing I noticed about her was that instead of squatting on a mat in native fashion she sank into a wide chair, and lying back inquired, with a pleasant smile and in perfect English, whether I was feeling any better. She was very fair, even for a Paumotuan half-caste, as I thought she must be, and I said to Pallou, "Why, any one would take your wife to be an English woman!"¹⁵³

Whilst the narrator's response might seem to be light-hearted, his bemusement at Taloi's refined and confident manner also belies his sudden disquiet at being confronted by an image of his own displacement. As I have argued, in *Almayer's Folly* Conrad repeatedly draws our attention to the way that the domestic space is produced through performative social practice in a way that undermines the coloniser. A similar unsettling is taking place here. Taloi's manner of sitting, her show of concern and reassuring smile, her relaxed manner and cultivated speech, are *in and of themselves* artificial and strange to the narrator. Taloi's former education in the Sydney school indicates that her sense of etiquette is learned behaviour. Yet her European manners seem strange in the South Pacific location. This is a moment in

¹⁵⁰ Becke, p. 50.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 51.

which the narrator recognises something David Morley describes as ‘the irreducible presence of alterity, in ourselves and in others’.¹⁵⁴ The European narrator deals with the anxiety that Taloi’s presence generates through a strategy of humour, yet it is the same anxiety that Mrs Vinck’s feels at Nina’s presence in her home which she deals with through a process of racist exclusion. As we have seen, Almayer deals with Nina’s hybrid presence in the home instead through a process of denial.

Taloi’s presence in Becke’s story also provides a useful illustration of the connection between the related concepts of hybridity, mimicry and the uncanny. Whilst she identifies as ‘a full-blooded South Sea Islander’ she is conversant in the language and practices of the European colonisers and beguiles the narrator through her mimicry of Western norms.¹⁵⁵ In doing so she transforms the home of the European trader into a distinctly uncanny space; the narrator has momentarily lost his moorings, his sense of place disturbed by Taloi’s seamless performance of colonial mimicry, her uncanny ability to make herself appear at home. He is reminded that whilst Taloi might be native to the region, she is un-homed by the European presence. At the same time the identity of the coloniser is similarly displaced.

A comparable moment of un-homeliness occurs in *Almayer’s Folly*. At the beginning of chapter seven, prior to the discovery of the body thought to be Dain Maroola in the Pantai river, Almayer wakes to find himself alone in the house. Unaccustomed to the lack of domestic activity in the home Almayer is quickly unsettled: ‘The sense of the unwonted solitude grew upon him suddenly and in the unusual silence he caught himself longing even for the usually unwelcome sound of his wife’s voice, to break the oppressive stillness which seemed to his frightened fancy to portend the advent of some new misfortune’.¹⁵⁶ In the absence of human activity Almayer is disturbed by an ‘oppressive stillness’ which makes him long for the familiar signs of a miserable and mundane domesticity. In other words, in this quiet moment when the space is not being practiced domestically, the reality of its strangeness becomes disturbingly tangible to Almayer. It is a moment of disquiet that is strikingly similar to other uncanny moments in Conrad’s fictions. As I will argue in relation to ‘Karain: A Memory’, the narrator’s attempts to discursively construct the interior of the schooner as a domestic space are repeatedly troubled by a sense of anxiety which he discerns as ‘a fearful near sense of things invisible, of things dark

¹⁵⁴ David Morley, *Home Territories*, (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 265.

¹⁵⁵ Becke, p. 50.

¹⁵⁶ Conrad, p.70.

and mute, that surround the loneliness of mankind'.¹⁵⁷ Similarly, we shall see how Kayerts and Carlier are prompted to domesticate the interior of their hut as a way of alleviating the anxiety induced by the wilderness that surrounds them which brings with it 'a suggestion of things vague, uncontrollable, and repulsive, whose discomposing intrusion excites the imagination and tries the civilised nerves of the foolish and the wise alike'.¹⁵⁸ In each instance the construction of the domestic space repeatedly figures as an anxious response to the uncertainties generated by the encounter with the exotic and unfamiliar. A similar anxiety unsettles Almayer's mother on the 'poisonous shores of Java', safely ensconced in the family bungalow in Java, who 'from the depths of her long easy-chair bewailed the lost glories of Amsterdam, where she had been brought up'.¹⁵⁹ Conrad shows us that whilst these domestic spaces are constructed to form a bond between the colonised territory and the metropole, in these strange and unfamiliar locations the colonial presence is never quite at home.

¹⁵⁷ Joseph Conrad *Tales of Unrest*, p. 30.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 86.

¹⁵⁹ Conrad, *Almayer's Folly* p. 6.

Chapter Two: Indigenous Domestic Space:

Malay Sketches and 'The Lagoon'

In this chapter I examine the presentation of indigenous domestic spaces in Frank Swettenham's *Malay Sketches* and 'The Lagoon' by Joseph Conrad. By 'indigenous domestic spaces' I include huts, house-boats, makeshift homes and tents constructed 'on the move', as well as the extended family homes which often feature in these stories. My objective is to explore the variety of ways that these domestic spaces appear to re-inscribe or challenge dominant ideas about non-Europeans in the late nineteenth century. How, for example, do these domestic spaces function within colonial discourses? Does the way of life presented in these narratives appear to be more primitive and less 'civilised' than the life that readers in metropolitan centres would have enjoyed? If so, does this seem to be one way of confirming that colonial expansion or the protection of overseas territories was justifiable and necessary? Or is the picture of life behind closed doors more ambiguous? If these representations are intended to serve a particular set of interests, how effective are they? Do they 'do the work' they are intended to do? Or can we detect inconsistencies and anxieties about the colonial enterprise within these narratives? Across a range of short stories, I examine a variety of domestic spaces in the colonial setting. I suggest that the indigenous domestic space is a key site in which official attitudes about the efficacy and legitimacy of the colonial project are most clearly visible, particularly in the tales of Frank Swettenham. Whether consciously or otherwise, Swettenham repeatedly returns to images of domesticity in order uphold an idea of Malay society as fixed in a time and space anterior to that of the civilised European narrator. The seeming informality of the 'sketch' which constructs an image of the author as disinterested observer belies a more serious intent, in line with Swettenham's position of responsibility within the British colonial administration. However, in their insistence on the otherness of the non-European, I argue that these stories also betray deep anxieties and doubts about the superiority of Europeans and Western civilisation in comparison to that of the East.

I read Swettenham's *Malay Sketches* alongside Conrad's early short story 'The Lagoon'. Whilst some critics have suggested that Conrad's early colonial fictions draw on the same kind of primitivist discourse which underpins Swettenham's sketches, I identify evidence in this often-overlooked tale which points

to a more undecided view of the East and a more knowing awareness of the strategies of primitivist discourse which Swettenham's tales uncritically reinforce. This view becomes visible in Conrad's presentation of domestic space, which draws our attention to the question of equivalence between coloniser and colonised in a way that troubles European assumptions of racial and cultural superiority.

'With a Casting-Net'

The story 'With a Casting-Net' forms part of the collection of *Malay Sketches*, published in 1895, by Frank Swettenham, who, one year after its publication, became the first Resident General of the Federated Malay States.¹⁶⁰ In the story Swettenham describes the collection of dwellings which, over a period of two days, make their way along the Perak river, transporting the Sultan, his family and the neighbouring chiefs and their families, to a place called 'Pasir Telor' for the annual harvesting of turtle eggs and a fishing contest where 'noble and peasant meet in generous rivalry of skill'.¹⁶¹

Fifteen or twenty large house-boats and several bamboo rafts containing about one hundred and fifty people make an imposing procession. The rafts are simply floating houses, with mat walls and a high thatched roof and are manned by crews of from four to sixteen polers; but the boats are graceful and picturesque barges [...] over the stern half of the boat is built a palm-thatched covering on a slight wooden frame, while curtains secure privacy. Inside this house, [...] sit and lie on mats and cushions the owner and his family or friends.¹⁶²

The narrator marvels at the splendour of the 'pleasure-fleet', with its drummers and buglers, flags and 'scarlet-bordered white umbrellas' which 'makes a brave show and a considerable noise'.¹⁶³ As the procession comes to rest and the inhabitants of these

¹⁶⁰ Ralph J. Crane, Jane Stafford, Mark Williams, *The World Novel in English to 1950*. Part 2, Ch.4, P. 7., (Oxford Scholarship Online: June 2018) <10.1093/oso/9780199609932.001.0001> accessed 23.06.20,

¹⁶¹ Frank Swettenham, *Malay Sketches*, (Singapore: Graham Brash (Pte) Ltd, 1984) p. 219.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 213-14.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

‘houses’ disembark, the ‘ladies’ appear in ‘a blaze of brilliant-coloured silks, of painted *sarongs*, cloth-of-gold scarves, and embroidered gauze veils [...] gold bracelets, necklaces and bangles [...] rings flashing with the light of diamonds and rubies’.¹⁶⁴ The figures complete a delightful scene in which the ‘scorching sun shines down [on] the yellow sands and sparkling river, with its burden of picturesque boats, and gives light and shadow to a charming picture’.¹⁶⁵

The author appears unequivocal in his enthusiasm for this unique local custom, and the account seems to present a positive image of Malay society as being at peace, confident, harmonious and vibrant. Royal authority appears secure in this province because the houseboat suggests that the ruling elite are safe, and ‘at home’ wherever they are transported. Accompanied and propelled by the ‘polers’ who inhabit less luxurious houses, the flotilla appears to reflect the stability of the Malayan social order, where ‘noble and peasant’ live in harmony and participate in games of friendly rivalry. However, whilst the narrator makes only a passing reference to himself as a ‘Western spectator’ in the recounting of the day’s events, the event takes on particular significance when read in light of the introduction to the story:¹⁶⁶

Whilst it was to Perak that the first British Resident was appointed, and this State is now the most wealthy, advanced and prosperous of all those under British influence, the Malays still maintain their traditions and observe their honoured customs as though railways and steamers, education and sanitation had no more part in their lives than when Albuquerque was striving to effect a landing on the shores of Malacca.¹⁶⁷

In this light, Swettenham’s depiction of the Sultan’s procession and ‘generous rivalry’ becomes more ambiguous. In the narrator’s view, despite the wealth and prosperity that the British have brought to the region the Malays persist in preserving elements of their cultural heritage which appear to provide no economic benefits and are, therefore, of questionable value. The pageant is indicative of a particularly regressive strain in the Malay character, which refuses to dispense with old habits and customs in the face of the untold advantages of Western modernity. In contrast to

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 215.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 216.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 219.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 211-12.

the ‘railways and steamers’, to all things new, clean and efficient, the natives still persevere with the archaic, the anachronistic, the traditional. But it is not simply that these mobile homes might be novel or strange to the ‘Western spectator’ and his metropolitan readers. The important point is that the house boat is a signifier of an *essential* difference between the British and the Malays, a difference that confers on the British a burden of responsibility to govern and modernise. This individual form of indigenous domestic space is being used to illustrate a more general point about the Malay character. Swettenham may provide details of the materials and design of these vessels but in this short story he is primarily interested in the domestic space as metaphor for Malay alterity.

***Malay Sketches* and Orientalist discourse**

Swettenham’s essentialist view of Malays, and his division of the world into one which sees the British on the side of modernity and progress and a ‘subject’ race as rooted in an unchanging and primitive past is characteristic of the kind of thinking which Edward Said explored in his seminal study *Orientalism* published in 1978. Said conceived of Orientalism variously as ‘a form of thought for dealing with the foreign’, a concept which describes the West’s portrayal of ‘the East’, and the body of knowledge of the Eastern world accumulated by Western philosophers, scholars, writers, artists and colonial administrators over centuries.¹⁶⁸ Whilst citing sources from earlier periods Said’s main focus was on the use to which Western knowledge of the East was put in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the context of imperial expansion, Said showed how Western governments (primarily those of France and Britain) often relied on reductive and stereotypical constructions of the Orient and Orientals to legitimise appropriation of Eastern territories. Invariably, Orientals were presented as ‘backward’, uncivilised and irrational and Eastern civilisation as distinct from the West, whose institutions, philosophies, scientific and technological innovations placed it in a rightful position of dominance over the East. Said notes,

the essential relationship, on political, cultural and even religious grounds, was seen – in the West [...] to be one

¹⁶⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 46.

between a strong and a weak partner [...] the Oriental lived in a different but thoroughly organised world of his own, a world with its own national, cultural and epistemological boundaries and principles of internal coherence.¹⁶⁹

In this respect Swettenham's depiction of Malay traditions and customs as remaining intact despite the great advances of Western civilisation would appear to be entirely in line with Said's theory of Orientalism. The British are certainly positioned as the 'strong partner', bringing wealth, technology and education to the 'weak', regressive East. The flotilla of house boats provides a fitting illustration of both an outmoded way of living and a resistance to progress that necessitates Western intervention. Moreover, in the context of Malaya in the period when the British extended political and commercial influence, the house boat as symbol of the Royal Court also serves another important function in the narrative which connects to an impression of both Malaysian authority and the broader society. Swettenham states in the opening to the story that Perak is a state where 'the rulers can claim the clearest genealogy and the longest recorded descent'.¹⁷⁰ Yet at the same time the floating court in this story produces an image of authority that is unmoored or unfastened from the territory. Unlike the British, who bring 'sanitation' and 'railways', suggestive of a more tangible and permanent purchase on the land (and on power), Malay authority, in the form of this pageant, appears unfixed, tenuous or insecure, or even, perhaps, merely performative.

In a variety of ways life in *Malay Sketches* is depicted as unstable: we find this manifested as the danger posed by the specifically Malay form of 'homicidal mania' ('Amok'), we see Malay society as under threat from the natural world ('The Tiger'), or we find it in the Malay tendency to settle conflict through brutal violence rather than diplomacy ('The Passing of Penglima Praun Semaun'). Against these images of instability, the West is positioned in binary opposition, embodying order, reason and security. In this respect 'With a Casting-Net' is more than an impartial account of a charming spectacle; it is evidence in its depiction of Malay society that British involvement in Malaya is vindicated and that *it works*. The domestic space plays an important role in Swettenham's Orientalist narrative of 'Malay disorder' resolved by 'British order'. As the Sultan's houseboat travels the waterways of Perak it produces the impression that the once unruly and violent landscape is now

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁷⁰ Swettenham, p. 211.

thoroughly domesticated. The Western spectator appears to be surveying a society which is at peace and harmonious, relaxed and co-ordinated before his imperial gaze. The landscape which is home to the ‘dwellers on the riverine’ and the ‘men from the neighbouring villages’ is noticeably conflict-free.¹⁷¹ In other words, the house-boat functions symbolically as the ‘Royal House’, unifying the disparate and unseen elements of society. Yet because the pageant is one of many traditions which, in Swettenham’s view, now have little relevance to the ‘modern world’, the Sultan’s power, as evidenced by the highly performative, spectacular and formal nature of the day’s proceedings, is *only* symbolic. The world of ancient ritual has now been superseded, as the author makes clear, by a modern world of railways and steamers. The *actual* job of administration, of ‘education and sanitation’ is now, as Swettenham states in his introduction, necessarily in the capable hands of the British.

As Said suggested, Orientalism produces an image of the East which positions it as inferior to the West in a variety of ways. It also produces an image of the West whereby its actions towards the East are presented as altruistic. Said’s account of Arthur James Balfour’s justification of British rule in Egypt to the House of Commons in 1910, for example, emphasises how Orientalist narratives present Western intervention and involvement in the East as a selfless act: ‘I think experience shows that they have got under it far better government than in the whole history of the world they ever had before, and which not only is a benefit to them, but is undoubtedly a benefit to the whole of the civilised West’.¹⁷² In relation to British Malaya Swettenham later wrote about how ‘the British Government was invited, pushed, and persuaded into helping the Rulers of certain States to introduce order into their disorderly, penniless, and distracted households, by sending trained British Civil Servants to advise the rulers in the art of administration’.¹⁷³ In this account we might think that British reluctance to become entangled in Malay affairs was overcome through coercion or diplomacy on the part of the stricken Malay rulers or that the British stood to gain nothing in return for their expert advice. It is also interesting to note that Swettenham uses the image of the ‘household’ as the site of imperial activity and intervention. In other words the colonial project is a task which

¹⁷¹ Ibid. p. 215, p. 221.

¹⁷² Said, p. 33.

¹⁷³ Frank Swettenham, *British Malaya: An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaya* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1906, reprint: Oxon: Routledge, 2018) p. vi-vii.

is best understood as a domestic one, putting the Malay 'house' in order, rather than anything to do with the world of politics or commerce. This discourse of domesticity does the job of sanitising and smoothing over a process which may have actually involved violent confrontation or was also accompanied by significant commercial opportunity. We might say that Swettenham's Orientalism is one that makes use of the domestic to reinforce a particular image of the East as helpless and unable to manage its own affairs, and the West as one that embodies structure, order and the reassuring stability of the home.

'The Tiger'

Elsewhere in the collection, more 'conventional' kinds of domestic space feature, such as the village huts and houses of the rural community or the 'picturesque, well-built and commodious' houses of the Sultan which provide the setting for a number of stories.¹⁷⁴ Yet the centre of interest in most of these stories is an illustration of how different, or novel, life in the tropics is compared to life in the metropole. Various kinds of domestic space provide a recognisable context for the Western reader – the domestic space as haven or refuge from the outside world; the domestic as the space of culture and civilised life – but in various ways this space is inhabited, invaded or threatened by something entirely alien to Western civilisation, something that shows these domestic spaces to be 'uncivilised'. In line with Said's concept of Orientalism, such accounts appear to inscribe an 'absolute demarcation between East and West'.¹⁷⁵ For example, the story 'The Tiger' recounts the terror that grips a Malayan *kampong* when a tiger is encountered by a young girl returning from her early morning domestic routine at a 'nearby stream, there to bathe and fetch fresh water for the day's use'.¹⁷⁶ The mundane details of domestic life contrast with the extraordinary and terrifying presence of the tiger, and the 'strange beauty' of a cool Malay dawn is shattered by the alarm that soon spreads throughout the village.¹⁷⁷ In the ensuing panic young and old join together in the snaring and killing of the tiger.

¹⁷⁴ Swettenham, p. 45.

¹⁷⁵ Said, p. 39.

¹⁷⁶ Swettenham, 'The Tiger', p. 13.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

On one level the story might be read as an illustration of native resilience and hardiness in the face of a hostile nature. The rapidity of the villagers' response to the presence of the tiger and the courage shown by the young chief and his villagers, advancing 'shoulder to shoulder' into the copse where the tiger lies in wait, create a positive impression of a functioning indigenous community.¹⁷⁸ But on another level the elision of the domestic and the natural worlds reinforces the sense of difference between European and Malay. The domestic space, which begins at the dwellings in the kampong and extends to the nearby stream, also encompasses the 'jungle trees and orchards, the long rank grasses and tangled creepers' within which the tiger lies in wait.¹⁷⁹ In native culture the domestic space, as the zone of 'civilised' life, is also inhabited by wild nature. The domestic space thereby does the work of reinforcing stereotypes of non-Europeans as 'uncivilised' and close to nature. Tigers may be uncommon, but the readiness of the villagers to deal with one ('sometimes the tiger comes about a village, and it is necessary to get rid of so dangerous a visitor') illustrates that it is a *component* of Malay life that makes it distinctly different from life in the West.¹⁸⁰ In other words nature is part of the fabric of domestic life – the space of nature and the domestic space are intertwined in native society. This is a world, as Said suggests, with its own 'principles of internal coherence', where nature and culture merge.¹⁸¹ The domestic therefore helps reinstate an idea of an essential difference between East and West.

De-historicising the non-European

In examining these stories I have suggested that there is a link between the specific examples of indigenous domestic space depicted and an underlying, essential quality in the colonised subject, and Malay culture more generally, which these spaces signify. These stories are not merely innocent or impartial representations, as Swettenham's preface to the stories would suggest: 'These pages contain no statistics, no history, no geography, no science, real or spurious, no politics, no

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁸¹ Said, p. 46.

moralising, no prophecy'.¹⁸² This avoidance of empirical detail is something which Said claims is characteristic of Orientalist discourse: 'abstractions about the Orient, particularly those based on texts representing a "classical" Oriental civilisation, are always preferable to direct evidence drawn from modern Oriental realities'.¹⁸³ The author's claim that the stories contain 'no geography' is true in the sense that the specific detail of a particular location, habitation or dwelling is less significant than the more general point, or element of the stereotype, which these places re-inscribe. It is also interesting that the author states that these stories contain 'no history'. In other words, it is part of Swettenham's strategy of representation to *de-historicise* this culture. Said claims that a consistent feature of Orientalist thought is the notion that the subject race exist outside of history ('the Orient is eternal, uniform').¹⁸⁴ Along similar lines, Anne McClintock claims that in colonial discourse indigenous peoples are symbolically displaced into a zone which she terms '*anachronistic space* [...] colonised people [...] do not inhabit history proper but exist in a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of human agency – the living embodiment of the archaic "primitive"'.¹⁸⁵ Orientals do not share the same conception of time or progress as Europeans but live, as has been noted, in an unchanging universe unaffected by the advances of Western Enlightenment thought. And it is true that in stories such as 'The Tiger', there is an absence of *specific* detail. The names of individuals, the specific locale, the date or time of year, are often absent, which make them function less as accounts of real events and more as symbolic representations. They perform the trick of suggesting that the particular conditions and themes presented in these stories are not contingent but permanent, and that their subjects are not unique but archetypal. The domestic setting invites us to think of these as relatable, everyday stories, but the strategies of representation have the effect of speaking for the whole of Malay culture.

The generalising tendency of Orientalism, or colonial discourse in general, is something which David Spurr claims is fundamental to its mode of representation. Exploring a range of rhetorical strategies which occur repeatedly in the journalism, travel writing and accounts of colonial administrators in the period, Spurr writes, 'in

¹⁸² Swettenham, back cover.

¹⁸³ Said., p. 301.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 301.

¹⁸⁵ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 30.

colonial discourse every individual weakness has its political counterpart – uncivilised society, according to this logic, being little more than the uncivilised mind and body writ large'.¹⁸⁶ The traits of individuals are inseparable from the kinds of society which those individuals inhabit and, in turn, require the intervention of more steadfast and rational Europeans. Spurr notes, 'the qualities assigned to the individual savage – dishonesty, suspicion, superstition, lack of self-discipline – are reflected more generally in societies characterised by corruption, xenophobia, tribalism, and the inability to govern themselves'.¹⁸⁷ I am suggesting that the same kind of mechanism operates in *Malay Sketches*, and that the salient or abiding theme in each of these stories, which infuses or impacts upon the domestic space – tradition, the natural world, tribal conflict, the supernatural, the theatrical – is always indicative of a particular trait in the 'native' character – regression, savagery, violence, superstition, duplicity – each of which is an element of the reductive stereotype which reinforces a sense of difference between coloniser and colonised.

Ambivalence as a sign of colonial anxiety

At the same time, this mode of colonial discourse, which produces an image of the colonised as simultaneously recognisable and 'other', corresponds closely to Homi Bhabha's concept of 'mimicry'. Described as 'one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge', colonial mimicry 'is the desire for a reformed recognisable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite'.¹⁸⁸ As with Swettenham's depiction of indigenous domestic space in *Malay Sketches*, colonial discourse establishes a kind of commonality between West and East only to eradicate that bond by rendering the colonised subject, or in this study the indigenous domestic space, as 'other' to Western norms. These spaces illustrate how the Victorian ideal of domesticity and domestication appears to be incomplete or in a more primitive stage of development within Malay society – these domestic spaces provide shelter and community, but they also display signs of barbarity. The 'sketches' use the indigenous domestic space in order to establish a

¹⁸⁶ David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire*, (London: Duke University Press, 1993) p. 76.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁸⁸ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 85–86.

shared frame of reference with a metropolitan audience, whilst at the same time emphasising the ‘otherness’ and degradation of Malaya and the Malay, *almost the same but not quite*.¹⁸⁹

In analysing the stories of Frank Swettenham in this chapter I have drawn largely on Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism in order to identify certain strategies of representation that appear to be present. I have suggested that Swettenham uses these individual indigenous domestic spaces as signifiers of more general, essential characteristics which reinforce an idea of the Malay (or in Said’s terms the ‘Oriental’) as distinct from, and in a variety of ways, inferior to, the European. However, it might be argued that these stories do not always succeed in the job of representing Malays and their way of life as entirely ‘other’ to the West. Moreover, whilst Said’s concept of Orientalism provides a way of identifying certain assumptions and strategies of representation that perpetuate a reductive and derogatory image of the East, it does not encourage us to consider how a subject race might actually resist or contest those ‘styles of thought’ which serve to subordinate them. A central criticism of Said’s work has been the scant regard his study pays to the potential for colonised subjects to subvert or resist such representations. For example, Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman have noted that *Orientalism* pays little attention to the capacity of the indigenous subject as constitutive agent.¹⁹⁰ An alternative reading of ‘With a Casting-Net’ might see the bond that appears to exist between Raja and peasant as an indication of the strength of native resistance to colonial power – a sign of unity which the British authorities might find difficult to contain, despite their proclaimed technological and scientific advantages. We might also see the Sultan’s pageant, which Swettenham sees as representing an essentially regressive aspect of the Malayan, as signifying *resistance* to the homogeneity of Western modernity. Furthermore, despite the author’s claim, in the preface, to ‘faithfully portray [...] that inner life’ of the Malay, there are spaces indicated in the text which are inaccessible and beyond the reach of the imperial gaze, particularly those private, domestic spaces, which carry the Sultan and his family and chiefs downriver.¹⁹¹

As I have outlined briefly above, in relation to the concept of ‘mimicry’, more recent work in the field of postcolonial studies has adopted a more sceptical

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Williams and Chrisman, p. 16.

¹⁹¹ Swettenham, back cover.

approach to the efficacy of colonial discourse and has argued instead that, as Bhabha proposed in *The Location of Culture*, ‘the point of intervention should shift from the ready recognition of images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the *processes of subjectification* made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse’.¹⁹² As Bhabha has noted, the processes of signification are contradictory, or ‘ambivalent’, because they strive to make the colonised subject both alien *and* familiar at the same time: ‘colonial discourse produces the colonised as a social reality that is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible’.¹⁹³ Colonial discourse brings the indigenous subject into the realm of Western knowledge yet insists on its alterity. It works to *domesticate* and *alienate* the colonised subject at the same time; to provide convincing proof of how different a subject race is but to do so by employing familiar, and shared, points of reference. Consequently, Bhabha suggests, the aims of colonial discourse are never fully met.¹⁹⁴

‘James Wheeler Woodford Birch’

The story ‘James Wheeler Woodford Birch’ provides a useful example of how the ambivalent nature of colonial discourse is registered on the level of the everyday when we take a closer look at a seemingly straightforward representation of domestic space. Swettenham recounts the regrettable story of his predecessor, Woodford Birch, who was stabbed to death by a group of men acting on instructions from a local Malay chief, Maharaja Lela. Throughout 1874, Woodford Birch’s attempts to implement reforms in his role as British Resident of Perak were met with suspicion and resistance by the native elites who, according to the narrator ‘preferred the state of uncontrolled lawlessness to which they were accustomed’.¹⁹⁵ Consequently, as the British pressed ahead with their plans of ‘establishing administrative authority [and] collecting revenue’, the Sultan Abdullah and his chiefs plotted to get rid of Birch in

¹⁹² Bhabha, p. 67

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 70–71.

¹⁹⁴ I have used the singular term ‘colonial discourse’ here primarily because this is the term that both Spurr and Bhabha use. More recent work in the field tends to use the plural ‘colonial discourses’, which acknowledges how discourses vary in relation to gender, class, cultural and historical specificity etc.

¹⁹⁵ Swettenham, p. 227, p. 230.

order to curtail the spread of British influence in Perak.¹⁹⁶ On the 1st November, 1875, after travelling throughout Perak to issue proclamations stating the new terms of British rule, Birch arrived in Pâsir Sâlak by boat. Met by a group of ‘sixty or seventy’ armed men, Birch never the less instructed his assistants to post the new proclamations on the shutters of a local shop, then retired to a nearby Chinese bath-house on the bank of the river. It was here that Birch was assassinated by a man named Pandak Indut who, ‘followed by three or four others shouting *âmok, âmok* [...] leapt on to the floating timbers and thrust their spears through the open space in the front of the house’.¹⁹⁷ Birch’s body surfaced briefly in the river, before the Resident was slashed ‘over the head with a sword. He sank and was not seen again’.¹⁹⁸ The story concludes by detailing the British reprisals, which included the execution of the Sultan Abdullah, Maharaja Lela and others, and a more forceful campaign of intervention in domestic affairs in Perak. As Swettenham notes, ‘by the action which his death made necessary, the State of Perak gained in twelve months what ten years of “advice” could hardly have accomplished’.¹⁹⁹

On one level the story evidences many of the traits which Said identified as Orientalist in its construction of the East. This is a story, for example, which instantiates the binarism of Orientalist discourse, Birch’s story an unequivocal tale of good versus evil. The epigraph, for example, prepares us for a tale of ‘a true and brave and downright honest man’, who, we come to see, is murdered because ‘he interfered with murderers and other evil-doers’.²⁰⁰ The story has a legitimating function in making clear the need for the stabilising presence of the British in light of the degenerate and violent nature of Malay society. Similarly the homogenising tendency of Orientalism is in place throughout, casting the Malay rulers and their people as all alternately, lazy, violent and resistant to progress, because ‘every change is regarded by the Malay with suspicion and distrust’.²⁰¹ Following Bhabha though, my interest here lies less in the way that the story reinforces an idea of the Malay as the degenerate other to the implied Western narrator, but to draw attention instead to *how* this idea is constructed. The scene and setting of Woodford’s murder is particularly significant in this respect.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 232.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 242.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 246.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 230.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

A description of the Chinese bath-house precedes the killing. We are told that ‘this bath-house was of the type common in Perak, two large logs floating in the stream, fastened together by cross-pieces of wood, and on them built a small house with mat sides about five feet high, and a roof closing on the sides but leaving two open triangular spaces at front and back’.²⁰² What is interesting about this passage is the way that the description familiarises or normalises something that might otherwise seem very strange or exotic to the Western reader. This domestic space is constructed of the most insubstantial materials (‘mat sides about five feet high’) and built on a rudimentary raft that floats in the river, yet it is referred to as a ‘bath-house’. Language confers an identity upon the thing described which makes it relatable to the Western reader. We might think of this, on a rather mundane level, as an example of colonial ambivalence – it determines to signify something as ‘other’ but has to do so within a familiar frame of reference. The encounter with an alien culture and civilisation seems to involve a process of framing it in familiar terms, bringing it into a system of signification that simultaneously determines to emphasise the *otherness* of something or someone, but does so in a way that brings it into a *recognisable* network of meaning. Furthermore, to see this also as an example of colonial mimicry would be to recognise a gap between the subject that is being described, the place where Birch was murdered, and the signifiers used to describe it: the ‘bath-house’. The passage seems to offer an example, in other words, of the ‘desire for a reformed recognisable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite*’.²⁰³ In comparison to Western norms it becomes apparent that the bath-house contains neither a bath, nor is it really a house, and that the words Swettenham uses point to an insufficiency in the language intended to contain the colonised other. It provides an example of the way that, according to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, ‘colonialism brings with it a sense of dislocation between the environment and the imported language now used to describe it, a gap between the ‘experienced’ place and the descriptions the language provides’.²⁰⁴ To think of this as an example of mimicry is to see that it is not simply the description of the everyday domestic space which we should distrust or regard as insufficient to describe the reality of this particular setting. It suggests instead that the whole manner of representing an unstable Malay society should also be viewed with some scepticism.

²⁰² Ibid., p. 240.

²⁰³ Bhabha, p. 85-86.

²⁰⁴ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, p. 161.

Through the domestic space, then, we see the cracks in the colonial discourse which attempts to contain the Malay and the larger society within which they exist.

‘Amok’

One final story from Swettenham’s collection of *Malay Sketches* provides a good illustration of both how the indigenous domestic space is intended to function within colonial discourse and how we can also detect certain anxieties about the process of representation. ‘Amok’ is an account of a multiple murder by a man named Imam Mamat ‘(that is Mamat the priest)’ who visits the house of his brother-in-law on the Perak River.²⁰⁵ After formally greeting the occupants of the house he proceeds to murder them one by one with a ‘golok’ knife and spear, including his wife, the brother-in-law and his wife, and two of their four young children. A neighbour rushes to help the family but is repelled and the murderer leaves the house, encountering an old friend, Uda Majid, by the river bank, who he then kills. Imam then absconds prompting a search for the killer by the village chiefs and a party of two hundred men. Two days later he appears at the house of a man named Lasam. He attempts to force his way inside but is driven back and sustains a fatal injury at the hands of Lasam. The story concludes with a list of the names and ages of those killed and wounded. The narrator then considers how this ‘quiet, elderly man of devotional habits’ could have developed ‘the most inhuman instincts’.²⁰⁶ Details of Imam’s autopsy reveal that whilst he died from a wound on the outer side of his right thigh, “the membranes of the right side of brain were more adherent than usual”.²⁰⁷

In one respect the dwellings of both Imam’s brother-in-law and Lasam are presented as discreet, private spaces which house extended families, separate from the ‘outside’ world. Imam’s spontaneous act of murder is all the more abhorrent because it is a violation of the domestic space, a violent intrusion into the sanctity of the family home. Yet this is tempered in both cases by the mention that Imam leaves the first house with ‘two spears which he found in the house’ and that whilst the second contains ‘four men, five women and seven children [...] the only weapon

²⁰⁵ Swettenham, p. 39.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 43.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

they possessed was one spear'.²⁰⁸ The presence of weapons within Malayan houses appears to be commonplace and illustrates that these domestic spaces are distinctly different from the Victorian ideal of the domestic space as refuge from the outside world. Indigenous domestic spaces are more deeply embedded within a violent society. Imam attempts to enter Lasam's home by violent means but he is also repelled with the same force of violence. These domestic spaces are not distinct from public life. They are uncivilised spaces. Violence permeates the boundary between the public and the private, rendering these homes as distinctly 'other' to Western norms. Yet, we might also see that despite the aims of the story to reinstate the distinction between European and Malay, there are indicators throughout the story that signify a lack of conviction within colonial discourse. The first indication might be seen in the introduction to the story. The author introduces the theme as follows:

Mention has been made of the Malay *amok*, and as what, with our happy faculty for mispronunciation and misspelling of the words of other languages, is called "running amuck," is with many English people their only idea of the Malay, and that a very vague one, it may be of interest to briefly describe this form of homicidal mania.²⁰⁹

There are a number of points of significance in this introduction. The first is the acknowledgement that Western knowledge of the East in the metropole may be founded primarily on reductive stereotypes, "running amuck" being many English people's 'only idea of the Malay', and that this in turn produces a very superficial or 'vague' understanding of people in distant parts of the world. We might see this as an unintended recognition of the precarious and slippery process of representing the colonised subject. The second is the author's dismissive suggestion that this is probably unimportant and that the misrepresentation of a foreign culture, 'our happy faculty for mispronunciation and misspelling of the words of other languages', is a harmless and amiable quirk of the English character.²¹⁰ In other words, in constructing knowledge of our 'others' the English are prone to *getting it wrong*, to perpetuate certain inaccuracies and untruths based on a mishearing or misunderstanding of a foreign language. The author's task is to produce a corrective representation which clarifies any confusion on the part of the Western reader with a

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 38.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

more accurate version of the Malay, bringing the colonised subject *inside* the sphere of Western knowledge. At the same time the Malay possesses a fixed, and recognisable essence, which differentiates it from the Western reader, ‘the Malay *amok*’, which makes it the ‘other’ of the Westerner and places it *outside* of Western civilisation. There is then, on one level, a form of binarism at work here, in that the author differentiates the reader as rational subject from the Malay as embodiment of uncontrollable and savage urges. This appears to correspond to Said’s assertion that the West defined itself in relation to the East ‘its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience [...] European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self’.²¹¹ However, as I have suggested, the process of securing this distinction, which appears to pull in two opposing directions at once, is as Bhabha claims, ambivalent, which in turn threatens the structure of knowledge which distinguishes coloniser from colonised, ‘the colonised as a social reality that is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible’.²¹²

To return to the question of domestic space, I have suggested how the domestic works within a larger process of stereotypical discourse, as ‘*almost the same but not quite*’, the killings depicted being both a violation of the domestic space but also being expressions of a violent society and an uncivilised, violent people. The account of these killings is intended to illustrate a specific manifestation of an essential difference between the civilised European and the savage Malay by contrasting the everyday domestic setting with the inexplicable act of violence. Colonial discourse is unstable, as Bhabha claims, because it pulls in two opposing directions. By providing a scientific explanation for the Imam’s killing spree the author intends to show that the Oriental exists *outside* of Western culture and civilisation. Yet at the same time, this gap dissolves with the revelation of *similarity* in the findings of the surgeon. In the process of reinstating the stereotype of the Malay as essentially, permanently violent, with a fixed identity, Swettenham also does so by recourse to scientific proof, a mode of knowledge based on change, discovery, the revelation of the new. We also have a second element of instability or division because the account contains those elements of ‘realistic’ detail (‘Just before sunset on the 11th February, 1891’) and the evidence from the murderer’s post-

²¹¹ Said, p. 1., p. 3.

²¹² Ibid., pp. 70–71.

mortem, which are proffered as proof of essential qualities.²¹³ This appears to encapsulate Bhabha's claim that the stereotype is an ambivalent mode of knowledge because it 'vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated'.²¹⁴ The account works to provide an explanation of the essential, the 'Malay *amok*', yet this form of stereotypical discourse 'is continually under threat from diachronic forms of history and narrative, signs of instability'.²¹⁵ Swettenham's use of the indigenous domestic space undermines his intention to 'bring home' the reality of difference between Malay and Western reader.

An alternative vision of the East: 'The Lagoon'

Whilst, as I have suggested, Frank Swettenham employed a certain creative licence in producing his 'sketches' of Malaya, they were certainly intended to be read as memoir, or as having an anecdotal quality, as distinct from the fictional treatment of the region which formed the basis of Joseph Conrad's first literary works. As we have seen however, Foucault's notion of discourse, which was central to Said's *Orientalism*, provides a valuable set of ideas and approaches which enable us to identify the kinds of features which occur repeatedly in both literary *and* non-literary works, particularly during the period of high imperialism in the late nineteenth century. As Sara Mills notes, 'Foucault has provided us with a vocabulary for describing the surface regularities which can be traced across a range of texts occurring within a certain context'.²¹⁶ Swettenham and Conrad were working within very distinct literary genres, but their work reflected dominant ways of thinking about the East in this period. I have attempted to show that despite Swettenham's claims of impartiality, the assertion that his stories contained 'no history [...] no politics, no moralising', his depiction of indigenous domestic space reflected dominant attitudes towards the Far East in order to 'justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction'.²¹⁷ In marked contrast, through an analysis of the short story 'The Lagoon', I show how Conrad's scepticism towards the official

²¹³ Swettenham, p. 42.

²¹⁴ Bhabha, p. 66.

²¹⁵ Ibid., p. 71.

²¹⁶ Mills, *Discourse*, p. 106.

²¹⁷ Bhabha, p. 23.

discourse of British Imperialism was, like Swettenham's confidence in its legitimacy, visible in his depiction of indigenous domestic space.

In 1895 Conrad published his first novel *Almayer's Folly*. Whilst the reception of the work was generally favourable some critics were dissatisfied with the image of the colonial frontier which Conrad presented, believing it lacked the colour and drama of popular imperial romance. A contemporary review in *The Bookman* suggested that 'the slow, vague mysterious East has cast its spell over Mr Conrad, with results not conducive to the interests of the volatile European reader'.²¹⁸ To this reviewer the novel had failed to satisfy the kinds of expectations fuelled by the popular fiction of the day. In the author's note to the novel, written at the time of publication but only published in a later edition of the novel in 1921, Conrad expresses a critical attitude to this kind of reductive way of thinking about the East:

The critic and the judge seems to think that in those distant lands all joy is a yell and a war dance, all pathos is a howl and a ghastly grin of filed teeth, and that the solution of all problems is found in the barrel of a revolver or on the point of an assegai. And yet it is not so.²¹⁹

Despite this Conrad presents us with a story in 'The Lagoon' which appears, at first reading, to conform to the very qualities he seemed to disavow. The story begins with an unnamed white trader, heading up-river with his Malay crew, deciding to stay the night at his friend Arsath's house by a lagoon. The crew are reluctant to stay because although he is a fellow Malay, Arsath is a stranger to them and has transgressed local custom by occupying an abandoned dwelling. The trader spends the night listening to the tale of Arsath, his murdered brother and his lover, Diamelen, who is ill and dying inside their hut. At the same time the crew sleep on board the boat out on the lagoon. As morning comes and Diamelen dies the trader and crew depart, leaving Arsath vowing revenge on his brother's killers but seeming lost in 'a world of illusions'.²²⁰ Arsath's tale of love and betrayal, which is the centrepiece of 'The Lagoon', presents the romanticised image of the exotic East that was commonly found in the popular adventure fiction of the day. The relationship between the white

²¹⁸ *Bookman*, September 1895, p. 176.

²¹⁹ Conrad, *Almayer's Folly*, p. 3.

²²⁰ Conrad, *Tales of Unrest* p. 185.

trader and his 'Malay friend' also appears to conform to well established generic conventions. As Linda Dryden notes: 'the native subject of imperial romance and adventure is a simple soul, trusting the superior moral, political, and cultural power attributed to the white hero'.²²¹ Critics tend to agree however that if Conrad sometimes utilised generic images of non-Europeans, he placed some critical distance between himself and these modes of representation to question contemporary thinking about the use of non-European cultures in fiction.²²² My argument here explores the significance of the 'split' that occurs in the story between the trader and his crew, and the subsequent production of two separate domestic spaces: the crew's houseboat and the platform outside the hut on which the trader and Arsat spend the night. Whilst the 'story within a story' does appear to conform to romanticised and stereotypical ideas about the East, the narrative which frames it works to unsettle those ideas, most visibly, I will suggest, in the representation of these two distinct domestic spaces.

As is well known, not all critics have accepted that the formal aspects of Conrad's work complicate any straightforward reading of the author's intended meaning. Chinua Achebe memorably concluded that there was no discernible or excusable difference between the views of Marlow and the author in 'Heart of Darkness'.²²³ Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan claims that 'The Lagoon' 'exhibits all the symptoms of 'primitivist' discourse; marking a sharp division between the Western white observer and the native who turns into an object of curiosity and knowledge; deploying the tropology of mysticism and magic [...] presenting the native hero as emotional, childlike, and untamed'.²²⁴ In seeing in 'The Lagoon' all the signs of 'primitivist discourse' Vulcan draws on a well-established structuralist mode which identifies the various strategies of representation which underline distinct and essential differences based on ethnicity. Accordingly, she isolates the various binary oppositions which occur in the text, between white observer and native as 'object of curiosity and knowledge', between white rationality and native 'magic and superstition'. Yet in demonstrating how the story conforms to this Orientalist (or

²²¹ Dryden, p. 40.

²²² see also: Baxter, 'Geography and Law in *Almayer's Folly*'.

²²³ Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', in Joseph Conrad, *Heart Of Darkness: Norton Critical Edition*. (New York, Norton, 2006) pp. 336–348.

²²⁴ Daphna Erdinast Vulcan, *The Strange Short Fiction of Joseph Conrad* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) p. 56.

primitivist) model there is much that Vulcan ignores. For example, the *European* perspective is objectified in the narrative rather than privileged. If the non-Europeans are subjected to an Orientalist treatment then, as Robert Hampson notes, ‘the unnamed European is subjected to what might be termed an ‘occidental’ treatment’²²⁵.

the white man gazed straight before him into the darkness
with wide-open eyes. The fear and fascination, the inspiration
and the wonder of death [...] soothed the unrest of his race.²²⁶

Furthermore, in foregrounding the antipathy between the crew and Arsath, based on his status as a ‘stranger’, and on his transgressive practices in occupying an abandoned house, Conrad indicates the plurality of ideas and cultures, contained within that constructed category of ‘Malay’. To overlook these important details is to fail to recognise Conrad’s engagement with, and critical distance from, the primitivist discourses associated with imperial romance, which are also abundantly evident in *Malay Sketches*, and to which Vulcan suggests the text adheres. Of the Malays on board the boat Vulcan writes, ‘The local people, presented through what appears to be free, indirect discourse, are universalised stereotypes of primitive ‘natives’.’²²⁷ Certainly Conrad provides us with only the sparest of details of the crew – a steersman who only grunts when asked to steer a course for the Lagoon and wields a flashing blade in a semi-circle above his head, and a surly juragan who is fearful of the sprits that haunt Arsath’s hut. The depiction of the crew offers little in the way of a more complex picture of indigenous people. But by assigning some significance to what the crew *do*, rather than simply how they are represented in the story, we might consider how this troubles Vulcan’s claim that those on board simply reiterate a reductive and derogatory stereotype. To do so requires an alternative approach which avoids the limitations of Said’s Orientalist or Vulcan’s primitivist framework, and which looks instead for equivalence or similarity in the actions and behaviours of individuals.

²²⁵ Robert Hampson, *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad’s Malay Fiction* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2000) p. 119.

²²⁶ Conrad, p. 176.

²²⁷ Erdinast Vulcan, p. 57.

‘The Lagoon’ and the production of domestic space

If we read ‘The Lagoon’ from a perspective that emphasises individual agency we can avoid the sort of approach which makes generalised conclusions based on representations of race. In this respect the work of Michel de Certeau is valuable in offering ways to think about the significance of individual practices which determine the kinds of spaces individuals inhabit, specifically the kinds of indigenous domestic space presented in this narrative. I suggest that reading ‘The Lagoon’ with these ideas in mind take us closer to a fuller appreciation of the multi-layered and deconstructive nature of ‘The Lagoon’.

As I outlined in the introduction in relation to the notion of ‘space as practiced place’, De Certeau invites us to take a ‘user-oriented’ approach to society, to think more about individual practices within a particular location, in a way that might contest or trouble its preordained status or function. His aim is to ‘bring to light the models of action characteristic of users whose status as the dominated element in society [...] is concealed by the euphemistic term “consumers”’.²²⁸ To this end, De Certeau formulates a number of concepts which offer ways of thinking about how individuals have the capacity to resist or challenge authority, or manifestations of power, on the level of the everyday, those ““ways of operating” [which] constitute the innumerable practices by means of which users re-appropriate the space organised by techniques of sociocultural production’.²²⁹ In addition to ‘space versus place’ De Certeau also draws a distinction between ‘the map’ and ‘the tour’, and ‘strategies’ and ‘tactics’. What these models do, when we apply them to readings of colonial fiction, is to help us discern how authority not only appears to be instantiated in everyday surroundings, in the form of maps, strategies and officially designated places, but also how it appears to be manifested through the actions of individuals, through the deployment of tactics, and through the production of spaces through individual agency. The focus, as Natalie Zemon Davis puts it, is to explore

²²⁸ de Certeau, p. xi. Whilst de Certeau uses the phrase “consumers”, which suggests his focus would be on modern consumer society, his text makes clear his interest in situations of colonial domination, such as that of the Spanish conquest of South America in the 16th century. His use of the word ‘consumer’ applies to any group which appears to have ‘rituals, representations and laws imposed on them’. (p. xiii.)

²²⁹ Ibid., p. xiv.

how ‘ordinary human behaviour resist[s] institutional control’.²³⁰ This shift of emphasis invites us to question whether individuals are, to use de Certeau’s phrase ‘passive or docile’, but may instead be active agents in situations which present a relationship between a colonising power and colonised individuals.²³¹ This has key significance in the colonial context because it puts the emphasis on domesticity *as process* as opposed to domesticity as an essential attribute of a particular race or people. In the book *Imperial Leather* (1995) Anne McClintock draws our attention to the etymology of the verb ‘to domesticate’:

Domesticity denotes both a space and a social relation to power. Etymologically, the verb to domesticate is akin to dominate, which derives from *dominus*, lord of the domum, the home. Until [very recently] however, the verb to domesticate also carried as one of its meanings the action ‘to civilise’.²³²

Domestication was seen as part of the process of ‘civilising’ colonised peoples, and, as McClintock’s definition makes clear, derives from the idea of domination. But de Certeau’s focus on individual agency, troubles any form of colonial discourse which suggests that one race is already essentially domesticated and others are not. His distinction between place and space draws our attention to how space can be appropriated for a particular purpose. It puts significance on the user of that space and of how places can be repurposed, despite their ‘official’ or ‘intended’ function. It invites us to think of the meanings that are created by individuals within those physical boundaries. The idea that domestic spaces are produced as a consequence of something that *we do* rather than something that *we are* unsettles the privileged status of the coloniser.

For example, upon arrival at their destination the trader leaves his boat to mount the bamboo platform in front of Arsat’s home. The crew, reluctant to remain in close proximity to the hut choose to stay on board. ‘The juragan of the boat said sulkily, “We will cook in the sampan, and sleep on the water”’.²³³ Conrad makes an important distinction between the crew’s conception of the boat and that of the

²³⁰ Natalie Zemon Davis, ‘The Quest of Michel De Certeau’, *The New York Review*, May 15th, 2008, p. 58.

²³¹ De Certeau, p. xii.

²³² McClintock, p. 34–35.

²³³ Conrad, p. 173.

narrator. The vessel, previously described by the narrator as 'the white man's canoe', is called a 'sampan' by the juragan, which attributes a degree of discursive agency to the Malaysian crewman. It undermines the authority of the third person narrative voice which describes the boat in terms of European ownership and instead presents an alternative perspective in which the crew define themselves and their spaces in their own terms. Of further significance is that the crew make a fire, cook, eat, converse and sleep on board, transforming the boat into a discreet domestic space at the moment of conscious separation from their white 'superior'.

At the same time, after retreating from the interior of the hut, in which the stricken Diamelen lays dying, the trader takes his supper from a basket, gathers sticks to make a fire to ward off mosquitoes, wraps himself in a blanket and has a smoke. His actions impose order on the environment and create a barrier between himself and the external space of nature. These simple gestures also convert the 'romantic' space of the lagoon, haunted by the voices which call to Diamelen from the water, into a domestic space, reassuringly mundane and familiar. The trader divests this space of its strangeness. Whilst this forms part of Conrad's subsequent distancing from the romantic mode of Arsat's tale, the significant point is that one space is neither 'more' or 'less' domesticated than the other but that these domestic spaces come into being through the actions of individuals. Conrad's depiction of these distinct spaces troubles a critical model which would deem one group of people 'civilised' and another 'primitive'. In contrast to Swettenham's *Malay Sketches*, which consistently present indigenous domestic spaces as 'uncivilised' when measured against Western norms, Conrad draws our attention to the process of domestication as a continuum. Domestic space is also contingent upon environmental conditions; the crew must make their home on the water, whether for one night or for a longer period, because their circumstances are determined by the demands of imperial trade. This ability to adapt to changing circumstances clearly troubles an image of indigenous people which insists on their 'backwardness' or their resistance to progress. Instead, Conrad foregrounds how indigenous domestic space is produced as a response both to environmental and historical conditions.

By depicting the native crew as accustomed to living on the water, and occupying a mobile domestic space, we are presented with something of a paradox. At the beginning of the story the crew are established as being 'local', in contrast to

Arsat who is viewed as an interloper or ‘a stranger’.²³⁴ This troubles our sense of ‘locality’ and belonging if we think of a domestic space as being one which is fixed and locatable. Instead, the sense of being local to a particular region in the case of the Malay crew describes a condition of inhabiting numerous locations at different times. It appears at odds with any orthodox understanding of the connection between geography and identity. Whilst the theme of mobility and domestic space is something which I shall explore more fully in a later chapter it has some relevance here in adding further weight to the argument that the crew do not conform to a reductive, Orientalist stereotype. Recent scholarship has explored the question of indigenous mobility in response to a tradition which tended to foreground the mobility of European colonisers. As Ballantyne and Burton claim, in much historical scholarship ‘mobility becomes the property of colonisers, and stasis the preternatural condition of the indigene’.²³⁵ Similarly Alan Lester and Zoe Laidlaw suggest that ‘Western agents and networks are often seen as global and mobile’, whereas ‘indigeneity is too frequently defined as local and static’.²³⁶ The depiction of a group of indigenous people who appear to be local *and* mobile therefore challenges dominant assumptions about the agency of colonised subjects.

Anachronistic space and non-European time

There are further examples in the story which trouble a ‘primitivist’ model. As has been discussed previously in this chapter, Anne McClintock claims that in colonial discourse indigenous peoples are symbolically displaced into a zone which she terms ‘*anachronistic space*’: ‘colonised people [...] do not inhabit history proper but exist in a permanently anterior time within the geographic space of the modern empire as anachronistic humans, atavistic, irrational, bereft of human agency’.²³⁷ There are a number of ways that Conrad appears to both engage with and challenge this aspect of stereotypical discourse in ‘The Lagoon’. At the opening of the story the boat

²³⁴ Conrad, p. 173.

²³⁵ Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, *Moving Subjects: Gender, Mobility, and Intimacy in an Age of Global Empire*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009) p. 6.

²³⁶ Alan Lester and Zoe Laidlaw (eds), *Indigenous Communities and Settler Colonialism: Land Holding, Loss and Survival and an Interconnected World*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015) p. 6

²³⁷ McClintock, p. 30.

transporting the unnamed white trader and his Malay crew appears to enter a different order of time. They are described as entering ‘the portals of a land from which the very memory of motion had forever departed’.²³⁸ Further references to a non-specific past are focalised first through the trader who recalls that ‘he had known Arsats years ago, in a far country in times of trouble and danger’ and then Arsats who thinks back on ‘the time of trouble and war’.²³⁹ These phrases, with their particular ‘native’ inflections, appear to describe a form of ‘non-European’ time. One way of reading these examples would be to see them as Conrad’s ironic appropriation of generic conventions. Vulcan reads them more literally: ‘It is as though the story takes place in some mythical region beyond history, beyond the experience of the white observer or that of the reader’.²⁴⁰ Yet we might consider how the houseboat which contains the Malay crew reminds us of the existence of a second order of time which coexists within the narrative. It is one of a number of instances in which Conrad disrupts the neat opposition between white and Malay by situating the indigenous characters in the story in different spaces, different temporalities and even different generic modes. In the moments before Arsats recounts his tale to the trader, and we are taken back in time to an idealised world of romance, they are momentarily distracted:

far away on the lagoon they could hear the voices of the boatmen ringing fitful and distinct on the calm water. The fire in the bows of the sampan shone faintly in the distance with a hazy red glow. Then it died out. The voices ceased.²⁴¹

Rather than existing in what McClintock refers to as ‘anachronistic space’, the Malay crew are evidently living and breathing in the present moment, set firmly in time and place in contrast to the non-specific location and time of Arsats’s tale. The crew’s domestic routines are oriented around the working day which is governed by the demands of the imperial market, in contrast to Arsats who appears eternally fixed in a ‘time of trouble and war’. Conrad’s depiction of ‘indigenous peoples’ is therefore split spatially between the anachronistic and the domestic present and serves to

²³⁸ Conrad, p. 171.

²³⁹ Ibid., p. 175, p. 177.

²⁴⁰ Vulcan, p. 56.

²⁴¹ Conrad., p. 176.

deconstruct the kind of racial stereotyping which would ordinarily present the ‘other’ country as set within an earlier stage of Western progress.

This staging of a scene which contrasts the world of adventure and a more mundane, commercial reality is, of course, not unique in Conrad’s work. A better-known example can be found in the ‘Malabar House Hotel’ scene in *Lord Jim* in which the impassioned reflections of a desperate Jim are regularly interrupted by the glib chatter of the frivolous ‘round the world’ ticket tourists who occupy the hotel dining room:

There were married couples looking domesticated and bored with each other in the midst of their travels; there were small parties and large parties, and lone individuals dining solemnly or feasting boisterously, but all thinking, conversing, joking or scowling as was their wont at home ²⁴²

In this example Western domesticity is presented as crass and stultifying. Rather than embodying an ideal of civility, life ‘at home’ appeared petty and provincial. Individuals may have possessed the means to be transported far from metropolitan centres but were unreceptive to the possibilities of new experience in foreign lands. This emerging form of commercial imperialism signalled a lamentable change to Conrad described by Steven Donovan as ‘a spatial closing-off of the high seas to romance [...] symbolised by the odious presence of globetrotters’ who, like the Malay crew, are implicated in a world of commerce.²⁴³ The crew’s presence, whilst unobtrusive in comparison to the commercial tourists of *Lord Jim*, produces a similar point of contrast between the everyday, domestic world and the idealised world of romance. The tourists and the occupants of the boat appear to signify the loss of ideals which Jim and Arsat hold dear. The Malay crew therefore offer an alternative representation of indigenous people as bound by the everyday rather than as the projection of imperial desire.

In 1897 Charles L. Graves wrote to Conrad on behalf of the editor of the *Cornhill Magazine* inviting Conrad to submit his short stories: ‘it is very unlikely he should decline anything you sent him’.²⁴⁴ Conrad’s first submission, ‘The Idiots’, was rejected and when, as Lawrence Graver notes, ‘the *Cornhill* requested something

²⁴² Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics) p. 56.

²⁴³ Steven Donovan, *Joseph Conrad and Popular Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) p. 92.

²⁴⁴ quoted in Lawrence Graver, *Conrad’s Short Fiction* (London: University of California Press, 1969) p. 18.

more characteristic of his exotic style, Conrad tried to reproduce the tangled landscapes of his Malayan novels'.²⁴⁵ This concession to the editors of the *Cornhill* appears to explain Conrad's description of the story to Edward Garnett:

It's a tricky thing with the usual forest river-stars-wind
sunrise, and so on—and lots of secondhand Conradese in
it.²⁴⁶

It would be easy to accept Conrad's dismissal of the story as pastiche, but the catch for us as much as for Conrad is its 'trickiness'. 'Tricky' implies the story is not quite so easy or so simple as his flippant dismissal suggests. Recalling Conrad's earlier appeal for more nuanced representations of the Far East in his 'Note' to *Almayer's Folly* we might surmise that in writing something 'exotic' for *Cornhill*, Conrad had to negotiate tricky tensions between romantic expectations and a desire to honour the agency of 'that humanity so far away'.²⁴⁷

Conclusion

In Frank Swettenham's *Malay Sketches* representations of indigenous domestic spaces appeared to confirm that colonised people were in need of improvement and incapable of taking care of matters by themselves. The dangers, deficiencies or abnormalities evident in the living spaces of indigenous people, as viewed by those in a position of authority, were reflective of problems endemic in native societies, requiring the stabilising influence of the West to improve standards in living, infrastructure, education and technology. When read in light of Said's concept of Orientalism, we can see how the presentation of the everyday, domestic space in these 'sketches' supported a larger purpose of legitimising Western intervention overseas and reminded metropolitan readers that non-Europeans were essentially different from themselves. In contrast, in the pages of his earliest published work, Joseph Conrad expressed a sceptical attitude towards the prevailing view of the Far East and appeared to question the essentialist certainties which underpinned works like *Malay Sketches* and the wealth of popular adventure fiction which sold in vast

²⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 26.

²⁴⁶ Conrad to Garnett on 14 Aug. 1896, *Collected Letters*, vol. 1, p. 302.

²⁴⁷ Conrad, *Almayer's Folly*, p. 3.

numbers in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Confidence in the racial superiority of the white European based on where and how they lived was, he believed, shortsighted and misplaced. 'The Lagoon' appeared to cut across the binary division between East and West by illustrating that domestic spaces are something which come into being through individual agency, both indigenous *and* European.

Chapter Three: The Ship

‘The Fate of the *Alida*’, ‘The Ebb-Tide’, and ‘Karain: A Memory’.

Thinking of the ship as a domestic space presents something of a paradox. Its very nature as a mobile vessel, in peril or vulnerable to the enveloping sea, seems at odds with the idea of domesticity which carries with it associations of stability, protection and security. Similarly, the ship as a space which is located in the exterior, public sphere might seem incompatible with the idea of domestic privacy. Furthermore, the masculine world of ships and ‘the craft’ of the sea might be thought of as far removed from the supposedly feminine world of domesticity. Yet inarguably, the ship in colonial fiction functions as a home, however briefly or imperfectly, for those on board, whether that be the white colonial trader, seaman or civil servant or native crew and passengers. The ships in these stories transport not only bodies and cargo but also, to borrow a phrase from Michel De Certeau, “‘ways of operating’” or doing things’, that reflect the values and attitudes of those on board.²⁴⁸ It therefore allowed writers to explore, at close quarters, contemporary assumptions concerning the distinction between civilised Europeans and primitive natives, a belief which Edward Said argued was a fundamental principle underpinning colonial discourse in the period. Similarly, the ship offered a way for writers to explore whether the dominant culture of the metropole remained stable and intact when transplanted to overseas territories or whether, under the pressure of unfamiliar customs and practices, it seemed less secure or legitimate than was generally believed.

The presentation of the ship as a mobile domestic space is something that we find throughout the colonial fiction of Joseph Conrad and the contradictions or possibilities that arise in the meeting of domesticity and mobility are central to many of his novels and short stories. By looking at the early short story ‘Karain: A Memory’ (1897) I show how Conrad uses the ship as a form of mobile domestic space to think through and challenge dominant ways of thinking about Europe’s colonial ‘others’ during the period of high imperialism. By examining how domesticity is represented as a form of social practice in the text, I show how Conrad uses the ship to question prevailing ideas of racial superiority and cultural difference. In this respect I suggest that the ship as an unstable form of domestic space was a key site through which Conrad challenged some of the fundamental assumptions which

²⁴⁸ de Certeau, p. xi.

underpinned colonial discourse in the period. Before presenting a more detailed analysis of Conrad's 'Karain' I will first offer a brief analysis of the short story 'The Fate of the Alida' by Louis Becke and the novella 'The Ebb-Tide' by Robert Louis Stevenson. There is some sense of a shared perspective common to all three writers in their scepticism towards dominant narratives about the colonial enterprise, but my main aim in presenting these stories side by side is to illustrate a development in terms of Conrad's modernist aesthetics which is notably different from the realism of Becke and Stevenson. The difference in Conrad's approach becomes more pronounced when set alongside the more naturalistic treatment of the colonial setting which we find in Becke and Stevenson. This difference is characterised by a greater self-reflexivity and self-consciousness in 'Karain' and signals a break from the conventions within which Becke and Stevenson were working. Whilst all three can, in general terms, be seen to challenge the official narratives of colonial powers during the period of high imperialism, I show how Conrad's modernism is registered in his presentation of shipboard domesticity which is more knowingly deconstructive of the discourse within which these fictions operated.

Shipboard domesticity in 'The Fate of the Alida'

There is a scene in the story 'The Fate of the Alida' (1894) by Louis Becke which sees the Polynesian girl Nerida dragged into the ship's living quarters below deck by the treacherous Motley, a man who has just murdered her husband, Taplin, and thrown him overboard:

they all trooped below, and took me with them – me, with my husband's blood not yet dried on my hands and bosom. They made me get liquor for them to drink, and they drank and laughed, and Motley put his bloodied hand around my waist and kissed me, and the others laughed still more. In a little while Riedermann and the mate were so drunken that no words came from them, and they fell on the cabin floor. Then Motley, who could stand, but staggered as he walked, came and sat beside me and kissed me again, and said he always loved me; but I pointed to the blood of my husband that stained my skin and clotted my hair together, and besought him first to let me wash it away ²⁴⁹

²⁴⁹ Becke, p. 112.

Whilst the living quarters of the ship are separate from the exterior world they can hardly be described as a domestic space. The white men get drunk, fall about on the floor and their leader Motley carouses with Nerida, oblivious to the blood on her hair and body. For Nerida it is certainly not a refuge from the outside world, nor is it, as Motley's unwanted affections in the company of his friends indicates, a particularly private space. The behaviour of these white commercial traders is decidedly uncivilised. In contrast, some hours earlier the same cabin had served as private quarters for Nerida and Taplin, who were travelling aboard the *Alida* despite warnings about Motley's dubious character. Prior to this Nerida had sensed that trouble was afoot when she felt that her privacy was being invaded by the watchful gaze of Motley and the conspiratorial whispers of his cronies: 'I hated to be on the ship. The man with the blue eyes filled me with fear when he looked at me; and he and the captain and mate were for ever talking amongst themselves in whispers'.²⁵⁰ In the contrast between Motley and Nerida, then, we can discern a difference of attitude towards the spaces that they inhabit. The valuing of privacy suggests a sensitivity to the way that different kinds of spaces should be conceived and of how certain kinds of behaviour seem appropriate in one space and unimportant in another.

This sensitivity to space has figured earlier in the narrative when Motley and Riedermann first enter Taplin and Nerida's home armed with concealed weapons. As Motley reaches for his gun Taplin disarms him and says: 'The man who draws a pistol in my house, Mr. Motley, does a foolish thing'.²⁵¹ In this instance Motley clearly does not recognise the home as being any different from the outside world. The notion of the private sphere is not a matter that concerns him. Taplin on the other hand clearly considers certain behaviours, the threat of violence and murder for example, to be unacceptable in the home. The house is a protected space.

What these examples are intended to illustrate is how space can mean one thing to one person and something else to another. These spaces have no stable identity in themselves but are produced instead by the things that people do within them, the sorts of things they consider appropriate or acceptable. In other words, as De Certeau suggests, space is a practiced place. The reason that this has significance in the colonial setting, and within the field of postcolonial studies more generally, is

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 110.

²⁵¹ Ibid., p. 103.

because it offers an alternative model for thinking about the conventional binary opposition between civilised and barbarian. The question of practices allows us to situate place and space at the centre of analyses in a way that undercuts considerations of race. For example, on the basis of their attitudes and behaviours, Motley, Riedermann and the unnamed first mate are all distinctly uncivilised, despite their European origins. Taplin on the other hand, who is also a European, is not. The difference can be attributed to the way that they inhabit, or practice, these various settings in the narrative and there is certainly no consistency on the basis of their racial origin. Similarly, Motley has a native crew consisting of three Tafito men and two others who are from the Carolines (Nerida describes them as ‘countrymen of mine’).²⁵² When the ship becomes a space of drunken debauchery the Tafito men get drunk on the liquor they steal from the hold. In contrast Nerida’s fellow ‘countrymen’ stay sober, guide the ship and offer Nerida protection. As we are told ‘they feared the Tafito men who are devils when they drink grog’.²⁵³ By looking at the text in this way a more complex and nuanced picture emerges which troubles any straightforward considerations of racial difference. There is clearly a difference, for example, being registered in this story between the different cultural traditions, habits or characteristics of a tribe in one geographical location and another, indicating that Louis Becke’s often bloodthirsty and violent stories, now out of print and largely neglected by scholars, gesture, on one level, towards the cultural diversity of the South Seas at the end of the nineteenth century. Reading the text in light of spatial practices makes us more alive to the possibility of the value of Becke’s often gruesome tales from a postcolonial perspective. Texts which appear on the surface to reinforce colonial discourse may instead be open to a more undecided interpretation.

The stories in *By Reef and Palm* are a good case in point. As Robert Hampson has noted, the collection contains a preface written by one Lord Pembroke which praises the value of Becke’s work in light of rather disparaging attitudes within metropolitan literary circles towards the increasingly popular genre of exotic and colonial fiction, most notably the oft-cited piece ‘Uncivilised’ by Alice Meynell which was published in 1893. Pembroke defends Becke by celebrating the primitivism within the stories, seeing value in the indigenous cultures of the South Seas in contrast to Western modernity. He does however, as Hampson notes, still

²⁵² Ibid., p. 110.

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 112.

maintain a conventional opposition between civilised and primitive, even if he favours the latter. Yet the stories themselves tend to trouble Pembroke's stereotypical view of the South Seas and are rich in details which indicate a more varied and complex range of cultures and communities that challenges the homogenising tendencies of colonial discourse. As Hampson suggests, 'Pembroke's view that "the interests and passions of South Sea Island life are neither numerous nor complex" is not borne out by the stories that follow [which] show the complexity of the local cultures'.²⁵⁴

The stories also show the complexities of human behaviour more generally in a way that resists a reductive model of interpretation. Whilst the ship is subject to Motley's unbridled desire it is perhaps fitting that, in an act of symbolic castration, Motley has his foot chopped off with an axe by one of the island men. Nerida then finishes him off with a knife before he is thrown into the sea. Whilst this is not the behaviour of civilised people, the ship *is* restored to a condition of order and harmony when Riedermann, the first mate and the three Tafito sailors are similarly dispensed with overboard. For Nerida and her helpers these acts of 'savagery' are contingent and not habitual. It is not an expression of an essential quality of their race as 'savages', but rather a necessary response to actual conditions. The ship is transformed from one kind of space into another and, by thinking in terms of spatial practices, our attention is drawn to the way that individuals are instrumental in making this change. In other words, the question of agency arises when we view spaces as produced by practices. It can be seen, then, that the ship in colonial fiction, as a space which constantly needs to be maintained in a state of domesticity by passengers and crew, has the potential to be of some significance in the context of postcolonial studies.

Hybridity, domesticity and 'The Ebb-Tide'

Robert Louis Stevenson's novella 'The Ebb-Tide' (1894) provides another useful example of shipboard domesticity. Of the three white men on board the ship the *Farallone* only the Englishman Herrick remains sober. After spending long hours at

²⁵⁴ Robert Hampson, *Joseph Conrad: Critical Lives*, p. 63.

the ship's wheel whilst his accomplices, Davis and Huish get drunk and neglect their duties, the exhausted Herrick finds himself surrounded by the native crew:

With one voice, the crew protested; ere Herrick knew what they were doing, the cook was aroused and came a willing volunteer; all hands clustered about their mate with expostulations and caresses; and he was bidden to lie down and take his customary rest without alarm.²⁵⁵

The actions of the crew reassure Herrick that he will be protected whilst he is sleeping. This is significant because Herrick knows that he can not trust his fellow white men who have ransacked the ship's cargo of champagne and are now incapable or indifferent to carrying out their duties. Despite making a pretence of being master of the ship Captain Davis spends most of his time 'sprawl[ing] all day upon the lockers, tipping and reading novels [...] his hours [...] passed in slavish self-indulgence and hoggish slumber'.²⁵⁶ In other words the native crew appear to be responsible for creating the conditions whereby the interior living quarters can function as a refuge from the outside world. This fact invokes a feeling of shame in Herrick because it appears at odds with the stereotypical assumptions which he holds towards them, thinking of one of the deckhands, Sally Day, for example, as 'the child of cannibals, in all likelihood a cannibal himself'.²⁵⁷ Despite the perennial threat which the sea represents to the lives of those on board it is the actions and attitudes of the crew that produce the homely qualities on board the ship that Herrick needs in order to rest. In contrast Davis and Huish create only discord and disharmony on the ship as they satisfy their own selfish needs instead of embracing a sense of collective responsibility such as we see with the native crew. It is the actions of the individuals on board, therefore, that determine the nature of the spaces they inhabit.

Thinking of the ship in this way draws our attention again to questions of agency and power. If we contrast the irresponsible behaviour of Davis and Huish with the dutiful crew it becomes apparent that the crew are not necessarily the servile subjects of their colonial masters but in fact possess significant power in shaping the culture on board the ship. Roslyn Jolly suggests that the ship is 'a microcosm of imperialist society, directed by greedy but incompetent whites, the labour supplied

²⁵⁵ Stevenson, p. 168.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 165.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 168.

by long-suffering natives who fulfil their duties without orders and are true to the missionary faith which the Europeans make no pretence of respecting'.²⁵⁸ This is true although it does tend to suggest that the natives are generally presented as compliant and passive in the text. By thinking of the ship as a space which is produced through a multitude of practices it can be seen that a more complex pattern of relations is in evidence on the *Farallone*.

The first indication comes when Herrick is given food by the cook who gives him 'unexpected and sometimes unpalatable dainties'.²⁵⁹ Herrick appears to believe that the food is inedible because the cook is incompetent. After all, when it is discovered that the ship's supplies have been wasted Herrick tells Davis 'If you turn a savage loose in your storeroom, you know what to expect'.²⁶⁰ Despite growing closer to the crew and benefitting from their acts of kindness Herrick appears to maintain a stereotypical conviction of racial superiority. Davis also appears to make a similar assumption about the cook's ineptitude, assuming that the food has been incorrectly cooked, so throws it away. As Huish complains, 'Ow often 'ave I 'eard you send the 'ole bloomin' dinner off and tell the man to chuck it in the swill-tub? And breakfast?'.²⁶¹ The reaction of both Davis and Herrick is indicative of a stereotypical and reductive way of thinking about their colonial others. Reading against this dominant narrative of native inferiority we might think instead of other possibilities. For example, the reason for first Herrick's distaste and Davis's disgust is never fully explained and is open to interpretation. Rather than being evidence of the cook's inadequacy it is possible that the food is reflective of the cook's own cultural traditions and eating habits. It is possible to see the cook as embodying the shifting and fluid cultural mix in the region; we are told, after all, that the native crew 'are all men of alien speech even to each other' and so reflect the cultural diversity of the South Pacific.²⁶² In this respect an alternative reading emerges in which our attention is drawn to the ship as a hybridised space, a confluence of forces and practices which reflect the geographical and historical realities of the region. In this light the folly of Davis's rejection of the cook's meals takes on a larger significance in which the whites' assumption of a fixed and superior cultural identity in contrast

²⁵⁸ Roslyn Jolly, in Stevenson, *South Sea Tales*, p. xiv.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 168.

to their inferior others appears shortsighted and unsustainable. To phrase this in Bhabha's terms, the whites' stereotypical mode of discourse is troubled by other possibilities, from 'diachronic forms of history and narrative, signs of instability'.²⁶³ In other words, the ongoing production of the ship as a domestic space by the cook unsettles and undermines dominant attempts to fix him as the colonised, savage 'other'.

Whilst Becke and Stevenson use the ship as a space of dwelling to challenge prevailing assumptions about racial difference they do so by employing a largely naturalistic mode of storytelling. On a superficial level a notable difference between 'Karain' and these stories is Conrad's use of an unreliable first-person narrator in contrast to the largely impersonal third-person narratives of Becke and Stevenson. It is worth considering the deeper significance of this difference. Elleke Boehmer describes the kinds of fiction which challenged the dominant narratives of the day as produced by writers who 'sought to undercut thematically and formally the discourses which supported colonisation'.²⁶⁴ Whilst it would be a mistake to suggest that there is an absence of formal experimentation in 'The Ebb-Tide' or 'The Fate of the Alida', Conrad is clearly interested in drawing the reader's attention to the artificiality of the colonial setting, which asked his readers to question the way that stories of empire were told, in a way that Becke and Stevenson are not.²⁶⁵ Chris GoGwilt has noted, for example, how the description of the exotic landscape in 'Karain' departs from a naturalistic mode of representation and 'gives way to an increasing self-consciousness about the artificiality of its exoticism'.²⁶⁶ Similarly, Andrew Purssell suggests that 'Conrad's modernism lies, in part, in his experimentation with contemporary popular forms' and that "'Karain: a Memory" can be understood as an early grappling [...] with some of the discursive constructions that underwrote the imperial project'.²⁶⁷ In this respect it seems

²⁶³ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 71.

²⁶⁴ Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) p. 3.

²⁶⁵ Roslyn Jolly, for example, contends that "'The Ebb-Tide' shows how Stevenson preceded Conrad in working out a narrative mode that overlaid extreme realism with symbolism and a kind of dreamlike imagistic excess to explore the nightmare of imperialism'. (Stevenson, p. xxxii–xxxiii.)

²⁶⁶ Christopher GoGwilt, 'The Charm of Empire: Joseph Conrad's "Karain: a Memory"', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 1991, 24.1 (1991), 77–91 (p. 80).

²⁶⁷ Andrew Purssell, 'Empire and Modernism in Joseph Conrad's "Karain: A Memory"', *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 71.299, p. 356–66.

reasonable to suggest that there is a subtle difference in the way that Conrad was exploring the possibilities of colonial fiction when compared with Becke and Stevenson. In the analysis that follows I suggest that this difference is registered in his use of a narrator who discursively constructs the ship as a domestic space.

Mobility and shipboard domesticity

In the paper 'Towards a Politics of mobility', Tim Cresswell poses a range of questions which he proposes may help to provide a focus and structure for scholars working within the burgeoning field of mobility studies. He asks: 'How is mobility discursively constituted? What narratives have been constructed around mobility? How are mobilities represented?'²⁶⁸ In recent scholarship within this field the ship has increasingly become a focus of interest. For example, in the article 'Home on the waves: domesticity and discomfort aboard the overland route steamship, 1842-1862', Jonathan Stafford examines the accounts of travellers aboard the P & O steamships that operated between Europe, the Far East and Australia in the mid nineteenth-century.²⁶⁹ These voyages offered an entirely new and often uncomfortable form of long-haul travel to previously inaccessible locations and became more prevalent after P & O's incorporation by Royal Charter in 1840. Stafford observes how, in the promotional materials and the design and decoration of the ship's interior, the ship's operators endeavoured to construct the experience of steamship mobility as an extension of land-based norms. Furthermore, in anecdotal accounts by those on board, the novelty, discomfort and strangeness of the journey was effaced by recourse to ideas and practices which constructed the ship as a familiar domestic space. As Stafford observes, 'the nascent technology's novelty meant that it was subject to distinctive representational and discursive responses, as passengers came to terms with the mobility it facilitated'.²⁷⁰ One such response, which is evident in a range of passenger accounts, is the prevalence of domestic social practices, which 'helped to assuage the discomforts, anxieties and monotony of shipboard life and the

²⁶⁸ Tim Cresswell, 'Towards a Politics of Mobility', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 28, (2010) 17–31 (p. 21).

²⁶⁹ Jonathan Stafford, 'Home on the waves: domesticity and discomfort aboard the overland route steamship, 1842–1862', *Mobilities*, 14.5, (2019). 578–595.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 579.

interruption of familiar land-based routine'.²⁷¹ Stafford explores the larger political significance of these passenger narratives and suggests that this process of normalisation emphasises 'the role of bourgeois material and social practices as a means for the historical agents of globalisation to come to terms with steamship travel'.²⁷² Whilst these accounts, written in the main by 'members of an ascendant colonial bourgeoisie: merchants, clergymen [...] colonial servants and military personnel', show how a dominant culture was mobilised and shipped to overseas territories Stafford also explores the silences and omissions in these accounts, suggesting that they illustrate how the preoccupation with domestic comfort worked discursively to silence concerns about the material realities of life below deck for subaltern labour.²⁷³ In this respect Stafford suggests that ships can be read 'as not just producers of mobility, but important mobile spheres of imperial social relations in themselves'.²⁷⁴ Stafford cites an account by Bayard Taylor on a steamship voyage of 1853 who noted that in the hottest part of the Red Sea it was a common occurrence for steamers at the time to 'lose' some of their subaltern stewards and firemen. At the same time, the affluent passengers on deck remained blissfully unaware of the grave risks to those in the engine room below deck. Taylor observes, for example, how, 'the panting and sweltering passengers drink claret and water and eat dry biscuits'.²⁷⁵ Stafford notes that, 'in the space of the steamship, the larger logic of imperialism can be seen to be played out in microcosm'.²⁷⁶

Normalising the spaces of mobility

There is much in Stafford's examination of passenger narratives aboard steamships in the mid-nineteenth century that can help in considering the role of domesticity and the domestic space in Conrad's 'Karain: A Memory' (1897). Of some significance is the suggestion that anxieties induced by the encounter with the new or unfamiliar were alleviated by both the steamship operators and the passengers themselves through the material and social practice of domesticity. Drawing on the work of

²⁷¹ Ibid., p. 581.

²⁷² Ibid., p. 580.

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 580.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 579.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 591.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 592.

Richter, Stafford notes that such practices served to ‘discipline, ameliorate and normalise spaces of mobility whose unfamiliarity and newness could be a source of anxiety to the passenger’.²⁷⁷ In this respect, in approaching ‘Karain’ we might consider how the practice of domesticity and the domestic space in the narrative serves to mitigate an unsettling reality of otherness outside the ship. Does, for example, the representation of the ship by the narrator as a domestic space deflect from the ‘discomforts and anxieties’ which might be produced through the encounter with the colonial Other? When we think of the domestic space as produced through the social practice of domesticity does this call into question the privileging of the domestic space as more ‘real’ when compared with the performative space of the colonised subject in the external world? By approaching the text in light of these ideas I show how Conrad uses the ship as a mobile domestic space to question dominant ideas of racial superiority and cultural difference in ‘Karain’. Rather than upholding the idea of an essential difference between the domesticated European below deck and the undomesticated native subject without, I show that Conrad presents the ship as a practiced, and therefore contingent, space of domesticity in order to question this assumed difference.

Conrad and *Blackwood’s* magazine

The publication of ‘Karain: A Memory’ in 1897 signalled the beginning of an important relationship between Conrad and *Blackwood’s* magazine, a publication which went on to publish Conrad’s most celebrated and discussed work ‘Heart of Darkness’ in 1899. Whilst this came as something of a relief to Conrad who, in the financially uncertain early years of his writing career, was eager to foster a relationship with such an esteemed periodical, he also appeared aware that publication in the staunchly imperialist *Blackwood’s* might represent something of a compromise. This is evidenced in a letter he wrote to his close friend, and fervent anti-imperialist Robert Cunningham Graham in April 1899: ‘I am glad you like *Karain*. I was afraid you would despise it. There’s something magazine’ish about it. Eh? It was written for Blackwood’.²⁷⁸ The fact that Cunningham Graham appeared to

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 583.

²⁷⁸ Joseph Conrad, *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) Vol. 2, p. 57.

approve of the story suggests that there was something in 'Karain' which aligned with his own ideas about empire in the final years of the nineteenth century. Despite the presence in the story of an array of elements including ghosts, charms and talismans, and an exotic Malay chieftain, Cunningham Graham may have recognised that the apparent conventionality of the story masked a more serious literary intent. Certainly critics have been divided, as they have about Conrad's better known 'Heart of Darkness', as to whether we should see Conrad, as Laurence Davies suggests, as 'an inspired subverter of imperial attitudes from within the premier imperialist magazine or as a cynical collaborator with the forces of racism'.²⁷⁹ That Conrad was writing stories with a particular audience in mind, given his precarious finances, is well established.²⁸⁰ Whether this makes Conrad, as Davies suggests, a 'cynical collaborator with the forces of racism' is a question that continues to be of concern to critics.

Conrad's concern that Cunningham Graham might 'despise' Karain acknowledges the fact that the story contains similarities to the kinds of adventure fiction regularly published in *Blackwood's*, which tended to uphold colonialist views. Certainly, the story, which was written in the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond jubilee, concludes with the haunted Karain apparently 'cured' by the gift of a commemorative English sixpence minted on the occasion of Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887, something which would have appeared to many to affirm the superiority of the rational European traders over the superstitious and irrational Malay. Yet, as we shall see, this moment, consistent with the rest of the narrative, is laced with characteristic Conradian irony which unsettles this assumption. Before presenting Karain with the coin the traders indulge in a rather hyperbolic display of reverence for the queen: 'She commands a spirit, too – the spirit of her nation; a masterful conscientious, unscrupulous, unconquerable devil'.²⁸¹ As Cedric Watts observes, this 'mumbo jumbo [...] tells its truths about the readiness of Europeans to mystify the monarchy and empire, and to be haunted by ghosts of their own'.²⁸²

²⁷⁹ Laurence Davies, quoted in Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*, p. 210.

²⁸⁰ see Dryden, p. 110.

²⁸¹ Conrad, p. 51.

²⁸² Cedric Watts, 'Fraudulent Signifiers: Saussure and the Sixpence in "Karain"', *The Conradian*, 28.2, (2003) 13–28 (p. 26).

‘Karain’ and the imperial romance

The story recalls the encounter between the English narrator and his fellow gunrunners, Hollis and Jackson, and the Malay chieftain Karain in ‘an insignificant foothold on the earth [...] a conquered foothold that, shaped like a young moon, lay ignored between the hills and the sea’.²⁸³ In the first chapter Karain is presented by the narrator in highly theatrical terms, performing for his followers and the Europeans on the deck of the schooner. With a ‘theatrical sweep of his arm’, for example, he indicates in the ‘jagged outline of the hills the whole of his domain [...] All mine!’.²⁸⁴ Over the course of two years the traders come to know Karain on more intimate terms following a series of nighttime visits which take place below deck in the living quarters on the ship. Here the heart of the narrative takes place. On a third and final visit, having swum from the mainland, a troubled and desperate Karain recounts his story of loyalty and betrayal within the more private and intimate space of the schooner’s cuddy. He tells the traders how, some years before, he had followed Pata Matara, his closest friend, in pursuit of the sister who had brought dishonour on the family by eloping with a Dutch trader. During the course of their odyssey Karain develops an obsession with the sister, believing himself to be her lover and protector and is haunted by her presence. At the moment when the couple are discovered and Pata Matara lunges to murder his sister, Karain, compelled by his obsession, slays Pata Matara in order to save her life. Karain is subsequently haunted by the ghost of Pata Matara but finds relief in the presence of an old shaman and sword-bearer who exorcises the ghost. However, following the sword-bearer’s death and the ghost’s return, Karain turns in desperation to the traders who, initially confused as to how they might help Karain, pacify him with an amulet made from a Golden Jubilee sixpence. The story concludes some years later as the narrator meets Jackson in London on the Strand. The narrator is bemused by Jackson’s continuing attachment to Karain and his supernatural tale, which he believes may be more ‘real’ than the ‘shuffle and beat’ of life in the bustling metropolis.²⁸⁵ The narrator closes the story by observing, ‘I think that, decidedly, he had been too long away from home’.²⁸⁶

²⁸³ Conrad, p.14.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 55.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 56.

Whilst early critics tended to view 'Karain' as what Bruce Johnson calls 'an entirely unsophisticated, faltering step toward *Lord Jim*', recent scholarship has looked more favourably on the story as amongst Conrad's most subtly challenging colonial fictions.²⁸⁷ Andrew Purssell suggests that in 'Karain', consistent with his first published works, Conrad 'continues to exercise and hone the demythologising strategies that are at play elsewhere in his early colonial fiction'.²⁸⁸ Others have explored Conrad's skilful negotiation of the codes which constituted the kinds of popular adventure fiction of the day, and his subtle subversion of those conventions. The story, as Amer Acheraïou observes, represents a more complex and ambiguous treatment of the exotic setting in which the first person European narrator, 'simultaneously perpetuates stereotyped images of the Malays and harbours a dis-Orientalising rhetoric that acknowledges the natives' value'.²⁸⁹ Robert Hampson has similarly noted the contradictory forms of signification in the text which alternately utilise conventional Orientalist tropes in one passage only to undermine them in the next.²⁹⁰ Such contradictions undermine the more Orientalist observations of the narrator, much as his tendency to describe Karain in grandly theatrical terms indicates, as Richard Ambrosini notes, 'his own uncomprehending view of Malayan life and his inability to recognise its reality'.²⁹¹

Much has been written about how the use of theatrical metaphors registers the narrator's detachment from the realities of native Malay life and of how his tendency to resort to the clichés and conventions which were the staple of the imperial romance and adventure stories of the day signals Conrad's critical attitude towards this popular form of contemporary fiction.²⁹² Less critical attention has been paid to

²⁸⁷ Bruce M. Johnson, 'Conrad's "Karain" and *Lord Jim*', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 24.1, (1963), 13–20 (p. 13).

²⁸⁸ Andrew Purssell, 'Empire and Modernism in Joseph Conrad's "Karain: A Memory"', *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, 71.299, (2020), 355–369 (p. 359).

²⁸⁹ Amer Acheraïou, 'Colonial Encounters and Cultural Contests: Confrontation of Orientalist and Occidental Discourses in "Karain: A Memory"', *Conradiana*, 39.2, (2007), 153–167 (p. 154).

²⁹⁰ Robert Hampson, *Cross-Cultural Encounters in Joseph Conrad's Malay Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000) p. 122.

²⁹¹ Richard Ambrosini, *Conrad's Fiction as Critical Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) p. 75.

²⁹² see Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance*, chapter 5. Dryden does draw our attention to the way that the interior of the ship is presented as rational space in comparison to the vague and indistinct external world but does not explore it in terms of social practice or as a domestic space.

the question of how Conrad also uses the interior living quarters of the schooner, from which much of the narrative unfolds, to offer a critical perspective on the European narrator. Jonathan Stafford has shown how reading the ship as a domestic space can draw our attention to the way that domesticity was practiced on board the steamships of the mid nineteenth-century in order to allay anxieties about the encounter with the new or unfamiliar. As Stafford notes, in this context the domestic can be understood as ‘a mode of experiencing mobility which intervened between the passenger and the materiality of maritime mobility’.²⁹³ This in turn served to efface both the question of the legitimacy of the European subject in unfamiliar and contested or colonised territory, but also to obscure the material realities of exploitation of the subaltern labour which produced the ship’s mobility. In the reading that follows my aim is to develop this approach to examine the way that the domestic mitigates an unsettling reality of otherness outside the ship for the narrator. In ‘Karain’ moreover, the domestic space is used not merely to alleviate the narrator’s anxieties about the encounter with the strange maritime world outside, or in this case the East and its native peoples, but also for the narrator and the European traders to define themselves against their colonial Others. However, when we look at this space as practiced, the narrator’s assumption of an original, stable identity becomes more open to question. In this respect I argue that Conrad presents the ship through the narrator as an unstable and contingent domestic space in order to challenge dominant ways of thinking about racial difference at the end of the nineteenth century.

Domesticity as performative social practice

There are clear points of correspondence between Stafford’s notion of domesticity as a set of material and social practices and De Certeau’s sense of space as a practiced place. In other words the ship, or certainly the living quarters within it in ‘Karain’, can be read as a domestic space when we consider the different kinds of material evidence and the way that the space is inhabited and conceived by the narrator and his fellow traders. For example, there is a bathroom below deck. Each of the traders has their own private quarters to sleep in. The space is presented throughout the

²⁹³ Stafford, p. 583.

narrative as separate and distinct from the outside world. In the narrator's view this private/public boundary also provides a way of differentiating the civilised Europeans on board from the barbarous followers who line the deck and crowd the exotic landscape outside. In fact, the sense of this space being metonymically attached to the metropole is frequently drawn to our attention through the ticking of the chronometers which are synchronised to Greenwich Meantime. To the narrator the ship is a repository of authentic English culture, transplanted fully intact and unaltered to the tropics. The domestic space is an expression of the narrator's differentiation of self and the other that lies outside the ship. In contrast to the world of work on deck – we are regularly reminded of the crew at watch above the traders – life below deck is a space of relaxation and recreation. This is after all the site of Jackson's guitar playing and Karain's storytelling. Throughout, Conrad constantly draws our attention to the way that the domestic is constructed through social practices. As we shall see, by thinking through how Conrad presents the domestic as performance we can see that the narrator's assumption of cultural superiority is called into question.

The first instance where this can be seen comes with Karain's first nighttime arrival at the schooner. In contrast to the overtly stagey persona which the narrator described on deck during the daytime, he now describes a more subdued, restrained individual:

Karain appeared noiselessly in the doorway of the little cabin. He was simplicity itself then; all in white; muffled about his head; for arms only a kriss with a plain buffalo-horn handle, which he would politely conceal within a fold of his sarong before stepping over the threshold.²⁹⁴

This follows a lengthy recollection of the narrator's impressions of Karain which emphasises his marvellous theatricality earlier in the day where 'he presented himself essentially as an actor [...] with a sustained dignity seen nowhere else but behind the footlights and in the condensed falseness of some grossly tragic situation'.²⁹⁵ The narrator conceives of the living quarters of the schooner as a more unaffected space in which the theatrical excesses of the day are cast aside. The domestic space appears to have an improving influence on the wild, uncivilised non-European subject,

²⁹⁴ Conrad, p. 19.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

allaying the mysterious fears which are a sign of his difference to the European narrator: 'It was only on board the schooner, when surrounded by white faces, by unfamiliar sights and sounds, that Karain seemed to forget the strange obsession that wound like a black thread through the gorgeous pomp of his public life'.²⁹⁶ To the narrator the domestic figures as a space of rationality which neutralises the supernatural excesses of the Other. The white faces here are associated with logic and reason, the domestic with the space of normality. To the narrator the living quarters are a repository of European culture in which the irrational nature of the non-European becomes subject to scrutiny. It reinforces the sense, as Amer Acheraiou suggests, of an 'opposition between a bewildering, emotional Orient and a coherent, cerebral West'.²⁹⁷ In other words the domestic space itself embodies those qualities of essential identity which differentiate the European narrator from the Oriental.

And yet, to return to the moment of Karain's entry into this space and to consider the question of domesticity as social practice, we might see instead that the narrator's assumption of cultural superiority is misplaced. An alternative reading becomes available instead in which Karain recognises that the interior space appears to function according to a very different set of rules in comparison to those that determine external space, and that entry into this 'rational' space necessitates a different kind of performance. When seen in this way, the fact of being civilised, which is a key marker of difference between European and Malay in the eyes of the narrator, is here presented as merely an act. Karain's clothing, whilst being in marked contrast to the performance on deck where he was 'dressed splendidly for his part', is still an outfit, even if of a different kind, and evidently one which Karain has decided is more suitable for his purposes when visiting the European traders alone. Similarly, his concealment of the kriss beneath his sarong can be read as a calculated performance of deference which contrasts to the display of grandiosity on deck. Karain, after all, still retains his weapon, and still presents a threat to the white traders, even if this threat has now been carefully concealed. As we have seen previously with the example of the Malay crew in 'The Lagoon', reading the text in light of theories of spatial practices encourages us to assign greater significance to the ways that individuals appear to operate within social spaces. In other words, we

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 20.

²⁹⁷ Acheraiou, p. 155.

are encouraged to view Karain as active agent rather than merely the docile subject of the narrator's stereotypical discourse. Rather than reading the text in terms of whether Karain is 'reduced to a dramatic figure devoid of a real existence', our attention is drawn instead to the possibility of intention and choice, which affords greater agency to the figure of Karain, despite the narrator representing him in stereotypical terms.²⁹⁸ For example, Karain's display of politeness before entering the traders' living quarters might be read instead as evidence of his knowledge of Western customs, and an awareness of the significance of the threshold that separates public and private space. In this way, rather than privileging the domestic space as a more 'real' or rational space as the narrator assumes, it can be seen to be constructed through a less noticeable, but equally performative, kind of social practice, a kind of practice which Karain understands and controls. Accordingly, the narrator's privileging of the racialised 'white' interior space which is presented in binary opposition to the 'black' thread of Karain's 'strange obsession', is quietly undermined. The narrator's representation of the living quarters as something which differentiates the European from the non-European gives way to an account which sees the space practiced in different ways by the two individuals concerned.

Whilst the sense of inhabiting a domestic space reflects the narrator's conviction of his innate superiority, seeing the space as practiced invites a more ambivalent reading. A second example can be seen when Karain enters the cuddy and enjoys the traders' hospitality:

Karain sat squarely in the ship's wooden armchair, under the slight sway of the cabin lamp, a cheroot between his dark fingers, and a glass of lemonade before him. He was amused by the fizz of the thing, but after a sip or two would let it get flat, and with a courteous wave of his hand ask for a fresh bottle.²⁹⁹

This passage can be read in two ways. An Orientalist reading would draw attention to the way that the narrator presents Karain as ignorant of the assumed benefits of Western science and technology. Such advances serve to position the narrator as the civilised domesticated observer in contrast to the savage object of his gaze. Karain is absorbed, in a rather innocent or childlike manner, by the carbonation of water which

²⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 155.

²⁹⁹ Conrad, p. 21.

produces the fizz in the lemonade, but fails to understand that this is meant to enhance the sensation of imbibing it, so let's it go flat, asking for another in turn. The fizzy drink as emblematic of a more modern form of hospitality appears to be beyond Karain's comprehension and he is situated firmly in a time and space outside of modernity. The narrator's description, whilst drawing our attention to Karain's humanity in his display of amusement and courtesy, none the less reinforces the sense of Karain as uncivilised because undomesticated.

However, a second reading might look for signs of ambiguity or ambivalence in the presentation of this domestic scene. We might notice, for example, how the narrator emphasises the otherness of Karain by placing him within a familiar context of Western domesticity – the wooden armchair, the glass of lemonade – yet he also emphasises Karain's displacement in his unfamiliarity with Western norms. In this instance the narrator appears to be employing the mode of colonial discourse which Bhabha describes as mimicry, 'the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, *but not quite*'.³⁰⁰ In other words the narrator draws Karain into a familiar context of Western domesticity to normalise him in order to illustrate how essentially different he is. The narrator's mode of representation therefore seems to be, on closer inspection, already divided against itself.

Mimicry and menace below deck

When we consider domesticity as a performative social practice we may also recognise that there are other ways of interpreting Karain's behaviour which trouble the one implied by the narrator. For example, we might see the possibility of ambivalence in Karain's amusement at the fizzy drink and in his wastefulness of something offered as a measure of hospitality. This can be read as deliberate - a disavowal of the superiority of the kind of metropolitan domesticity and Western rationality which the drink appears to represent, rather than as evidence of Karain's racial inferiority or deference to his European hosts. On a simple level the scene illustrates Karain's resistance to being assimilated into a dominant European culture and his appropriation of the drink to perform a function other than the one that was

³⁰⁰ Bhabha, p. 86.

originally intended. More importantly, by presenting this scene as an illustration of Karain's racial difference, the narrator unwittingly reveals that cultural identity is clearly something which is practiced as opposed to innate. Karain's difference is predicated on the basis that he does things the wrong way: by letting the lemonade go flat and enjoying the drink as a visual spectacle rather than as a beverage. This implies that his difference can be corrected by doing things the right way. In other words, cultural identity is based on practices which can be learned, rather than being exclusive to the white European on the basis of an innate quality or essence. Thus Conrad undermines the stereotypical discourse of the narrator by using the domestic space to present cultural identity as practiced and therefore contingent, against the narrator's questionable assumption of an originary identity.

The use of an unreliable narrator in 'Karain' is central to Linda Dryden's analysis of the story in her essay 'Performing Malaya'.³⁰¹ Drawing on Clifford Geertz and James Clifford's theories of culture as performance, Dryden shows how the narrator 'believes himself to be participating in a stereotypical imperial romance' and of how his tendency to present Karain largely in the reductive mode of representation of this popular genre serves to reduce Malays 'to pantomime actors and ignores their cultural specificities'.³⁰² Conrad ironises the narrator's point of view by, for example, drawing points of similarity between the presentation of primitive native superstition and the lucky charms and fetishes which Hollis produces at the story's climax, an irony which is lost on the narrator. Conrad alerts us to the blind spots in the narrator's account throughout and we are invited to mistrust the version of reality which he presents us with. As I have suggested, drawing on Stafford's examination of passenger responses to steamship mobility, we might also read the narrator's account of Karain as an anxious response to the encounter with the alien and unsettling non-Western Other. We can read the description of seafaring life, and of traders involved in dangerous and illegal activity, as a coming to terms with the unsettling environments of the East. I am suggesting that the narrator seeks meaning and imposes order by attempting to frame the experience of life on board the ship discursively as one of familiar domesticity, which mitigates the unsettling encounter with the non-Western Other.

³⁰¹ Linda Dryden, 'Performing Malaya', in *Joseph Conrad and the Performing Arts*, ed. by Katherine Isobel Baxter and Richard J. Hand, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) pp. 11–27.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

The unhomely space of the ship

There are moments throughout the text, however, which appear to threaten the narrator's assurance of stable domesticity and his own assumption of a stable identity. On a simple level the narrator's description of Karain when he first enters the 'shelter of the schooner's cuddy' registers his sense of spatial disorientation which contact with Karain induces: 'The quiet dignity of his bearing transformed the dim-lit cuddy of the schooner into an audience-hall'.³⁰³ The boundary between public and private space appears to dissolve in this moment, as the intimate space of the cuddy seems transformed by Karain's presence into a public venue. Similarly, Karain seems to evoke in the narrator the suspicion that there are realities beyond the insular world of the ship which trouble his conception of stable domesticity, describing how Karain has 'the power to awaken in the beholders wonder, pain, pity, and a fearful near sense of things invisible, of things dark and mute, that surround the loneliness of mankind'.³⁰⁴ Karain seems to evoke in the narrator something David Morley describes as 'the irreducible presence of alterity, in ourselves and in others'.³⁰⁵ The sense of there being things invisible, of realities that the narrator can not see, also draws our attention to the omissions and limitations of the narrator's mode of relating Karain's tale, framed as it is by the reductive and stereotypical conventions of the imperial romance. Indeed, the narrator's framing of the living space as one of clarity and rationality is troubled by the presence of unseen and unconscious forces, of 'things invisible [...] dark and mute'.³⁰⁶ Finally, as the traders sit in silence after hearing Karain's account of Pata Matara, we are told, 'The silence was profound; but it seemed full of noiseless phantoms, of things sorrowful, shadowy, and mute, in whose invisible presence the firm, pulsating beat of the two ship's chronometers ticking off steadily the seconds of Greenwich Time seemed to me a protection and a relief'.³⁰⁷

The important point to note here is that the encounter with the unknown induces anxiety in the narrator and that his identification with the familiar – the reassuring tick of the chronometers synchronised to Greenwich Meantime – serves as

³⁰³ Conrad, p. 21.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

³⁰⁵ David Morley, *Home Territories* (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 265.

³⁰⁶ Conrad., p. 30.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 43.

a relief. In other words, the space itself is not homely but only becomes so through the leap of imagination that the narrator performs which connects this space to the metropole. It is only through the narrator's representational practices, artificially stimulated by the mechanical ticking of the chronometer, that the space can be conceived as separate and as a refuge from the outside world. It is worth considering, briefly, the implications of the narrator's need for protection and for identification with the metropolis. Protection implies security and fixity but it also carries with it implications of being bound or attached to something. The rhythm of the chronometer is a sign of the narrator's lack of autonomy, his sense of being conditioned by and dependent on Western culture. In the book *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (2004), Henri Lefebvre explores the deeper significance of rhythm, suggesting that the otherwise innocent or neutral rhythms of the everyday, like the ticking of the clock or the chronometer, are implicated in the maintenance of social order: 'rhythm seems natural, spontaneous, with no law other than its own unfurling. Yet rhythm, always particular (music, poetry, dance, gymnastics, work, etc) always implies a measure. Everywhere there is rhythm, there is measure, which is to say law, calculated and expected obligation, a project'.³⁰⁸ When viewed in this light we might see the narrator's sense of relief at the ticking of the chronometer as double-edged, signifying both a sense of comfort but an underlying sense of obligation to the authority of the colonial centre. The living quarters of the cuddy are in fact a Foucaultian space of discipline which is troubled by the unsettling silence of the colonial environment, of things 'sorrowful, shadowy, and mute'.

What these references to the disturbing presence of unseen forces beyond the narrator's comprehension amount to (and there are several others throughout the narrative) is the sense that despite his attempt to frame the experience of life on board the schooner discursively as a home, the ship is an un-homely space. The contact with an alien and unfamiliar culture has induced in the narrator a profound sense of unhomeliness. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha describes unhomeliness as 'the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations', the point at which 'the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other'.³⁰⁹ In other words the use of once-stable

³⁰⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (London, Continuum, 2004) p. 8.

³⁰⁹ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 9.

categories for understanding and structuring experience no longer seem to apply in this moment of 'extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations', inducing in the individual a profound sense of alienation and anxiety. We can see that in 'Karain' the same sense of unhomeliness haunts the narrator's account of maritime domesticity, the same sensation of the collapsing of the boundary between imagined public and private space, and the same suspicion that despite his best efforts to imagine and inhabit the space below deck as if it were a home, his assumption of homeliness and its corresponding association with the colonial authority of the metropole, is dubious and untenable. The veneer of civilisation which the narrator is attempting to impose is troubled by an awareness that there are other forces at play which cannot be assimilated into his discourse of domesticity. In this light we can read the narrator's account, rather like those of the passengers on the P & O Steamships, as a way of coming to terms with the Other in a way that selectively reshapes the materiality of that experience. Accordingly, the presentation of the schooner as domestic space is, like the representation of native Malay life in terms reminiscent of the imperial romance, something which we should treat with suspicion. Both the romantic mode, which frames native life and Karain's tale, and the domestic mode, which frames life below decks, function as two sides of the same coin.

The moment when this becomes most visible in the text appears at the climax of Karain's story. Our attention has been drawn from the very beginning of the tale to the fact that Karain's experience is mediated by the narrator, and that there may be some slippage between Karain's actual experience and the version that the narrator presents. He begins, 'This is, imperfectly, what he said'.³¹⁰ As has been suggested, Conrad draws on the conventions of the popular colonial fiction of the day to indicate the limitations of the narrator's view of Karain and his followers who he largely represents in stereotypical terms. As Dryden observes, 'the narrator endows Karain's story with a romantic, mythic status that belies the Malay's genuinely complex and tragic dilemma'.³¹¹ This reductive and excessively romantic mode of representation is in evidence at the climax of Karain's tale as he describes the discovery of Pata Matara's sister and the Dutchman after he and Matara's lengthy quest: 'We knew deception, false hopes; we knew captivity, sickness, thirst, misery, despair ... Enough! We found them! ...'³¹² The language here reaches a crescendo of

³¹⁰ Conrad, p. 33.

³¹¹ Dryden, p. 22.

³¹² Conrad, p. 39.

romantic excess. Yet at this precise moment we are brought swiftly back to the mundane reality of the cabin: 'Hollis sat up quickly, and spread his elbows on the table. Jackson made a brusque movement, and accidentally touched the guitar. A plaintive resonance filled the cabin with confused vibrations and died out slowly'.³¹³ The moment is a complex and deeply ambiguous one. Firstly, the narrator presents Karain's voice (as related by him) as histrionic, in contrast to his own, which calmly observes the details of mundane world of concrete objects and real people within the cuddy. Thus, Conrad draws a stark contrast between the narrator's mode of representing Karain's life and his representation of the Europeans below deck. Native culture is presented as excessively theatrical and superficial in contrast to the rational culture of the Europeans. As Robert Hampson notes, it is a perspective which 'emphasises the spectacular aspects of the Other and denies subjectivity and historical specificity'.³¹⁴ This is clearly exemplified by the summary of Karain's experience which is framed by a series of abstract nouns, 'deception, false hopes [...] misery, despair', rather than anything concrete. The narrator's return to domestic space, as rational space, appears to show how the Europeans are grounded in a more rational and stable reality. The accidental noise emitted by Jackson's guitar brings us back into regular time, into the space of ticking chronometers and back into history, in contrast to the vague, indeterminate sense of time which has characterised Karain's tale. As Karain laments at one point in the narrative, 'A year passed, then another. I ceased to count the number of nights, of moons, of years'.³¹⁵

Yet at the same time we are reminded by the guitar that the domestic space is also produced by a different kind of performance. Whilst Jackson's guitar playing below deck designates the living quarters as a recreational space, distinct from the place of work above the living quarters from which we hear the noise of the native crew, we are reminded that recreation is itself a performance of a different kind. The domestic space is not a natural space but one which is produced through the performance of different kinds of social practice. Whilst the clanging guitar, which brings us abruptly back into the mundane space of domesticity, contrasts with the grandiose and inflated mode of storytelling which the narrator has employed to relate Karain's tale, it also draws attention to the fabricated nature of the domestic space.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Hampson, p. 122.

³¹⁵ Conrad, p. 38.

The narrator's world of European domesticity is no more rational or real than the world of romance in which the narrator situates Karain.

There is a further, telling moment in the narrative which draws our attention to the performative, and therefore unstable, nature of cultural identity. When Karain makes his third and final visit to the schooner having swum from the mainland he is offered fresh clothing: 'Hollis [...] said without stirring, 'Give him a dry sarong – give him mine; it's hanging up in the bathroom.'³¹⁶ Whilst it is Hollis who offers his sarong to Karain it is implied that all three traders are in the habit of wearing the native Malay garment. It is also significant that this is disclosed by direct rather than reported speech. Hollis reveals something that the narrator does not disclose himself and would possibly rather be kept secret or to which he simply chooses to assign no significance. But the presence of the sarongs is a sign of the subtle ways that the traders' culture is becoming hybridised through contact with the East, despite the narrator's need for the chronometer's reassuring link to Greenwich Meantime, that constant reminder of his English origins. It also serves to remind us that culture is something that is practiced and performed, like the donning of the garments which are hanging in the traders' bathroom. On a simple level the sarong indicates that the separation between the domestic and the exotic which the narrator attempts to maintain throughout the narrative may not be as clear cut as he imagines.

In the moments following Karain's tale the narrator considers Karain and reflects on the question of 'illusion': 'I thought of his wanderings, of that obscure Odyssey of revenge, of all the men that wander amongst illusions [...] of the illusions that give joy, that give sorrow, that give pain, that give peace; of the invincible illusions that can make life and death appear serene'.³¹⁷ Whilst the narrator is reflecting on Karain, such statements, as Ambrosini and others have noted, say more about the narrator than they do about the Malay chieftain.³¹⁸ Whilst Karain, haunted by both the vision of Pata Matara's sister, then by the ghost of Matara himself, might be viewed by the narrator as a man that wanders 'amongst illusions', we can see that throughout the narrative Conrad intends us to see that it is also the European trader, ensconced safely on board the schooner in his discrete living quarters, who is also prone to the same forms of self-delusion and self-dramatisation that he believes are the mark of the non-European. Yet rather than a belief in a world

³¹⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

³¹⁷ Ibid., p. 43.

³¹⁸ Ambrosini, p. 75.

of spirits the narrator places his faith in a world of domesticity, in which spaces as containers of civilisation are made to demonstrate an essential difference between Europeans and uncivilised Orientals.³¹⁹ By drawing our attention to the ways that this domestic space on board the ship is constructed through forms of social practice Conrad subtly undermines the assumptions of the narrator who views his own domesticated world as measurably more real and rational than the supposedly inferior world of the East.

Conclusion

In a letter to the publisher T. Fisher Unwin dated 22nd August 1896, Conrad expressed his disappointment with Louis Becke's novel *A First Fleet Family*, but in doing so registered his admiration for the writer's earlier collections of short stories: 'It is not Mr Becke who disappoints me. The trouble is that I cannot find Mr Becke in the book. [...] I can find there his knowledge of ships, of the sea, of seamanship and seamen – but there is very little of those masterful touches of his'.³²⁰ Conrad, as we know, was not always so well-disposed towards the work of his contemporaries and his praise of Becke should not be taken lightly.³²¹ Stephanie Newell notes that 'outside metropolitan limits, one can find an array of excluded literatures and authors', and much like the 'ruffian' writers of the Niger Delta who are the object of Newell's study, Becke's life on the colonial periphery seems to have informed his unconventional approach to the popular adventure genre, an approach that, in questioning the dominant narrative of colonialism as 'civilising mission', he shared with Conrad and Stevenson.³²² To critics such as Frederic Jameson, however, Conrad represented a breach with the nineteenth century tradition to which Stevenson belonged, and that 'even after eighty years, [Conrad's] place is still

³¹⁹ Conrad, p. 43.

³²⁰ Joseph Conrad, *The Selected Letters of Joseph Conrad* ed. by Laurence Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 54–5.

³²¹ Of Marie Corelli and Hall Caine, who Davies describes as 'two of the day's most loved and derided authors', Conrad said: 'neither of these writers belongs to literature [...] they are popular because they express the common thought, and the common man is delighted to find himself in accord with people he supposes distinguished'. Ibid., p. 109–10.

³²² Stephanie Newell, 'Dirty Whites: "Ruffian-Writing" in Colonial West Africa', *Research in African Literatures*, 39.4 (2008), 1–13 (p. 11).

unstable, undecidable [...] floating uncertainly somewhere in between Proust and Robert Louis Stevenson. Conrad marks, indeed, a strategic fault line in the emergence of contemporary narrative [...] the emergence of what will be contemporary modernism'.³²³ When we place Conrad alongside Becke and Stevenson, we are reminded that Conrad's modernism was registered not only in the kinds of formal experimentation which we later find in 'Heart of Darkness', but also in a greater self-consciousness about the modes of representation commonly employed in the colonial fictions of his contemporaries, both the romantic mode which frames the tale of the colonised other in 'Karain', and the realist mode which is intended to present the more sober reality of domestic space below deck.

³²³ Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, (London: Routledge, 1983), p. 194.

Chapter Four: The Hotel

Victory and 'Fan-Tan'

Things are never quite as they seem in a hotel. It is a site which offers the possibility of privacy and escape but is located 'outside' in the public sphere. It has the security and permanence of a home yet a stay in the hotel for most individuals is only temporary. It is a point of transition between one place and the next, not a destination. It has the impersonality of a business but it is also an intimate space. The hotel, in contrast to other kinds of dwelling, is a commercialised domestic space. In other words, it is two things at the same time, or one thing pretending to be something else. And as a space that is both private and communal, commercial and familial, it embodies two sets of conflicting impulses; one which tends towards permanence, homeliness and stability, and another which is subject to chance, to fluctuations in the market, to the unpredictability of circumstance.

In a previous chapter I argued that this kind of duality can be seen in representations of the ship in colonial fiction. I suggested that exploring the relationship between the ship as both a mobile place of work but also a dwelling or domestic space, offered a way of thinking about how writers used these mixed-use or multivalent spaces to uphold or interrogate the larger discourses of empire. In relation to the short story 'Karain: a memory' (1897) for example, I argued that Conrad repeatedly draws our attention to the way that the domestic space is constructed as a way of alleviating the anxiety produced by the encounter with the unknown Other. Thinking about how a space is produced through practices, that is, fabricated through different kinds of social performance, provides a way of considering how the overarching narratives of empire were and are themselves constructed. The hotel, as a space which is simultaneously a home and a business, both familial and commercial, similarly invites us to question how this ambivalence might offer a way of thinking about the stability of the larger discourses of empire. In this chapter I explore how the hotel figures in the work of Joseph Conrad and his contemporary, the Australian writer William Carleton Dawe. I illustrate that there are clear links between the instability of the hotel as space and the larger discourse within which these fictions operated, and that writers used this dual or ambivalent nature of the hotel, as a simultaneously commercial and domestic space, to reinforce or challenge the kinds of discourse which upheld colonisation in the period. These

sites are not merely the neutral setting within which the more conspicuous elements of plot and character are foregrounded. I argue that by reading the hotel as an ambivalent and conflicted space, that is, one produced through varied and often conflicting practices, we can discern a divergent attitude toward the dominant beliefs of the day in the work of these writers.

The hotel and modernity

In recent years the hotel has garnered significant attention as an object of critical analysis. To some critics, this liminal space, which appeared to be both a home and not-a-home, proved fertile territory for writers whose work sought to interrogate the dominant values and attitudes of the time, as well as the larger social and cultural upheavals which were characteristic of modernity in the early years of the century. The equivocal nature of the hotel is central to Emma Short's study of the hotel in the work of modernist women writers. Short notes that the hotel's 'complex liminality [...] its resistance to being confined as either public or private, marks the hotel as a space that offers crucial insight into the shifting tensions and ideologies of modernity.'³²⁴ In particular, Short explores the way that writers such as Jean Rhys, Elizabeth Bowen and Katherine Mansfield used the ambivalent nature of the hotel to think through and challenge dominant constructions of gender in the early twentieth century. Interestingly, Short suggests that the use of the hotel as setting in the work of these writers is also linked to their experience of marginalisation as women who had a shared history of a colonial birthplace. The liminality of the hotel appeared a fitting subject for women writers who had, to some extent, been marginalised from the dominant culture of the imperial centre because of their origins in colonised territories.

There are some points of connection here then if we consider why Conrad might also have been drawn to the hotel as setting which, as Andrew Francis has shown, is consistent throughout his colonial fiction.³²⁵ In *Culture and Imperialism*

³²⁴ Emma Short, *No Place Like Home: The Hotel in Modernist Women's Writing* <<https://theses.ncl.ac.uk/jspui/bitstream/10443/1403/1/Short,%20E.%2012.pdf>> p.1 [accessed 12.07.19]

³²⁵ Andrew Francis, 'Accommodating Space, Time, and Culture: Reading Across Cultures and Colonialism in the Hotels of Conrad's Asian Fiction', *Transnational Conrad*, Special issue, *L'Époque Conradienne*, 41 (2016), 87–97.

(1993) Edward Said suggests that Conrad's work registers the sense of his feeling both at home as a British subject, and self-conscious of his status as an outsider, something Said describes as a 'persistent residual sense of his own exilic marginality',³²⁶ It might be argued that this sense of marginality is also reflected in the choice of setting in many of Conrad's works, whether this be on *The Nellie* moored on the outskirts of the capital at Gravesend in 'Heart of Darkness' (1899), the Verloc's house in the back streets of Soho in *The Secret Agent* (1907), or the port city of Sulaco in *Nostromo* (1904), located on the threshold between modernity and traditional society. The hotel in *Victory* (1915), is similarly located on the outer fringes of the European colonial territories on Java and seems to offer a suitable way for Conrad to explore, from the margins, his often ambivalent attitude towards the colonial past.

In her book *The Hotel as Setting in Early Twentieth Century German and Austrian Literature* (2006), Bettina Matthias examines the increasing frequency of the hotel as setting in the works of German and Austrian writers in the period. This trend, Matthias suggests, reflected in part a growing sense of unease amongst writers and intellectuals about the emergence of extreme nationalist political movements throughout Europe in the early years of the twentieth century and a consequent anxiety about notions of home and what it meant to 'belong'.³²⁷ More generally, the use of the hotel in literature reflected the instability of other social institutions such as the family and the ideology of the 'solid bourgeois home', or the questioning of traditional belief systems.³²⁸ In this respect, the hotel became an appropriate site for writers to explore the lives of individuals who were, as Matthias suggests, 'out of their element in the real and philosophical sense'.³²⁹ Furthermore, the prevalence of the hotel in fiction reflected the pervasiveness of capital in everyday life. With reference to the work *Die Philosophie des Geldes* (The Philosophy of Money, (1900)) by sociologist George Simmel, Matthias notes that in late capitalist societies 'not only goods and services, but ideas, space and time have become quantifiable in monetary terms [...] there is hardly a place where people are not subjected to the ambivalent effects of society's monetary organisation.'³³⁰ In this respect the hotel is

³²⁶ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, Vintage, 1994) p. 27.

³²⁷ Bettina Matthias, *The Hotel as Setting in Early Twentieth Century German and Austrian Literature* (Woodbridge: Camden House, 2006) p. 1.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Ibid.

³³⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

perhaps a more obvious example of a space in which money and the practice of everyday life are intertwined or indivisible. To Matthias this is indicative of the deceptive or ambivalent nature of the hotel. She observes that 'Hotels are fully capitalised spaces that do not openly acknowledge or reveal their capitalist foundation. While the whole operation of the hotel is based on the power of capital, it is this capital investment that also allows guests to suspend money's all-pervasive presence and enjoy the more or less luxurious offerings of their lodgings.'³³¹

It is worth considering how Matthias's notion of hotels as 'fully capitalised spaces that do not openly acknowledge or reveal their capitalist foundation' might offer a way of thinking about the hotel in colonial fiction. To reconfigure Matthias's statement slightly to accommodate the idea of domesticity, we might also consider the hotel as a place which is practiced domestically in a way that disguises its commerciality. And if we also think more broadly of domestication in the colonial context as a byword for 'civilisation' then this offers a way in to thinking about the larger narrative of colonialism which, though impelled by economic interests, was constructed in the official narratives of the period as a civilising venture.³³² To what extent, then, does the hotel in these fictions appear to be a place of 'civilisation' and to what extent is it oriented around making a profit? How are these two elements represented in the colonial hotel and what is the relationship between them? Might the hotel offer a way for us to explore how the civilising mission was constructed through domesticity as a way of concealing underlying financial imperatives? If in 'Karain' the 'domestic' figures as a form of denial in the narrative, might we say that it figures as a form of concealment in relation to the hotel in Conrad's *Victory*? Considering the hotel in light of ideas of spatial practices could certainly allow us to gain fresh insights into the way that writers explored the colonial venture as a civilising force during the period of high imperialism.

³³¹ Matthias, p. 3.

³³² In this respect we might think of the connection between 'civilisation' and 'domestication' which, with reference to Ann McClintock, I cited in an earlier chapter. To recall, in *Imperial Leather* McClintock notes that 'a secondary meaning of the term to domesticate is also 'to civilise'. McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 34–35.

The colonial hotel

Reading the hotel in relation to colonialism also points to something of a gap in literary criticism because, whilst much has been written about the hotel in the context of modernity and modernist literature, less attention has been paid to what it might tell us about coloniality or colonial fiction. A recent exception is Tijana Parezanovic's 2016 study of the colonial hotel in J. G. Farrell's *Troubles* (1970).³³³ On one level the paper is a fairly straightforward analysis of the way that Farrell uses the *Majestic Hotel* as a symbol of British Imperial rule. The novel, set in the fictional county of Kilnalough against the backdrop of the Irish War of Independence between 1919 and 1921, depicts the attempts of the Anglo-Irish Protestant owner Edward Spencer to return the hotel to its former condition of grandeur. His efforts are frustrated by the signs of damp and decay caused by nature, the lack of funds to sustain the hotel as a viable business, but also the threat to its future presented by the local native Irish population and the shadowy members of Sinn Fein who circulate around the establishment. On a simple level the physical condition of the hotel corresponds to the larger commentary on imperial decline. For example, the roots that spring up through the tennis court – tennis being then a largely gentrified pastime – are an obvious metaphor for the native Irish seeking to reclaim this colonised territory from the British ruling class. Similarly, the exotic flora and fauna in the *Majestic*'s Palm Court, incompatible with the Irish climate, provide an ironic commentary on the homogeneity of territorial colonisation. That the hotel is burnt down by its Irish caretaker, the only inhabitant of the *Majestic* who possesses a comprehensive knowledge of the hotel and its wider locale, provides another example of Farrell's commentary on the fragility of British rule.

My interest here however lies more in how Parezanovic advances the concept of the *colonial hotel* as a way of exploring the stability of the larger discourse which upheld colonial rule in Ireland during the period. Parezanovic suggests, for example, that the novel illustrates how 'the British Empire refuses to acknowledge the socio-political and historical changes of the early twentieth century and denies the existence of interstitial spaces between its firmly defined structures, whereby it inevitably meets its end'.³³⁴ Parezanovic's theorising of the hotel, which draws on

³³³ Tijana Parezanovic, 'Other Spaces of the Empire: A Colonial Hotel in J.G. Farrell's *Troubles*', *Prague Journal of English Studies*, 5.1 (2016), 53–70.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

postcolonial theories of the uncanny, liminality, hybridity, the stereotype *and* Michel Foucault's concept of the 'heterotopia' – thus offers a way of thinking about how the ambivalent or contradictory nature of the hotel might correspond to certain inconsistencies or weaknesses within the larger colonial discourse. The hotel is both a home and a business for example, but the blurring of this distinction is symptomatic of the hotel's decline. Once the elderly guests become a permanent fixture in the hotel the proprietor no longer feels able to charge them for their rooms. Parezanovic notes that 'By refusing or having no opportunity to leave, the ladies of the *Majestic* perpetuate the historically unsustainable idea of the eternal empire'.³³⁵ In the same way, the notion of the hotel and the larger discourse of empire as stable and permanent is undermined by those other elements which are required to sustain it. The hotel always depends on new guests, on a flow of capital, and on constant upkeep, which are at odds with the hotel as a symbol of permanence or implacable authority. The hotel can thus be seen to be internally divided between its status as a home and its function as a business, identities which are, in some ways, incompatible. As a space then, we might think of the hotel as comparable to Bhabha's notion of colonial discourse as also fundamentally ambivalent, pulling in two contrary directions at the same time, exhibiting characteristics which appear to be one thing whilst also being something very different. This ambivalence also provides a linking point between the spatial and the discursive in the analyses that follow in this chapter.

Victory and the 'unrestful hotel'

The hotel as a symbol of modernity figures at the very beginning of Joseph Conrad's *Victory* (1915). Within an extended meditation on the link between coal, diamonds and financial processes the narrator refers to coal as 'the supreme commodity of the age in which we are camped like bewildered travellers in a garish, unrestful hotel'.³³⁶ Yet whilst the novel explores, as Allan Simmons suggests, 'the instability of life at

³³⁵ Ibid., p. 66.

³³⁶ Joseph Conrad, *Victory* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2004) p. 7.

the time of writing', it actually looks back to an earlier period.³³⁷ Having received substantial critical praise but little financial reward for a series of works including *Nostromo* (1904) and *The Secret Agent* (1907), Conrad returned to the fictional setting of his first published works *Almayer's Folly* (1895) and *An Outcast of the Islands* (1896).³³⁸ Whilst the 'unrestful hotel' seemed an apt symbol of modernity, the hotel, this opening passage appears to indicate, might also be read as emblematic of the colonial past.

Colonial ambivalence in Schomberg's hotel

In part one, chapter five of *Victory*, Davidson recounts Schomberg's reaction to the discovery that Lena, a member of the Ladies' Orchestra which has been resident at Schomberg's hotel, has disappeared:

What he was concerned for was the good name of his house. Wherever he had been established, he had always had "artist parties" staying in his house. One recommended him to the others; but what would happen now, when it got about that leaders ran the risk in his house – his house – of losing members of their troupe. And just now, when he had spent seven hundred and thirty four guilders in building a concert-hall in his compound. Was that a thing to do in a respectable hotel?³³⁹

The passage provides a valuable illustration of those competing impulses, the familial and the commercial, which characterise the hotel as space. Indeed, the passage offers a useful example of de Certeau's formulation of space not as inert or neutral but as 'a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs and contractual

³³⁷ Simmons, *Critical Issues*, p.183. *Victory* was written between October 1912 and May 1914, on the eve of the First World War. Simmons suggests that the novel explores 'nothing less than the scepticism of the age'.

³³⁸ *Victory* was one of a number of works along with 'The Secret Sharer', 'Freya of the Seven Isles' and 'Because of the Dollars', which were inspired by a visit Conrad had received in 1909 from Carlos Marris, an island-trader and ship's master, who Conrad knew during his days as first mate on the *Vidar* in the British merchant navy. (see Douglas Kerr, "The Secret Secret Sharer", *Conradian* 39.2 (2014), 19–30 (p. 19)).

³³⁹ Conrad, p. 39.

proximities'.³⁴⁰ In the first place Schomberg foregrounds the idea of the hotel not as a business but as a home. It is his 'house' and as such it has a moral dimension. It is important to him that the hotel is thought of as a good place with a good reputation. The hotel is a reflection of what seem to be Schomberg's deeply held principles. For Schomberg, Axel Heyst – the man who has taken the young English girl, Lena, from the hotel – has violated the sanctity of the home. Secondly, the hotel is not merely a space for living in, but a place of culture and community, a place which will 'always' have "artists parties". The hotel is not lifeless or inert but dynamic, a space of recreation. Furthermore, it is equally important that the hotel be thought of as a secure place, one in which individuals will feel protected from intrusion from the outside world. Against the threat of intrusion from the unstable public sphere, the hotel is a protected space. Schomberg constructs an image of the hotel, then, in terms of a series of ideals to do with morality, community and security. In other words, in order both to illicit sympathy and to cast himself in the best light possible Schomberg mobilises the idea of the hotel as a home, a domestic space.

Yet what is also noticeable about the passage is how quickly Schomberg's ideals quickly give way to economic considerations. Underneath this display of moral certainty, Schomberg's speech is marked by a level of anxiety; the affront to his dignity and integrity is quickly undercut by other concerns, namely the potential damage to his finances. Schomberg thus betrays his less idealistic side. Whilst he frames the hotel as a space of stability and safety his thoughts quickly shift to the nitty gritty of exactly how many guilders he has had to spend to maintain it. The contrast between Schomberg's high-mindedness and his petty frugality could not be clearer.

At this point in the narrative we already know that Schomberg is not the virtuous individual he would like his audience to think he is. The real reason for Schomberg's distress is that he is aggrieved and humiliated; his attempts to seduce the young English girl Lena have failed and this rejection serves to shatter his self-image as 'a man of substance, in the prime of life, who knew his way about'.³⁴¹ We know then, from the various details which have already been disclosed in the narrative, that Schomberg does not honour the ideals which he so vehemently defends. Conrad appears, then, to be employing Schomberg as an emblem of a

³⁴⁰ De Certeau, p. 117.

³⁴¹ Conrad, p. 75.

particular kind of coloniality which, whilst seeming to be driven by high ideals, is fundamentally commercial in nature.

But on another level, if we read the hotel as a ‘microcosm of the colonial situation’, the passage is also interesting in terms of what it might tell us about the instability of colonial authority.³⁴² If we first take Schomberg’s use of the word ‘house’, it appears to suggest, and possess, a stability, a fixed meaning which is transparent and unquestionable. The house is, in Derridian terms, the transcendental signified. His repeated and emphatic use of the word, particularly at the moment when it is isolated in parentheses ‘his house – his house – ’, invests the word with absolute authority, there is an implicit agreement about what the word means to his auditors which requires no further justification or explanation. Similarly, his use of the word ‘always’ extends the idea of the hotel as a spatial imaginary which is fixed and unchanging. And yet this is troubled by those details which indicate certain kinds of contingency, the ‘just now’ which locates the hotel within a specific place and time, the specific amount of money required to alter or extend the hotel, the potential threat to the good name of the hotel which is bound up with its financial viability. This second set of concerns gestures towards the contingent, the aleatory, the random effects of circumstance, the historical. They are also connected with questions of finance in various ways.

There is a contradiction then, a divergence in these different kinds of statement, one which frames the hotel as a place of solidity and permanence, the embodiment of transcendental values and attributes which, like the word ‘house’, appear to signify an essential quality, and another which suggests that the hotel is an unstable space, under threat, subject to chance, time-bound. The hotel is, by these terms, always in a process of coming into being. In other words, there is an unstable relationship between the ideal and the material. We can see, therefore, how Conrad is using the hotel in *Victory* as an ambivalent space to question the stability of the kinds of discourse which upheld colonisation in the period. If, as I have argued, Conrad uses the ship to deconstruct his narrator’s articulation of colonial discourse in ‘Karain’, we might also say that he uses the hotel to deconstruct Schomberg’s in *Victory*. As I have suggested throughout this thesis, we repeatedly find examples in Conrad’s colonial fiction in which the spatial has a deconstructive relationship to the discursive.

³⁴² Francis, p. 87.

Schomberg and the colonial enterprise

As indicated in the passage above, this is not the first hotel which Schomberg has managed. His appearance in Sourabaya comes after a number of years managing various establishments around the Far East, ‘first in Bangkok, then somewhere else, and ultimately in Sourabaya’ and of living a rather itinerant and insecure life.³⁴³

Schomberg’s career as a hotelier is characterised by a consistent inability to establish a home anywhere for any length of time. Whilst his notion of the hotel as ‘house’ suggests permanence and stability, this is belied by his habit of moving on a regular basis. Nor is it the only work of Conrad’s fiction in which he appears. Schomberg is, to use Cedric Watts’s phrase, one of Conrad’s ‘transtextual’ characters, and had earlier appeared in the novel *Lord Jim* (1900) and the short story ‘Falk’(1903).

Although Schomberg is a largely peripheral character in each of these stories his presence nevertheless looms large. In ‘Falk’ for example he is described as ‘a brawny, hairy Alsatian, and an awful gossip’.³⁴⁴ It is this propensity to gossip which is the main reason for Schomberg’s notoriety and is indicative of his disruptive and unstable character. On the basis of Schomberg’s history as a hotelier across South East Asia which is alluded to in *Victory*, and his trans-textual status, I explore the ways that Conrad invites us to read Schomberg as embodying the essence of colonialism as a commercial entity. In this respect I take up Andrew Francis’s claim that the narrator’s reference to Schomberg’s ‘genius’ for catering encourages us to think more broadly of Schomberg and the hotel as emblematic of the colonial enterprise: ‘We can read it in this way as ironically signifying the limitedness not only of his essence and of his endeavours to assert Europeanness in the tropics, but, perhaps, by association, of all those colonial assertions of which the hotel is a symbol’.³⁴⁵

³⁴³ Conrad, p. 19.

³⁴⁴ Joseph Conrad, *Typhoon and Other Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 84.

³⁴⁵ Francis, p. 95.

The extra-territorial preserve of the European

The first part of *Victory* is set primarily in Sourabaya, an important town and port in north-eastern Java. In part one, chapter five we come to the gates of Schomberg's hotel,

stood back in an extensive enclosure containing a garden, some large trees, and, under their spreading boughs, a detached "hall available for concerts and other performances" as Schomberg worded it in his advertisements. Torn and fluttering bills [...] stuck on the brick pillars on each side of the gateway.³⁴⁶

Whilst the indicators of scale provide a sense that this is a rather imposing establishment the walls and the 'extensive enclosure' also indicate that the hotel is clearly separate from the wider locale. Sourabaya at the time was a particularly cosmopolitan location containing significant numbers of Dutch, Malay, Arab and Chinese, yet the description of the hotel points to its highly restrictive nature. As an image of the colonial presence the hotel appears to be cocooned within its grounds, the trees and walls obscuring any connection to the outside world. Andrew Francis suggests that the physical and architectural features of the European colonial hotel, this being typical of the kind described in travel books in the late nineteenth century, can tell us much about the nature of the colonial presence in South East Asia in the period. 'What we see depicted in the description of Schomberg's hotel is [...] an extra-territorial preserve of the European, as if it were a consulate enjoying its legal extra-territoriality'.³⁴⁷ In other words, what the hotels represent in various ways is the desire to exclude the non-European, often in highly complex cultural settings. As Francis suggests, 'in keeping with the simulated extra-territoriality of their domains [...] the intention behind the hotels [was] to "make it Dutch" or "make it British"'.³⁴⁸ The forced insularity of the hotel is illustrated later on in the narrative with the arrival of the three 'desperadoes', Mr. Jones, Ricardo and Pedro. When the hotel begins to be used by them for gambling, Schomberg is terrified of the possibility that word will get outside into the wider community. Anxious that one of the Chinese staff will spread word amongst his own people, Schomberg panics and cries 'what

³⁴⁶ Conrad., p. 30.

³⁴⁷ Francis, p. 90.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

about the boy on late duty? If he sees cards and actual money passing, he will be sure to blab, and it will be all over the town in no time'.³⁴⁹ The hotel is a protected space which anxiously keeps the world outside at bay.

This exclusivity is also reflected in Schomberg's particular brand of hospitality, specifically his choice of menu. His stock in trade is the 'table d'hôte' meal, a characteristically European form of dining. This arrangement means that all customers pay the same amount, irrespective of how much they eat, an arrangement which invariably works in Schomberg's favour. As Francis notes, 'this type of catering has attractive economics. Customers pay a fixed amount even if they eat little [...] and with the time of meals being fixed, labour costs are lower'.³⁵⁰ However, whilst Schomberg's form of hospitality is based on its profitability, he maintains that his motivation is primarily altruistic – he wants to provide a good deal but, more importantly, to foster a sense of much-needed community amongst his fellow Europeans. As he tells the narrator in 'Falk', 'I do it for the sake of a lot of young white fellows here that hadn't a place where they could eat it decently in good company'.³⁵¹ Similarly, in *Victory*, Schomberg describes the meal as a kind of benevolent gesture for his customers: 'A table d'hôte? Yes, certainly [...] for the sake of white men'.³⁵² Schomberg's attitude towards his customers is, to all appearances, one of a benevolent paternalism. He sees his role of hotelier as akin to that of a father figure, the head of the household drawing his disparate white family together in one place. Again, this kind of narrative serves discursively to construct the hotel as a familial space, Schomberg as the benevolent patriarch, catering to the needs of his fellow Europeans. Indeed, Schomberg sees himself as a guardian of European culture, his 'fixed' meal reflecting his fixed way of thinking about cultural difference, his conviction that European identity can and must be preserved intact through the practice of European forms of hospitality. But in terms of his commercial practice, the table d'hôte meal aligns with a very different set of values which considers people primarily in monetary terms. Schomberg's hotel actually seems to be one of the 'fully capitalised spaces that do not openly acknowledge or reveal their capitalist foundation'.³⁵³ Thus our attention is drawn to the disparity between the

³⁴⁹ Conrad, p. 90.

³⁵⁰ Francis, p. 95.

³⁵¹ Conrad, *Typhoon and Other Tales*, p. 98.

³⁵² Conrad, *Victory*, p. 80.

³⁵³ Matthias, p. 3.

hotel as a place which embodies the values of the family or community, and as separate from the outside world, and one in which the values of the marketplace predominate. It is, as Matthias suggests, a space in which we see ‘the ambivalent effects of society’s monetary organisation.’³⁵⁴ When we read the hotel as produced through different forms of social practice it seems to be a conflicted, unstable space, both a home and not-a-home at the same time.

As the narrative progresses in the first part of *Victory* our attention is repeatedly drawn to the way that Schomberg discursively frames the hotel as homely or as a place of belonging to his customers in a way that belies its un-homeliness. As we have seen, the ‘table d’hôte’ is Schomberg’s signature form of hospitality. Another way that he constructs the hotel as European space is through a series of rhetorical gestures, the designation of particular areas of the external and built environment with names that create an imaginary bond between this colonised territory and the European homeland. For example, he labels the exterior space surrounding the public room on the ground floor a ‘piazza’.³⁵⁵ Similarly, he refers to the new structure built in the grounds of the hotel as his ‘concert-hall’.³⁵⁶ These details illustrate how Schomberg frames the hotel as contiguous with European or metropolitan space, the hotel as simply a home from home, or, as Francis suggests, ‘an outpost of willed Europeanness’³⁵⁷. But both of these examples are subjected to scrutiny by the narrator and repositioned in terms which emphasise the actual geographical location of the hotel and the materiality of the environment. In this respect we might be encouraged to think of the hotel as hybridised space. For example, the narrator creates a critical distance from Schomberg’s rhetorical posturing when we are told ‘Footsteps and voices resounded on the verandah – I beg pardon, the piazza’.³⁵⁸ Where Schomberg sees certainty and permanence the narrator finds ambivalence. The hotel as a legitimate or natural location for the European coloniser, as Schomberg assumes, is thereby called into question, the narrator suggesting that Schomberg’s rigid distinction between coloniser and colonised is not so clear cut. Similarly, Schomberg’s ‘concert-hall’ is described as a ‘small, barn-like structure, built of imported pine boards, and raised clear of the ground’.³⁵⁹ Whilst

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Conrad, p. 30.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 55.

³⁵⁷ Francis, p. 95.

³⁵⁸ Conrad, p. 55.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

Schomberg gestures towards a shared past and a grand cultural tradition that has existed in a distant place and time, the narrator gestures to the present, the contingent and the everyday, his use of the word ‘imported’ reminding us that the materials used to construct this building are not native to the area but have had to be transported from elsewhere. Cultural identity does not occur naturally but is instead something which is constructed, produced through process. Furthermore, we are reminded that the hotel is not an end point but a point of transition, a location between one destination and the next. The narrator’s commentary thereby repeatedly questions Schomberg’s rhetoric which presents the European presence as both stable and legitimate.

What is also notable about Schomberg’s construction of the hotel as European space is that it implies sameness where we might instead find difference. His conception of the hotel assumes that all of the various European influences: French (‘table d’hôte’, ‘pavilion’), Italian (‘piazza’) English or possibly German (‘concert hall’), can be assembled like a jigsaw puzzle to form a neat, coherent whole. In other words, he assumes that whiteness is a coherent and stable category instead of one which might be contested or internally split in some way. This image of an harmonious Europeanness is particularly ironic given Schomberg’s origins. As Francis notes ‘his Alsatian origin places him firmly in a context of uncertain boundaries and identification, Alsace having been annexed by Germany in 1871 after the Franco-Prussian War.’³⁶⁰ In the article ‘The White Stuff’ (1998) Homi Bhabha suggests that it is the job of the critic to draw attention to the way that dominant discourses of race proceed from an assumption that whiteness is coherent and transparent and therefore not something which needs to be explained or discussed. Stereotypical discourse relies, in other words on stereotypical ideas of both non-whiteness *and* whiteness. He suggests that ‘the subversive move is to reveal *within* the very integuments of “whiteness” the agonistic elements that make it the unsettled, disturbed form of authority that it is – the incommensurable “differences” that it must surmount’.³⁶¹ Paraphrasing Bhabha, David Huddart writes ‘whiteness is not one thing, and never has been one thing. Its authority is split and anxious,

³⁶⁰ Francis, p. 93.

³⁶¹ Homi K.Bhabha, ‘The White Stuff’, *Artforum*, 36.9 (1998), 21–24 (p. 21).
 <<https://www.artforum.com/print/199805/whiteness-studies-32587>> [accessed 30.3.22]

however unified it might be in its exercise of power'.³⁶² Conrad's presentation of Schomberg's (colonial) authority as 'split and anxious' is manifested, as we have seen, in a variety of ways throughout the text, and on this occasion the assumption that Europeanness and whiteness are 'one thing' is undermined through the wry reflections of the narrator. But Conrad also ironises assumptions about a unified whiteness in the presentation of the Ladies Orchestra, specifically in the characterisation of its grotesque leader Zangiacomo, a man whose physical appearance and identity are entirely deceptive. Zangiacomo has a dyed purple beard and his 'orchestra' play what sounds like 'more or less Hungarian dance music'.³⁶³ Most importantly the orchestra leader's Italian name, Zangiacomo, belies his German origins, a fact which comes as a shock to the credulous Davidson. Through Zangiacomo and the Ladies Orchestra Conrad presents an absurd image of a world structured in a way that overlooks the specificities of cultural difference, a world in which an essential whiteness/Europeanness makes nationalities interchangeable. In doing so Conrad undermines the assumption that the hotel, like colonialism, is a stable 'home' for all white skinned people.³⁶⁴

That Schomberg refuses to see the hotel as anything other than European, an inability to acknowledge the presence of the non-European within his view of the world, is explained as a habit of mind later in the narrative. Discussing the passage from Sourabaya to Samarang with Ricardo, Schomberg considers the possibility of being seen by the native islanders, then quickly dismisses the thought as inconsequential: 'Both these white men looked on native life as a mere play of shadows. A play of shadows the dominant race could walk through unaffected and disregarded in the pursuit of its incomprehensible aims and needs'.³⁶⁵ Schomberg's view of the hotel is similarly one which filters out any sign of the non-European, but this limited view is undercut in the narrative by a telling detail which invites us to understand this space instead as hybridised. In Part Two, as Heyst approaches the concert-hall, we are told 'the lamentations of stringed instruments issued from the building in the hotel compound, the approaches to which were decorated with Japanese paper lanterns'.³⁶⁶ As we have seen elsewhere, Conrad frequently

³⁶² Huddart, *Homi K. Bhabha*, p. 50.

³⁶³ Conrad, p. 65.

³⁶⁴ Bhabha, p. 21.

³⁶⁵ Conrad, p. 128.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 53.

incorporates details within these narratives which draw our attention to the ways that cultural identities are altered as a result of the cross-cultural encounter, whether this be the sarongs hanging in the bathroom of the European traders' schooner in 'Karain', or the presence of the European lamp in Lakamba's house in *Almayer's Folly*. Such details point to the realities of imperial trade and question hegemonic ideas about racial identity. These spaces reflect an exchange of ideas and goods which do not privilege one culture over another but indicate a mutually beneficial relationship, or certainly one which is shaped by economics rather than being reflective of essential differences between cultures. The presence of the Japanese lanterns in Schomberg's enclosure similarly reminds us that his sense of cultural identity as fixed and unchanging is misplaced and unsustainable. Importantly, they also remind us that the hotel is a place in which visitors reside while in transit between one destination and the next. The hotel caters for guests who are engaged in different forms of commerce and so bring with them the artefacts and practices of disparate cultures. The commercial aspect of the hotel thus undermines any fixed idea of the hotel as home.

The hotel as performative space

If our attention is drawn to the way that Schomberg artificially constructs the hotel as homely through rhetoric, it is also drawn to the fact that he is constantly performing a role. Much as he assumes the hotel to be a natural home the narrator repeatedly presents Schomberg as engaged in various kinds of performance which undermine his assumptions of homeliness. The hotel is constantly produced through a process of performing the role of hotelier in various ways. We are told for example that he preserves 'a distant Lieutenant-of-the-Reserve demeanour', or he speaks 'in his formal military manner'.³⁶⁷ He also has a habit of 'exaggerating the deep manliness of his tone'.³⁶⁸ On another occasion we are told that 'his bearing was stately'.³⁶⁹ Whether in acting as a 'benefactor of mankind' or affecting his 'officer of the reserve manner', Schomberg acts in a way that is designed to construct and reinforce a

³⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 54., p. 81.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 85.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 40.

certain image of the hotel as a place in which he enjoys a natural authority.³⁷⁰ However, whilst he has a ‘habit of throwing out his chest and speaking in a severe voice’ we are also told that ‘he was in reality of a timid disposition under his manly exterior’.³⁷¹ Schomberg therefore expends a significant amount of effort to sustain this performance of authority and the involuntary grunts and noises which he emits – ‘Davidson heard him gnash his teeth as he went’ – betray his underlying anxiety.³⁷² Schomberg is always in a state of restlessness and agitation, never seeming quite as at home as he would like his customers to believe.

The hotel as dysfunctional family home

At the beginning of this chapter I suggested that we could think of the hotel as a place which is practiced domestically in a way that disguises its commerciality. We might consider that one particular form of practice which can characterise a space as domesticated is the imposition of the family structure or the institution of marriage as determining influences within a space. A site would appear to be a domestic one because of the way that it is oriented around the idea of family or marriage. But in *Victory* we are provided with a vivid illustration of how the family and marriage as institutions are mobilised to mask the underlying function of the hotel as a commercial entity. Ellen Burton Harrington notes that ‘It is difficult to imagine a more critical assault upon the Victorian conceptions of idealised wifely subordination than the depiction of the Schomberg’s marriage’.³⁷³ This is because Mrs. Schomberg has been subjected to her husband’s physical intimidation and psychological abuse for so long that she appears almost devoid of humanity, reduced to the likeness of ‘an automaton’. As the narrator observes, ‘one was inclined to think of her as an It – an automaton, a very plain dummy, with an arrangement for bowing the head at times and smiling stupidly now and then’.³⁷⁴ What the narrator fails to appreciate is that whilst Mrs Schomberg appears nothing more than an oddity to the community of traders, she has actually been deployed by her husband to

³⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 24.

³⁷¹ Ibid., p. 82.

³⁷² Ibid., p. 30.

³⁷³ Ellen Burton Harrington, ‘The Case of Mrs. Schomberg in *Victory*’, *The Conradian*, 40.2 (2015), 15–24 (p. 15).

³⁷⁴ Conrad, p. 33.

monitor their spending habits. The knowledge that Schomberg accumulates about his guests is then used to coerce them into spending more by vilifying anyone whom he deems to be parsimonious. The financial operation is thus cloaked in a veneer of domesticity but its corrosive effects are writ large on the persona of Mrs Schomberg; having been placed only in the service of capital Mrs Schomberg has become reified, reduced to the status of an object.

Whilst the depiction of this marriage is clearly intended by Conrad as a critique of unchecked patriarchal authority it is also, through a chain of association made explicit in the text, linked to a larger critique of colonial authority. Burton Harrington makes clear this connection by indicating how Mrs Schomberg's first appearance in the text is preceded by a description of the Ladies Orchestra who have to endure the 'sordid conditions and brutal incidents of such tours led by such Zangiacomos who often were anything but musicians by profession'.³⁷⁵ The description gestures towards the uncertainty of their role as either musicians or prostitutes. Importantly, the women are described as not 'much better than slaves really' which foreshadows the presentation of the Schomberg marriage that follows.³⁷⁶ As Burton Harrington notes, 'Conrad invites a broader criticism of the similarly enslaving and exploitative conditions to which women like Mrs Schomberg are subject in unequal marriage'.³⁷⁷ The use of the word 'slaves' however, also explicitly extends Conrad's critique to address the injurious nature of colonial authority, as Burton Harrington observes: 'Conrad makes explicit the connection between oppression of women and the colonial subject [...] Mrs Schomberg makes manifest the illegitimate basis for patriarchal power, in a violent portrayal of gender domination that evokes the colonial struggle'.³⁷⁸ If the institution of marriage was thought of as emblematic of European civilisation then Conrad presents it here in the colonial setting as rotten at its core. As presented through the mode of domesticity in *Victory*, colonialism is exploitative and brutalising, rather than the civilising force it claims to be.

I have suggested throughout this chapter that the dual nature of the hotel, as a domestic space which is also a business, or an uneasy combination of the transient and the permanent, highlights some important contradictions which offer a way of

³⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 34.

³⁷⁷ Burton Harrington, p. 16.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 17.

thinking about the legitimacy of the official narrative of colonialism as a civilising mission. In this respect I have shown how Conrad uses the hotel in *Victory* to question the stability of the kinds of discourse which upheld colonisation in the period. By way of contrast, I want to turn now to an example of colonial fiction by a little-known contemporary of Conrad, which is of value to the extent that it shows us how a choice of setting might also be used to reinforce colonial views rather than interrogate them. As has been discussed in a previous chapter concerning the indigenous domestic space, I suggested that we find a consistency of approach in Frank Swettenham's *Malay Sketches* which reinforces an idea of essential difference on the basis of the uncivilised nature of indigenous dwellings. In this story I suggest that the hotel similarly does the work of upholding the idea of essential difference between East and West.

William Carlton Dawe and the Bodley Head

The hotel in question is central to the short story 'Fan-Tan' by the Australian writer William Carlton Dawe. The story is one of a number in the collection *Yellow and White* (1895) published by John Lane and was clearly intended to cater to the burgeoning demand in the period for exotic tales set on the fringes of empire. T. Fisher Unwin were similarly hoping to capitalise on this market when they published Conrad's first novel *Almayer's Folly* in the same year. Unlike Unwin, however, John Lane, and the Bodley Head publishing house which he had created alongside Elkin Mathews in 1889, had developed a reputation for a particular kind of fiction, in part because, in its earlier years, it could not afford to attract well known authors away from established publishing houses. Margaret Diane Stetz describes how Lane and Mathews 'deliberately went after unknowns and rebels, authors who could not count on any publisher to be interested in their work or who had manuscripts rejected on the grounds of risqué or unpopular subject matter and who, therefore, were unlikely to argue over financial terms'.³⁷⁹ Lane and the Bodley Head's most well known publication in the period was *The Yellow Book* (1894) the yellow cover of which was suggested by Aubrey Beardsley because of its association with illicit French fiction. Contemporaries viewed Lane as having a rather liberal approach to sexual matters

³⁷⁹ Margaret Diane Stetz, 'Sex, Lies, and Printed Cloth: Bookselling at the Bodley Head in the Eighteen-Nineties', *Victorian Studies*, 35.1 (1991), 71–86 (p. 71).

although others thought that this was merely superficial, Oscar Wilde allegedly stating to friends that *The Yellow Book* ‘was horrid and not yellow at all ... It is dull and loathsome, a great failure’.³⁸⁰ Similarly Lane’s habit of double-bookkeeping is apparent in his defence of Aubrey Beardsley. In the face of accusations that the artist’s work was was lewd and indecent Lane argued that Beardsley was ‘the Hogarth of his day, and that he had no more sympathy with decadence than Hogarth had for the vices depicted in “The Rake’s Progress”’.³⁸¹ The stories in *Yellow and White* certainly explore the seamier side of the colonial experience, and often depict white British colonists who, as the title of the collection suggests, become romantically or sexually involved with stereotypically alluring Oriental women. Nevertheless, whilst the subject matter is rather more risqué than that found in the kinds of adventure and romance fiction which enjoyed massive popularity a decade earlier, it has much in common with those works which, as Linda Dryden suggests, ‘represented the East as an adventure playground for intrepid Europeans’.³⁸² Despite touching on the taboo subject of interracial sex and romance, *Yellow and White* is triumphantly imperialist in its view of the Far East and provides an interesting illustration of a certain kind of cultural product which may have seemed slightly *outré* or subversive to readers in the late nineteenth century but which appears, from a postcolonial perspective, to be deeply reactionary in its attitudes and underlying assumptions regarding the Far East and non-Europeans.

‘Fan-Tan’

The story begins with a chance meeting in Hong Kong between the narrator and a businessman named Pinto, a resident of the neighbouring Portuguese colony Macao, who is eager to share with him the attractions of his hometown. Tempted by the prospect of visiting its renowned gambling houses the narrator agrees to accompany

³⁸⁰ quoted in Michèle Mendelssohn, *Henry James, Oscar Wilde and Aesthetic Culture, Edinburgh Studies in Transatlantic Literatures* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014) p. 203.

³⁸¹ Aubrey Beardsley, *Under the Hill and Other Essays in Prose and Verse by Aubrey Beardsley* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1904) p. viii-ix.

<<https://archive.org/details/underhillotheres00bearrich/page/n15/mode/2up>> [accessed 10.2.22]

³⁸² Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial*, p. 17.

Pinto who assures him that they will be staying in ‘the cosiest little hotel in Macao’.³⁸³ Over a number of evenings the narrator masters the art of ‘Fan-Tan’ and returns to the hotel alone late one evening having accrued a small fortune at the gambling tables. He is greeted by the landlord but is slightly suspicious when he is offered an already uncorked bottle of wine. He is similarly disconcerted when, approaching his upstairs room, he hears the sound of snoring, notices that his neighbour’s door is wide open, and then discovers that there is no key to lock his own door, so barricades himself inside. After retiring to bed he is soon disturbed by the sensation that he seems to be ‘sliding softly over a bed of sand, the movement making a low swishing noise’ and then wakes once more to the sight of a large shadow ‘growing larger and larger [...] against the window, while the walls were undoubtedly *closing in upon me!*’.³⁸⁴ The walls are not, in fact, closing *in*, but one wall has been raised from the floor, and the narrator’s mattress is being dragged towards it by whoever is behind the partition in the adjoining room. Carefully choosing his moment to strike, the narrator seizes the hand of the would-be robber, removes a ring from its middle finger, then dodges the knife that bursts through the paper partition. The unknown adversary flees and, shortly after, the narrator leaves the hotel, but not before handing the ring to the landlord, a scowling ‘Portuguese with a black, forbidding cast of countenance’.³⁸⁵ His demeanour confirms to the narrator that the hotel is a front for the criminal activities of the landlord and his absent accomplice, the now ringless Pinto, who had tricked the narrator into staying in the hotel.

On one level ‘Fan-Tan’ seems like a simple reworking of a tale common to the adventure genre: the intrepid explorer journeys into unfamiliar territory, secures his bounty by virtue of his superior intelligence, then escapes the clutches of the treacherous foreigner with his treasure intact.³⁸⁶ But as Dryden suggests, ‘this type of literature is not simply good clean boyish fun: the moral and racial assumptions contained within it indicate the dominant concerns of the age in which it is written’.³⁸⁷ In some ways the hotel in ‘Fan-Tan’ has some obvious similarities with

³⁸³ W. Carleton Dawe, *Yellow and White* (London: John Lane, 1895) p. 30.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³⁸⁶ We can see the enduring appeal of this kind of narrative far beyond the colonial period in, for example, popular Hollywood productions such as Steven Spielberg’s *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981).

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

Schomberg's hotel in the sense that it is practised domestically in order to conceal an underlying financial operation. Everything from the description by Pinto that this is 'the cosiest little hotel in Macao', to the hospitality of the landlord with whom the narrator shares a bottle of wine and enjoys a 'friendly smoke', to the more subtle signs of domesticity such as the open bedroom door and the absence of a key, are all intended to create the illusion that this is a protected space, separate from the uncertain public sphere. However, we can see that the hotel is being used in this story not to question dominant ideas about colonisers but to reinforce dominant ideas about the colonised.

We can read the hotel in this way because an explicit link is made in the text between the devious nature of Pinto (and by association his partner, the landlord) and his racial origins. In other words, Dawe uses the instability of the hotel within a larger Orientalist framework, which relies on stereotypical representations of the native Chinese as racially inferior, irrational and devious, in comparison to the rational, modern, progressive, British colonial. When the narrator first meets Pinto in Hong Kong the narrator 'strongly suspect[s] that there was a strain of the Chinaman in him' and notices that Pinto's eyes have 'a suspicious Oriental slant'.³⁸⁸ Pinto's status as a fellow European and of equal status is therefore called into question because, in the eyes of the narrator, to be Chinese is to be inherently deceitful and of dubious moral character. Significantly, as the narrative proceeds it becomes clear that Pinto is not simply a manifestation of individual racial degeneracy but is actually emblematic of the degeneracy of the larger colonial society in Macao. That the Portuguese have allowed the native Chinese to gain a foothold in the colonial economy is symptomatic of this decline. What was once a great trading port and destination for Portuguese adventurers, the place where 'China first came in contact with the West', is now a shadow of its former self, a 'malodorous city' and a potent symbol of imperial decline.³⁸⁹ As the narrator notes 'In Asia, as in Europe, the Portuguee has lost caste, and the ubiquitous Chinaman has set up his fan-tan tables on the remnants of a past greatness'.³⁹⁰ In other words, this once great colonial society has become corrupted by the malign influence of the native Chinese. We can trace a line therefore, from Pinto as racially 'corrupt' in the eyes of the narrator, to Macao as a corrupt society, to the hotel as a place of corruption. The hotel can

³⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 26.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 27., p. 35.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 28.

therefore be read as emblematic of the larger colonial society, one which Dawe presents as degenerate and unstable because of the contaminating influence of the native Chinese. This in turn serves to legitimise the British presence on the neighbouring colony which, by implication, has a stabilising influence on the unruly native Chinese. So, in contrast to Hong Kong, where upright and legitimate forms of commercial practice prevail – the narrator notes how ‘everyone is a broker in Hong Kong, more or less’ – Macao has been contaminated by the illicit practices of the deceitful Chinese.³⁹¹ The hotel functions less as a site through which the text interrogates dominant ways of thinking about the colonial venture, as I have suggested it does in *Victory*, than one which does the work of reinforcing colonialist views.

There is, however, an alternative reading of this story which comes to light when we look at the instability of the hotel from a different perspective, a reading which would see this story as illustrating an anxiety about the precariousness of colonial rule. A clue to this can be found at the very beginning of the story when the narrator first sets the scene of his initial meeting with Pinto, described as taking place in the Hong Kong Hotel, ‘a place not quite so select, perhaps, as the reception room at Buckingham Palace on a drawing room day, but a place in which one often dropped across some curiously entertaining personages.’³⁹² We can read this passage as an indicator of an underlying anxiety that British cultural identity may be at risk, or under threat, when so far removed from that symbolic centre of empire, Buckingham Palace.³⁹³ Rather than figuring as a mirror image of the imperial centre, the hotel, with its ever-changing and unpredictable clientele, seems ‘curiously’ dislocated from it. This anxiety becomes more visible however when we return to the

³⁹¹ Ibid., p. 26.

³⁹² Ibid., p. 26.

³⁹³ I am reminded of the more conscious ironising of the notion of London as the symbolic heart of empire in Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* in which the Houses of Parliament are described as ‘the very centre of the Empire on which the sun never sets’. (Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2004, p. 157.) It is difficult to discern a similar degree of irony in the stories in *Yellow and White*. Indeed, there is a moment when, reflecting on the loutish behaviour of he and his fellow brokers the previous evening as they are transported through the city, the narrator declares ‘But what cared we? We were all free-born Britons, and as such had a splendid contempt for the opinion of the d—d foreigner’. (p.35.) There is an absence of the kind of critical detachment from the narrator’s viewpoint which we find in much of Conrad’s colonial fiction, and this is characteristic, on a surface level at least, of many of the stories in the collection.

hotel in Macao and the moment when, in the moments prior to being dragged across the floor, the narrator wakes from an encounter with what he describes as ‘Madame Nightmare’.³⁹⁴ Having had a strange, unsettling dream, which includes an encounter with the stock, inscrutable ‘yellow-faced’ Chinaman, the disoriented narrator wakes with a ‘violent shiver’ at the ‘horrible thought that [...] what I saw did not really exist [...] that I was in my own room at Hong Kong’.³⁹⁵ In other words, the strange post-colonial society of Macao has momentarily become indistinguishable from the allegedly secure and stable neighbouring British colony. The hotel is revealed to be an uncanny space which, far from affirming the legitimacy of colonial presence in Hong Kong, provides the narrator with an unsettling glimpse of colonial authority menaced by its colonial Other.

Conclusion

It is interesting to compare the career of Carleton Dawe with that of Conrad. It might be simplistic to think of Dawe as merely a writer of sensational fiction whose priorities were primarily commercial given the scarcity of information about him, but it is difficult to think otherwise on the basis of what we *do* know. According to Percival Searle's *Dictionary of Australian Biography*, Dawe belonged to an old Cornish family and was born in Adelaide in 1865.³⁹⁶ In his twenties he published two volumes of poetry, *Sydonia and other Poems* (1885) and *Love and the World and other Poems* (1886), before turning his attention to fiction. After some time living in the Far East he moved to England in 1892, where he lived for more than forty years. He died in 1935 having published in the region of seventy novels. Titles such as *The Woman, the Man, and the Monster* (1909) and *The Woman with the Yellow Eyes* (1917) provide a sense of the kinds of sensational fiction which was Dawe's stock-in-trade.³⁹⁷ He also wrote several plays, two of which, *The Black Spider* (1920) and *The Shadow of Evil* (1921) were made into commercially successful films. The sheer volume of the work, and general lack of critical interest in Dawe's output in terms of

³⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 47.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 49.

³⁹⁶ Percival Searle, *Dictionary of Australian Biography, Volume 1.*, (London: Angus and Robertson, 1949) p. 225.

³⁹⁷ E. Morris Miller, *Australian Literature* (London: Angus and Robertson, 1956) pp. 141–143.

its literary worth, invites us to think of Dawe as someone who catered to the popular tastes of the day and, in many respects, reflected the prevailing attitudes of his time. For this reason his work is of value in providing us with an example of the way that, in the words of Stephanie Newell, ‘imperialist and exoticist discourses were vigorously upheld in mainstream British popular literature in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries’, something which is certainly evident in works such as ‘Fan-Tan’ and the other stories in *Yellow and White*.³⁹⁸ In this respect his choice of setting for the climax of ‘Fan-Tan’, appeared, consciously or not, to reflect an intention to perpetuate an image of the Far East as distinctly Other to civilised British society, populated by inscrutable and untrustworthy Orientals or their mixed-raced descendants. The hotel as an unstable space, a commercial entity masquerading as a home, reflected a desire to present the hybrid society of Macao, corrupted by the malign influence of the native Chinese, as similarly unstable, an instability which explained the need for the British to extend their calming influence over foreign lands.

As we have seen in relation to the author’s introduction to *Almayer’s Folly*, from the beginning of his literary career, it had been Conrad’s express intention to write against the stereotypical image of the East, an image which a story like ‘Fan-Tan’ exemplifies. To what extent he achieved this aim is the subject of ongoing debate, given that, as many critics have noted, the kinds of stock character which appear in the popular adventure fiction of the time, of which Dawe’s *Yellow and White* is a good example, can also be found in Conrad’s colonial fictions.³⁹⁹ The Chinese servants who dwell on the periphery of Schomberg’s hotel in *Victory*, for example, are not necessarily any more complex than the individuals we find in *Yellow and White*. However, Conrad’s use of the hotel in *Victory* reflects a desire to challenge the Eastern stereotype by focussing instead on the prevailing belief that it was Europeans who brought stability and prosperity to the East. The figure of the hotelier Schomberg, anxiously pacing the floors of the hotel in military fashion, and denigrating any guest who fails to spend the expected amount of money on his premises, symbolises the restlessness and voracity of the European presence in overseas territories, despite its pretensions of respectability and civility. Conrad thus uses the ambivalent nature of the hotel as part-domestic and part-commercial space

³⁹⁸ Stephanie Newell, ‘Dirty Whites: “Ruffian-Writing” in Colonial West Africa’, *Research in African Literatures*, 39.4 (2008), 1–13 (p. 1).

³⁹⁹ see Baxter, ‘Geography and Law in *Almayer’s Folly*’.

to illuminate the provisionality of the European subject, restlessly un-homed in unfamiliar territory.

Chapter Five: The Trading Station

‘The Methodical Mr Burr of Majuru’, ‘The Doctor’s Wife’,
‘An Outpost of Progress’ and ‘The Beach of Faleša’

Having spent much of his early professional life as an itinerant trader among the tropical islands of the South Pacific it is unsurprising that Louis Becke should have chosen to set many of the stories in *By Reef and Palm* (1894) and *The Ebbing of the Tide* (1895) in and around trading stations. In the same period, Joseph Conrad’s time as captain of a river steamboat in the Belgian Congo resulted in two stories, ‘An Outpost of Progress’ (1896) and ‘Heart of Darkness’ (1899), which made memorable use of the trading station as setting to explore the troubling nature of the Belgian colonial enterprise. Similarly, when the ailing Robert Louis Stevenson settled in Samoa in his final years, his first-hand experience of imperial intervention in the South Seas resulted in the novella ‘The Beach of Faleša’ (1893) which also made extensive use of the trading station as setting. When compared with the popular imperial romance fictions of the day which were, as Linda Dryden notes, intended to ‘transport [...] readers away from everyday concerns and to immerse them in uncomplicated exotic romance’, these stories presented a very different vision of imperialism.⁴⁰⁰ The use of a realistic setting reminded readers that, in the words of Edward Said, ‘the business of empire [...] had become the empire of business’.⁴⁰¹ The choice of setting in these works therefore indicated both a critical stance towards the imperial romance genre and a shared scepticism towards the official discourse of imperialism. They also display a shared perspective and tone towards the imperial enterprise; a note of irony is evident, for example, in the ‘progress’ of Conrad’s title, in Louis Becke’s description of his murderous trader the ‘Methodical’ Mr Burr, and in the darkly comic juxtaposition of romance and realism in Stevenson’s tale. The trading station thus offered potential for satire and irony when offset against the high ideals of imperial powers or the escapist fantasies of popular romance.

Part of the satirical character of these colonial fictions arises from the jarring effect produced when the domestic meets the exotic in the context of the trading station. European domesticity is shown to be incongruous or absurd in the midst of the exotic setting. Similarly, the domestic space as embodiment of Western ‘civilisation’ becomes available for satire when juxtaposed with the primary function

⁴⁰⁰ Dryden, p. 2.

⁴⁰¹ Said, *Culture And Imperialism*, p. 23.

of a place intended to facilitate profit; the financial imperatives of the trading station sit uneasily alongside the civilising ideals embodied by the domestic space. Moreover, the theme of 'trade' as suggestive of exchange and mobility contrasts with the theme of 'domesticity' which suggests stability, order and security. In the contrast between the two, these writers were able to reflect on the stability of imperial ideals at a time when, as Marshall Berman notes, an ever expanding world market was 'capable of the most spectacular growth [...] capable of everything except solidity and stability'.⁴⁰² In *The Condition of Postmodernity* David Harvey shares Berman's view of the disruptive effects of capital: 'When placed in the context of capital accumulation [the] fixity of spatial organisation becomes heightened into an absolute contradiction. The effect is to unleash capitalism's powers of 'creative destruction' upon the geographical landscape'.⁴⁰³ In this respect the division between the private and the public, which was central to metropolitan ways of thinking about social space, might be shown to be highly unstable in a setting in which the domestic and the commercial were so closely conjoined.

On a simple level the dominant distinction between the public and the private is also troubled by the practicalities of domestic life in the colonial setting. This distinction is confused in 'An Outpost of Progress', for example, by the practice of washing or bathing, which in metropolitan terms would be considered private practices, in outside space. The same can be said of cooking. We have seen how the public/private model is troubled in another of Conrad's fictions, *Almayer's Folly*, in which Mrs Almayer and Babalatchi conspire in the uncertain, liminal space of the rear courtyard where food is prepared. Whilst the courtyard is an integral and discrete part of Almayer's home it is also easily accessible to the local community from without, something Babalatchi exploits to his advantage. We might say that Almayer's complacency, and part of his undoing, rests on his assumption that the feminised courtyard is private and therefore separate from the public sphere, when in actuality it is implicated in the larger society in a way that undermines his assumption of authority. His adherence to the model of the separate spheres, in other words, outlines the limitations of his Eurocentric, patriarchal way of thinking, and is one reason for his downfall. Native customs, domestic arrangements and practices are therefore shown to trouble dominant Western models of social space. As Sara

⁴⁰² Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air – The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 2010) p. 19.

⁴⁰³ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989) p. 258.

Mills notes, 'colonised space troubles some of the simple binary oppositions of public and private spheres, since some of the values circulating within the colonised countries are profoundly at odds with the values of the imperial culture'.⁴⁰⁴

Accordingly, a common theme throughout these works is the indeterminacy of borders between private, domestic space and the public realm of commerce within the fictional representation of the trading station. The combined effects of commerce and native practices on the 'simple binary oppositions of the public and private spheres' thus forms the basis of the exploration of the works that follows. I argue that Becke, Conrad and Stevenson present the trading station as a hybrid space, in which the traditional distinction between the public and the private is troubled in the colonial setting, in a way that both questions the civilising ideals of the colonial enterprise and illustrates the instability of colonial authority.

Whilst all three writers used the trading station as a way of challenging the dominant narrative of colonialism as civilising mission, reading these works alongside each other also serves to illuminate an important affinity between Conrad and Stevenson when viewed from a postcolonial perspective. I argue that reading 'An Outpost of Progress' and 'The Beach of Falesá' in light of postcolonial and spatial theory brings to light the central role that native women play within these narratives, evidenced by their ability to navigate and influence the assumed separate spheres of the private and the public. In this respect this chapter builds in part on Linda Dryden's discussion of the postcolonial link between Conrad and Stevenson, a shared quality which she describes as 'a coinciding of determinations to challenge [...] the assumptions of previous imperial narratives and offer [...] a reading that privileges the previously marginalised native subject'.⁴⁰⁵

Public, private and the methodical Mr Burr

Although the white independent traders of Louis Becke's early short stories are far removed from metropolitan centres they nonetheless carry with them traditional

⁴⁰⁴ Sara Mills, 'Gender And Colonial Space', *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 3.2 (1996), 125–148 (p. 130).

⁴⁰⁵ Linda Dryden, 'Literary Affinities and the Postcolonial in Robert Louis Stevenson and Joseph Conrad', in *Scottish Literature and Postcolonial Literature: Comparative Texts and Critical Perspectives* ed. Michael Gardiner and Graeme Macdonald (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011) p. 95–96.

assumptions about the home in a way that can tell us much about what David Spurr describes as ‘the power of ruling ideas which continue to hold sway outside the historical and institutional limits of direct domination’.⁴⁰⁶ A memorable example is presented in the story ‘The Methodical Mr Burr of Majuru’, from the collection *By Reef and Palm* (1894). Like many others in the collection, Becke questions the prevailing belief in European cultural superiority. In this instance, the ‘method’ that enables Mr Burr to prosper on Majuru is reflective of a civilisation that is neither more advanced nor more enlightened than native civilisation but is instead more capable of employing violence to achieve its aims.

Mr Burr is described as ‘a prosperous man’ whose success seems largely attributable to a quality of rigour and self-discipline. Unlike the rather dissolute white traders who populate Becke’s stories Mr Burr is abstinent and only drinks ‘under the pressure of the monotony caused by the non-arrival of a ship to buy his produce.’⁴⁰⁷

He would then close his store, and, aided by a number of friendly male natives, start on a case of gin. But never a woman went into Ned’s house, though many visited the store, where Ned bought their produce, paid for it in trade or cash, and then sent them off, after treating them on a strictly business basis⁴⁰⁸

Mr Burr’s characteristic self-discipline is reflected in his way of thinking about public and private space. He divides the trading station between the accessible public store and the inaccessible private house. The public zone outside the trader’s home is a homosocial space of male camaraderie and whilst women visit the store they are discouraged from lingering too long in the public sphere or remaining to share in Burr’s hospitality. Burr’s attitude to the public and private therefore appears to adhere to a traditional, metropolitan model of social space: women are excluded from the public arena and wives of appropriate moral character reside within the sanctity of the home. His method of managing the trading station reflects a determination to impose the values of the dominant imperial culture within colonised territory.

Burr’s rigid view of social space remains intact despite considerable pressure from the native community, particularly from the local elders who are eager to establish more favourable terms with Mr Burr. We are told for example that the local

⁴⁰⁶ Spurr, p. 6.

⁴⁰⁷ Becke, p. 77.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

women, ‘backed by the chiefs, had made most decided, but withal diplomatic, assaults upon his celibacy’.⁴⁰⁹ Burr, however, resists the opportunity to embrace the native practice of polygamy and declines the chief’s invitation to give any of the ‘two or three hundred young girls’ at his disposal the title of honorary wives *pro tem*.⁴¹⁰ In this instance we can see an illustration of how, according to Mills ‘some of the values circulating within the colonised countries are profoundly at odds with the values of the imperial culture’.⁴¹¹ The local chiefs, for example, see the process of bargaining with native young girls and women as inseparable from the trading in goods and resources. The worlds of the commercial and the conjugal, the public and private spheres, are much less distinct within the native Marshall island community depicted in this story. Whilst the representations of women in Becke’s stories are undoubtedly problematic from a feminist perspective, thinking in terms of the public and the private in this instance draws our attention to an aspect of cultural difference between European and non-European that privileges neither coloniser or colonised. The model of the separate spheres which the trading station instantiates might be better understood as an alternative form of practice within non-European space.

As we have seen in the depiction of Schomberg’s hotel in Conrad’s *Victory*, venues which serve as a meeting point between different cultures in the colonial setting can provide a way of examining the latent attitudes of colonisers towards indigenous people. As Andrew Francis notes, in presenting the interaction of Malays and Europeans, Conrad can be seen to be ‘transcending the national, writing across the imagined boundaries and frontiers of national difference and indicating what the truly transnational might, and should, comprise’.⁴¹² Yet the European hotel of the tropics ‘remains firmly national, a place of division of culture and language [...] an institution that foregrounds ironically the transnational precisely by its being organised to exclude it’.⁴¹³ We can see in Becke’s presentation of Mr Burr’s trading station a comparable site which also tells us something of the colonial presence, one which similarly serves as a point of exchange and negotiation between the European and non-European whilst at the same time signalling the colonisers’ determination to exclude or prohibit the indigenous culture. The colonial presence, as represented by

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., p. 78.

⁴¹¹ Mills, p. 130.

⁴¹² Francis, ‘Accommodating Space, Time, and Culture’, p. 96.

⁴¹³ Ibid., p. 96.

Mr Burr, has little to do with bringing progress and civilisation to the non-European but appears to operate on purely economic terms. Burr's distance from the local community, combined with his evident prosperity, illustrates the way that, in the case of Mr Burr, the colonial presence is fundamentally economic in nature. The strict division of the trading station into private and public spheres belies the civilising ideals of colonialism.

It soon transpires that Burr is not averse to the attractions of non-European women *per se*. We discover that before she died some ten years previously Burr, trading in a different part of the South Seas, was married to a Manihikian woman. It is apparent that this woman, at least from the perspective of the narrator, was of 'another kind. They don't breed that sort here in the Marshalls.'⁴¹⁴ We can infer then that the Manihikian wife was sufficiently European in her conduct and values to be considered a suitable partner for Mr. Burr, whilst the local girls, in the view of the narrator and Mr Burr, are not. He believes he may have found a suitable wife when he is offered a girl called Le-jennabon, the daughter of a local chief who wishes to repay Mr Burr for supplying his tribe with rifles. Anxious that he might be being 'set up' Burr has spies sent to observe Le-jennabon to provide an assessment of her moral character. As he tells the narrator, "'I've been over to Arhnu several times, and I've had spies out, and damn me if I could ever hear a whisper against her'"⁴¹⁵ Unfortunately Burr soon begins to question his wife's character, particularly when she attracts the attention of a 'flash buck' from the nearby island of Likieb. Burr ambushes the young chief in his garden, shoots him through the chest, and forces Le-jennabon to parade his severed head through the town. Concluding his story Burr tells the narrator, 'Then I takes the thing, wet and bloody, and slings it into the middle of the Likieb people, and gave Le-jennabon a shove and sent her inside'.⁴¹⁶ Describing this episode as 'the luckiest thing as could ha' happened' Burr takes pleasure in his enhanced reputation as 'a man who hez business principles' whilst also giving Le-jennabon 'a good idea of what might happen to her if she ain't mighty correct'.⁴¹⁷

Becke's story might be read as a dark satire of the ideology of the separate spheres, satirising notions that this model of society reflects the 'natural order of

⁴¹⁴ Becke, p. 79.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., p. 84.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

things' by presenting instead a fictional version of the model that is underpinned and maintained by ruthless male violence and a pathological need to control female sexuality. In the colonial setting the story becomes an examination of the violent nature of both the masculine *and* the imperial. Becke suggests that 'civilisation' is neither gently introduced or easily assimilated into native culture but brutally imposed, and native people coerced through the threat of violence. The civilising ideals which would be reflected in the ideology of domesticity are shown to be secondary to the more important business of trade and the economic dominance by white male authority figures such as Burr. Becke therefore uses the trading station to present the imperial enterprise as one of cultural exclusion and female subjugation in the service of economic interests.

Colonial instability on the public/private boundary

On another level it is also evident that Mr Burr's determination to secure the boundary between public and private space is marked by intense paranoia and anxiety. He is clearly paranoid, for example, that his marriage to Le-jennabon might result in a loss of control of his private domain, and similarly anxious that the local women, encouraged by the village elders for commercial gain, will destabilise the strict separation of the public and private. Mr Burr displays a desperation to install in foreign territory a structure which is clearly under threat from the community which surrounds it. Whilst Becke's depiction of colonial violence, on the level of its brutal realism, subverts the prevalent belief about white superiority, revealing the white man to be far more savage than the indigenous population, we can also see that on another level this is a story about the instability of a certain binary mode of thinking in the colonial setting. This way of thinking, which is manifested in Burr's rigid policing of the public/private boundary, must be stringently defended and violently reinforced to maintain his authority. The trading station in this story can therefore be read as emblematic of a binarism which is revealed to be fundamentally unstable on the very boundary between the public and the private.

The instability of boundaries is also a central concern of another of the tales in the collection. 'The Doctor's Wife' is the story of a jaded suburban professional, 'weary of his life in the land of the *papalagi*', who arrives in the Marshall Islands of the South Pacific and 'goes native', hunting wild boar with the young men of the

local tribe and immersing himself in the life of the community.⁴¹⁸ The doctor builds a house and store which soon becomes the centre of village festivities and, as the ‘dark faced’ narrator Lāgisiva recalls, the doctor has ‘many lovers amongst our young girls’.⁴¹⁹ Eventually the doctor announces that he is leaving the island but will soon return from his homeland with a white woman whom he has ‘loved for many years’.⁴²⁰ As a parting gift the doctor instructs the chief to share the contents of his house and store to the many unmarried young girls in order to guarantee their silence regarding his sexual activities. Unfortunately for the doctor, when he returns with his bride the local community realise that she is the cousin whose portrait adorns the wall of his home, and that the two are ‘alike as are two children of the same birth’.⁴²¹ The horrified natives ostracise the incestuous couple and are suitably unsurprised by the premature deaths of their infant children, one ‘dumb’ the other ‘hideous to look upon’, in the years that follow.⁴²² The tale ends with Lāgisiva recounting the death of the shamed doctor’s wife and his departure some years later with his native wife, Suni, and their three children.

As with ‘The Methodical Mr Burr of Majuru’, ‘The Doctor’s Wife’ is distinctly different from the kind of stories of the period which pitted morally upright adventurers against savage natives. In contrast to the popular adventure fiction of the day, the savages and barbarians who populate the colonial frontier in these stories are not stereotypical dark-skinned Africans, Orientals or Pacific Islanders but white Europeans. On a simple level the stories in *By Reef and Palm* therefore challenge the dominant narrative of the day which presented Europeans as racially and culturally superior. In ‘The Doctor’s Wife’ this is vividly illustrated by the photograph of the doctor’s cousin on the wall of his study, an image of modernity that simultaneously reminds us of both the doctor’s material advantages *and* his degeneracy. The story is also interesting because it appears to offer a view of white degeneracy from a non-white perspective; the subtitle: ‘Consanguinity – From a Polynesian Standpoint’, appears to invert the traditional binary opposition of civilised/savage central to colonial discourse which underpinned much of the popular colonial fiction of the time.⁴²³ Similarly, these stories question the idea of the colonial venture as a

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., p. 92.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., p. 93.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² Ibid., p. 95–6.

⁴²³ Ibid., p. 91.

civilising mission, foregrounding instead the primacy of trade in determining relations between European and non-European.

At the same time, the white traders in these narratives appear to believe in an essential difference between themselves and their colonial others. The doctor's arrival in the Marshall Islands, for example, is predicated on an assumption that he is entering an essentially different kind of space, a degenerate culture within which he can satisfy his basest instincts with impunity, unlike that of the metropolitan centre where such behaviour is forbidden. This essentialist discourse is also evident in the stereotypical mode of representation regarding the native girls:

Did a girl but look out between her eyelashes at a piece of print in the store, lo! it was hers, even though it measured twenty fathoms in those days. So every girl – even those from parts far off – cast herself in his way, that he might notice her. And he was generous to all alike – in that alone was wisdom.⁴²⁴

The passage has the effect of representing the Marshall island girls as an undifferentiated mass, all alike, and all equally materialistic and sexually available. In this respect the story is similar to many of the examples of literature from the nineteenth century which Edward Said draws upon in *Orientalism* which illustrate how the East was constructed through Orientalist discourse as a place of uninhibited sexuality.⁴²⁵ Writing of Flaubert, for example, Said observes how the author,

associates the Orient with the escapism of sexual fantasy. Emma Bovary and Frédéric Moreau pine for what in their drab (or harried) bourgeois lives they do not have, and what they realise they want comes easily to their daydreams packed inside Orientalist clichés: harems, princesses, princes, slaves, veils, dancing girls and boys [...] the association is clearly made between the Orient and the freedom of licentious sex.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁴ Ibid., p. 93.

⁴²⁵ Becke's presentation of native girls as submissive, undifferentiated and sexually available is not untypical of the period, but this is a stereotype that has endured long after the late nineteenth century. A more recent example of native female desire can be found in the Hollywood film *The Bounty* (dir. by Roger Donaldson, Thorn EMI, 1984) in which hordes of Tahitian girls race to greet the surprised and grateful crew of the fabled ship as it nears their shores.

⁴²⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 190.

A fairly straightforward reading of 'The Doctor's Wife' appears to be available then, in which we see the text as similarly reinforcing the kind of discourse which Said illustrates here. The doctor is living out the same kind of fantasy of the tropical South Seas which Bovary and Moreau project on to the Orient. And yet, if we apply a different critical model that is more attuned to the representation of public and private space then our attention is drawn to the shifting and undecided nature of the text, rather than its stereotypical strategies of representation. We might say, for example, that the structure of difference which the text upholds is undermined by the presentation of native space as in a perpetual state of flux because of the presence of trade. In this respect the colonial setting is unbounded by metropolitan structures, a space in which there is little division between the public and the private. The trading station becomes the very kind of hybridised space which Mr Burr wants to prohibit. We might also say that the actions of the girls, in trading sex for goods, transforms the domestic space into a commercial one, since the basis of the exchange between the girls and the doctor is economic. In other words, the boundary between the domestic and the commercial collapses, the public and the private become one. Thinking in this way also draws our attention to the possibility of agency amongst the native island girls, a form of agency which the stereotypical forms of representation in the text appear to disavow. Rather than thinking of the girls as blindly materialistic and licentious we might consider the transaction to be a matter of choice. We might also notice that the doctor attempts to reclaim the home as a private space, and reassert the idea of difference between himself and the natives, through a commercial transaction with the village chief and the local girls. In other words, the doctor assumes that he can separate the private and the public spheres when in fact they are always interconnected by commerce. The trading station can be read, therefore, as an ambivalent space in which the fixity of stereotypical discourse is destabilised by the constant traffic of trade across the public/private boundary.

Becke's stories of commercial traders on the colonial frontier cast a critical eye on the metropolitan centre in their use of domestic space; after all, the doctor's natural urges appear to have been stifled by 'civilised' society and the story suggests that, when he first arrives on the island, a repressive metropolitan domesticity is actually the cause of the doctor's malaise. Similarly, Mr Burr's ruthless adherence to the model of the separate spheres is presented here as pathological, reflective of a culture that is radically unstable, subordinate to economic interests and held together only by the threat of extreme violence. From his many years working as a trader in

the South Seas Becke appears to have seen enough to know that the claims of Westerners to moral or cultural superiority were highly questionable.⁴²⁷ As the narrator of ‘The Methodical Mr Burr of Majuru’ says, ‘our morals are a lot worse than those of the natives’.⁴²⁸ A similar note of scepticism is struck by Robert Louis Stevenson’s narrator in ‘The Ebb-Tide’ (1894) which shares the Tahitian setting of many of Becke’s stories: ‘Throughout the world of the Pacific, scattered men of many European races and from almost every grade of society carry activity and disseminate disease’.⁴²⁹ At a time when European powers were citing the benefits of European civilisation to justify the acquisition overseas territories, the moral argument for the imperial project seemed highly dubious.

At the same time Becke’s stories largely rely on stereotypical modes of representation in relation to non-Europeans. Whilst the stories in *By Reef and Palm* occasionally gesture towards a greater degree of complexity within native cultures and communities, the reference to the more refined Manihikian woman in ‘The Doctor’s Wife’ being one example, such details remain largely undeveloped within the narrative. It requires some work to recover a sense of indigenous agency from a reading of these stories. For a more nuanced picture of native culture and a more detailed presentation of domestic space in the context of the trading station I now want to turn to one of Joseph Conrad’s earliest published works, the short story ‘An Outpost of Progress’.

‘An Outpost of Progress’: The ‘lightest part of the loot’?

As most recent critics acknowledge, ‘An Outpost of Progress’ has tended to suffer from unfavourable comparisons with Conrad’s only other, and more well-known African fiction, ‘Heart of Darkness’. Its secondary status has also been attributed, in part, to Conrad’s ambivalence about the story, referring to it in the author’s note to *Tales of Unrest* (1898) as ‘the lightest part of the loot’ in relation to his journey to Africa in 1889.⁴³⁰ However, somewhat surprisingly, Conrad also submitted it to *The*

⁴²⁷ A. Grove Day, *Louis Becke*. (New York: Twayne, 1966) p. 28.

⁴²⁸ Becke, p. 79.

⁴²⁹ Robert Louis Stevenson, *South Sea Tales*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) p. 123.

⁴³⁰ Joseph Conrad, *Tales of Unrest*, p. 6.

Grand Magazine in 1906 for a series called ‘My best story and why I think so’.⁴³¹ Earlier scholars have tended to support the first statement, the influential American critic Albert Guerard stating that the story was ‘chiefly interesting as a cold adumbration of ‘Heart of Darkness’, compared to which ‘An Outpost of Progress’ is ‘carefully, ploddingly, plausibly constructed to throw a full expository light on its theme’.⁴³² Guerard’s contemporary A.T.Tolley saw it as ‘undeniably inferior’ to ‘Heart of Darkness’, whilst more recently, Rob Nixon has described it as a ‘trial run’ for the better-known work.⁴³³ The story has enjoyed something of a critical rehabilitation in recent years, in ways which have, so to speak, turned the tables on ‘Heart of Darkness’. Jim Holstun, for example, calls for a re-evaluation of the earlier work from a Marxist-Humanist perspective. The vaunted status of ‘Heart of Darkness’ is reflective, Holstun argues, of the privileging of modernist works by critics and an attendant subordination of literary realism. Favouring the ‘radical, realist passion’ of the story, Holstun suggests that ‘the sardonic realism of “Outpost” connects imperial causes to horrific but intelligible African effects, producing a remarkable critique of European colonial capitalism. *Heart of Darkness* smudges this anti-imperial clarity, detaching causes and effects, turning both into free-floating modernist intensities’.⁴³⁴ Robert Hampson’s essay, ‘An Outpost of Progress: The Case of Henry Price’, offers an authoritative and comprehensive challenge to Chinua Achebe’s ‘An Image of Africa’ by demonstrating how the earlier story provides the more detailed and nuanced representation of African culture and society which Achebe found to be conspicuously absent from ‘Heart of Darkness’.⁴³⁵ Hampson shows how ‘An Outpost of Progress’ provides us with clear evidence that Africa was much more to Conrad than, to use Achebe’s words, ‘a metaphysical battlefield

⁴³¹ J. C. Hilson and D. Timms, ‘Conrad’s “An Outpost of Progress” or The Evil Spirit of Civilisation’, in *Joseph Conrad: Third World Perspectives*, ed. by Robert Hamner, (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1990), pp.107–116. (p. 114).

⁴³² Albert J. Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1958) p. 64–65.

⁴³³ A. T. Tolley, ‘Conrad’s Favourite Story’, *Studies in Short Fiction*, 3.3. (1966) p. 319. Rob Nixon, ‘Preparations for Travel: The Naipaul Brothers’ Conradian Atavism’ *Research in African Literatures* 22.2 (1991), p. 189. n. 1.

⁴³⁴ Jim Holstun, “‘Mr. Kayerts. He is dead’: Literary realism and Conrad’s “An Outpost of Progress””, *ELH*, 85.1, (2018), 191–220 (p. 195).

⁴³⁵ Robert Hampson, ““An Outpost of Progress”: The Case of Henry Price’, In *Conrad In Africa: New Essays on ‘Heart of Darkness’*, ed. Attie de Lange and Gail Fincham, 211-230. (Lublin, Poland: Social Science Monographs – Boulder – 2002) pp. 211–230.

devoid of all recognisable humanity'.⁴³⁶ Similarly, Harry Sewlall suggests that 'in its portrayal of Africa, ['Outpost'] presents Europe's Other as possessing both agency and authority'.⁴³⁷

In the analysis that follows my aim is, in part, to build on the work of Hampson and Sewlall, but in a way that draws our attention to the role that Mrs Makola plays within the narrative, a role which has been largely overlooked in previous criticism which tends to emphasise the significance of the Henry Price/Makola figure. I also argue that when we read the story in light of ideas of public and private space, we find Conrad using the African setting to question a dominant way of thinking that draws binary distinctions between the public and the private, the coloniser and the colonised. In this respect the narrative makes explicit links between the spatial and the discursive, between the ways that colonisers negotiate and practice space and the way that they uphold structures of difference between themselves and their colonial others. The instability of the public/private divide is thus shown to be deeply implicated in the instability of the larger discourses which underpinned the colonial enterprise.

In the story, two European traders, the portly Kayerts and his assistant Carlier, arrive at a remote point 'three hundred miles away from the nearest trading station', on a steamer accompanied by the director of the Great Trading Company.⁴³⁸ The former chief of the station has died of fever and lies buried within the compound, albeit some distance away from the buildings which house the two traders, their assistant – a man from Sierra Leone who maintains that his name is 'Henry Price' – and his family. The director departs, having outlined how to best develop the land, and Kayerts and Carlier proceed with the business of prettifying their home, assured that their work will bring them quick and easy financial rewards. Whilst the trade in ivory is slow, they receive food and friendship from a local chief, Gobila, and settle into a life of idle contemplation, fortified by the words in a newspaper found in the house which remind them that they are 'bringing light, and

⁴³⁶ Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"' in, Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York: W. W Norton and Co., 2006), p. 343–4.

⁴³⁷ Harry Sewlall, "'Masquerading philanthropy': Conrad's image of Africa in "An Outpost of Progress", *English Academy Review*, 23 (2006), 4–14 (p. 13).

⁴³⁸ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008) p. 4

faith and commerce to the dark places of the earth'.⁴³⁹ Matters take a turn for the worse when a tribe of 'strangers' arrives at the station, six men draped 'from neck to heel in blue fringed cloths' carrying 'percussion muskets', who negotiate with Henry Price and his wife Mrs Makola whilst the baffled traders look on.⁴⁴⁰ Two days later the traders wake to find that their native workforce has been sold to the tribe by Henry Price in exchange for ivory and that one of Gobila's men, who wakes up whilst the workers are being taken, has been shot dead. Consequently Gobila puts a stop to the ready provision of food and the traders, in a condition of physical and psychological decline, soon turn on each other. A violent dispute over access to their remaining supply of sugar results in Kayerts accidental killing Carlier. Startled by the sound of the returning Company steamer, he then hangs himself with a leather strap from the cross planted in the grave of the first chief of the station. The story ends with an image of the purple-faced Kayerts 'putting out a swollen tongue at his Managing Director.'⁴⁴¹

Kayerts, Carlier and the separate spheres

There is a moment midway through the narrative when, during a visit from the tribe of strangers who arrive at the station, Kayerts and Carlier, sitting in the shadow of the verandah which surrounds their home, are momentarily unsettled by the voice of the chief of the tribe. Whilst they are incapable of understanding the language being spoken they are nevertheless disturbed by the sense of familiarity that the speech of the tribesman evokes: 'It was like a reminiscence of something not exactly familiar, and yet resembling the speech of civilised men'.⁴⁴² This sense of being disturbed by the long-forgotten or suppressed is, of course, a text-book example of the uncanny. In *The Uncanny* (1919) Freud described the experience as 'the class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar'.⁴⁴³ In this moment within the station we appear to have such a moment, the realisation that, contrary to everything that Kayerts and Carlier have been conditioned to think in

⁴³⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 10.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., p. 25.

⁴⁴² Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁴³ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, (London: Penguin, 2003) p. 124.

their formative years, they actually have a kinship or, in Conrad's terms, share a common humanity, with the supposedly savage African who stands before them.

I mention this particular example because it captures much of the tone of the early part of the narrative, particularly those passages which focus on the traders' impressions of the African landscape. Africa, as constructed through the eyes of the traders, is unreadable, threatening, unsettling. The jungle, for example carries with it 'a suggestion of things vague, uncontrollable, and repulsive, whose discomposing intrusion excites the imagination and tries the civilised nerves of the foolish and the wise alike'.⁴⁴⁴ Great emphasis is placed on the immensity of the natural landscape compared to the 'insignificant cleared spot of the trading post'.⁴⁴⁵ Unsettled by their strange and unfamiliar surroundings the traders affect an air of superficial bonhomie, all the while contemplating the possibility of the other's likely death. More importantly, they then set about making the interior of their dwelling more homely: 'The first day they were very active, pottering about with hammers and nails and red calico, to put up curtains, make their house habitable and pretty'.⁴⁴⁶ They focus on the interior of the home and neglect to maintain the space exterior to their dwelling, despite the fact that the Managing Director has given them clear instructions to 'plant a vegetable garden, build new storehouses and fences, and construct a landing-stage'.⁴⁴⁷

The scene has significance for a number of reasons. One is that it signals Conrad's clear departure from the conventions of the imperial romance genre by presenting colonists involved not in acts of masculine daring and courage but in a process of feminine domesticity. Another is that it illustrates the satirical take on imperial ideals which are central to the story. Official claims that the colonial presence overseas was a fundamentally civilising one are treated here with suspicion, the improvements which Europeans are affecting on the colonised territory are, much like the curtains hanging in the window of the traders hut, merely cosmetic. But we might also think of this moment discursively when we read this scene in light of ideas of the uncanny. In *The Location of Culture* Homi Bhabha discusses the uncanny specifically in relation to the public and the private, describing the postcolonial condition one in which 'the borders between home and world become

⁴⁴⁴ Conrad, p. 5.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

confused; and uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting'.⁴⁴⁸ The traders' moment of arrival at the station 'in the centre of Africa' appears to be similarly uncanny when faced with an unsettling and boundless landscape which encroaches on the station compound and intrudes into their thoughts. The 'discomposing intrusion' of the jungle in this respect seems to threaten the familiar separation of public and private space. In this light the construction of the public/private boundary can be read as an anxious response to a sense of the unhomely in the colonial setting. It is a moment which demonstrates the traders' desire to reassert a sense of belonging, at the moment when their very identity appears to be under threat from the African space which surrounds them. In Conrad's hands, the trading station is thus presented as a discursive space, in which the instability of colonial authority is revealed in the arbitrary separation of the public from the private.

The Managing Director, as previously noted, has encouraged Kayerts and Carlier to cultivate the land and to think about their responsibilities for the external spaces within the compound, something which they fail to do, and something which ultimately proves fatal to their survival. One way of looking at this is to think of the Director as advocating a more fluid model of social space, one which sees no separation of the public from the private. The domestication of the outpost should, if done effectively, extend to the cultivation of the land, thereby enabling the traders to become more self-sufficient. Yet the traders privilege their privacy and thus create a hierarchy of space within the compound, one in which they enjoy the privileged position of domesticity within the home whilst the station workforce and Makola take care of the general running of the place. Their failure to develop a more holistic and flexible way of thinking and working means that their authority is entirely dependent on Makola and Father Gobila's tribe. In other words, their ability to remain largely ensconced within an assumed private sphere actually rests entirely on the regular provision of goods from outside. Their tendency to adhere to a simple separation of the private and the public thereby determines the nature of their presence which is proved to be unsustainable.

Near the beginning of the story the narrator provides a diagnosis of the traders' shortcomings: 'They were two perfectly insignificant and incapable individuals, whose existence is only rendered possible through the high organisation

⁴⁴⁸ Bhabha, p. 13.

of civilised crowds'.⁴⁴⁹ Ian Watt summarises the story accordingly by suggesting that 'Conrad's basic theme [is] the practical incapacity, and the intrinsic moral and intellectual nullity, of the typical products of modern urban society'.⁴⁵⁰ Reading the traders' ineptitude more in light of Michel Foucault's ideas of panopticism, and with reference to the imperial propaganda found in the station home, Harry Sewllall suggests that 'Kayerts and Carlier are manipulated like puppets by an imperial power that exercises surveillance from afar. Empire has set up the panoptic structure, making accessible [...] the most powerful propaganda at its disposal – the written word – through which it exercises control'.⁴⁵¹ This is certainly reflective of the traders' sense of legitimacy and purpose in the days when they might otherwise come to question their right to be at the station. But I want to suggest that it overlooks a more mundane level of conditioning which is registered in terms of the boundary between the public and the private, which Conrad repeatedly draws our attention to throughout the narrative. This can be seen in the numerous references to both the immobility of one or other of the traders and their spatial positioning at key points throughout the text.⁴⁵² The first example comes when the first tribe of warriors enter the station compound: 'Those warriors would squat in long rows, four or more deep, before the verandah, while their chiefs bargained for hours with Makola over an elephant tusk. Kayerts sat on his chair and looked down on proceedings, understanding nothing'.⁴⁵³ Whilst it could be argued that the verandah is the natural place for the indolent traders to be positioned and merely functional within the narrative, it seems as likely that Conrad also intends to emphasise the ideological implications of the traders' spatial positioning. I suggest this because it recurs on the second visit from the Loandan tribe, the traders described as 'lounging in their chairs under the verandah'.⁴⁵⁴ Later on Carlier casts a withering eye over 'his chief who had not stirred from the verandah'.⁴⁵⁵

Conrad's repeated positioning of the traders in this liminal space, and their general characterisation as static and immobile, invites us to read the space as

⁴⁴⁹ Conrad, p. 5.

⁴⁵⁰ Ian Watt, *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 75.

⁴⁵¹ Sewllall, p. 10.

⁴⁵² For example, as the director leaves Carlier shouts : "We shall let life run easily here! Just sit still and gather in the ivory those savages will bring", Conrad, p. 6.

⁴⁵³ Conrad, p. 7.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 16.

ideological; the positioning of the traders on the threshold between public and private space indicates their slavish adherence to a particular way of thinking, something that the hybrid nature of the station, as an unstable or in-between space, repeatedly undermines. But our attention is also drawn to the connection between the way that the traders differentiate space in terms of the public and private, and the way that they differentiate themselves from their non-European others. This is vividly illustrated when the first tribe of warriors visit the station. Situated above on the verandah the traders marvel at their ‘unusual’ appearance and impressive physicality: ‘look at that fellow there [...] Did you ever see such a face? Oh the funny brute! [...] Look at the muscles of that fellow [...] Fine arms but legs no good below the knee’.⁴⁵⁶ That this is characteristic of the traders’ mode of relating to the natives is indicated by Conrad’s use of the past tense, which transform the isolated encounter into a representation of *all* such encounters: ‘Carlier, smoking native tobacco in a short wooden pipe, *would* swagger up twirling his moustaches, and, surveying the warriors with haughty indulgence, *would* say – “Fine animals. Brought any bone?” (emphasis added). The traders’ detachment in seeing the tribesmen as an object of study corresponds to a mode of discourse which Edward Said identified as a salient characteristic of Orientalism: ‘The Orient was viewed as if framed by the classroom, the criminal court, the prison, the illustrated manual. Orientalism [...] is knowledge of the Orient that places things Oriental in class, court, prison, or manual for scrutiny, study, judgement, discipline, or governing’.⁴⁵⁷ The traders’ articulation of a fundamentally racist and Eurocentric perspective is connected to their spatial positioning, a perspective which, as the narrative makes clear, is arbitrary and contingent, undermining the Europeans’ assumption of superiority, objectivity and critical detachment. There is then, an important relationship at work in the text between the discursive, such as it is presented in the Europeans’ views of the African tribesmen, and the spatial, located as they are on the very border between the spurious private and public spheres. The traders’ way of thinking, and their adherence to the straight lines of the built environment, are clearly interrelated.

As if to underline the point, the Europeans’ inflexibility is contrasted with the movements and practices of the tribesmen who drift between the traders’ house and Makola’s abode before ‘ma[king] themselves at home’ in outdoor space.⁴⁵⁸ This

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

⁴⁵⁷ Said, p. 41.

⁴⁵⁸ Conrad, p. 11.

public zone is appropriated and made homely through the practice of domestication. The native distinction between the public and the private is less clear cut, the worlds of the commercial and the domestic, for a community who are accustomed to an itinerant way of life, much more closely intertwined. In the article 'Verdi in Berau', Robert Hampson draws on Gilles Deleuze's concept of the rhizome which he describes as 'an alternative to arborescent command systems', to explore the differences between a European, hierarchical model of social organisation, and a native Malayan one which can be thought of as more 'rhizomatic'.⁴⁵⁹ Hampson notes that 'the rhizome, with its transversal communication, its a-centred multiplicity, its shifting directions, provides a model of alliance and flexibility'.⁴⁶⁰ Whilst the familial networks which Hampson describes are different from the native tribes referred to in this chapter, the functioning communities which we encounter in 'Outpost' and Becke's stories clearly operate in line with structures which appear more flexible than the European models upheld by white male colonisers. This flexibility figures as a threat to the more rigid model of social organisation which underpins the colonial presence in these narratives.

Maps, tours and Mrs Makola

The blurring of the public/private boundary is also brought vividly to life in the presentation of Mrs Makola. As I have noted above, 'An Outpost of Progress' has played an important role in recent years in counteracting the influential claims of Chinua Achebe, who described Conrad as a 'thoroughgoing racist', primarily because of the derogatory and stereotypical representations of Africans which he found in 'Heart of Darkness'.⁴⁶¹ Robert Hampson's article 'An Outpost of Progress: The Case of Henry Price' foregrounds the geographical and historical contexts which inform the representation of the Henry Price figure to show that Conrad saw beyond such stereotypes. To Hampson Makola/Henry Price is 'the pivotal figure in the narrative: his ability to negotiate between and manipulate the different cultures of Europe and Africa is the centre of the story'.⁴⁶² Whilst there is little more to be said

⁴⁵⁹ Hampson, 'Verdi in Berau', p. 87.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 87.

⁴⁶¹ Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa', p. 343.

⁴⁶² Hampson, 'The Case of Henry Price', p. 218.

about the Henry Price figure I want to suggest that there *is* more that can be said about Mrs Makola when we think about the text in light of ideas of the public and private. In this respect applying a critical model which has traditionally been attentive to the gendering of spaces enables us to bring into focus the important role that Mrs Makola plays within the narrative.

Until the moment that the tribe of strangers enter the compound Mrs Makola has remained largely unseen, consigned to the family hut, tending to the three children and taking care of domestic duties. These arrangements appear to conform to a traditional, colonial gendering of social space in which women are excluded from the masculine realm of business and trade. Yet the narrative troubles this simple binary divide. Mrs Makola is characterised not only by her physical size but also by the strength of her voice: '[Makola's] wife was a negress from Loanda, very large and very noisy'.⁴⁶³ In other words, she is someone who both physically and audibly challenges notions of restriction or containment. Even when she is placed out of sight, concealed within the home and taking care of domestic duties, her presence spills over into the public space of the courtyard: 'the man, after looking round, noticed Makola's hut and walked over there. The next moment Mrs Makola was heard speaking with great volubility'.⁴⁶⁴ After finding the white Europeans unable to communicate and Makola anxious and non-committal, the leader of Loandan tribe realises that he can negotiate with Mrs Makola. Subsequently, the tribe eat a meal 'prepared by Mrs Makola. The immense woman was excited, and talked much with the visitors. She rattled away shrilly, pointing here and there at the forests and at the river. Makola sat apart and watched'.⁴⁶⁵

In this moment of exchange with her fellow Loandans, Mrs Makola is the centre of interest in the story. She has stepped out of her 'designated' space and blurred the boundary between domesticity and commerce: the provision of food indicates the consolidation of a bond between Mrs Makola and the Loandan tribe and connects the domestic space of the Makolas' hut to the external space where the meal is consumed. Her behaviour indicates that she possesses information not yet disclosed by the narrative and implies a knowledge of the terrain outside of the immediate space of the trading station. This contrasts notably with the Europeans' perception of their surroundings when they see that 'the river, the forest, all the great

⁴⁶³ Conrad, p. 3.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

land throbbing with life, were like a great emptiness'.⁴⁶⁶ Whilst it seems that Makola, who is 'sat apart', cannot enter the space of negotiation with this tribe, Mrs Makola can, based on the cultural specificity that she shares with the 'strangers'. The sharing of a cultural, geographical bond eradicates the division between private and public space. In this instance, the presence of the local disrupts the homogeneity of territorial and cultural colonisation.

A series of events follows her encounter with the Loandan tribe. The traders are persuaded by Makola to allow the station workforce to enjoy an evening of dancing and drinking palm wine. The workers are then kidnapped by the Loandans who leave behind their supply of ivory as payment. We can deduce that in executing their plan they were aided by Mrs Makola, whose 'pointing here and there at the forests and at the river' provided the tribe with the required knowledge of the land beyond the boundaries of the station.⁴⁶⁷ But we might also see in Mrs Makola's exchange with the tribe a perception of space untrammelled by any dominant distinction between public and private space. It is worth exploring the significance of this moment in relation to Michel De Certeau's distinction between the 'map' and the 'tour'.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1985), De Certeau explores the distinction between ways of describing space that foreground the act of seeing and those that describe a process of moving through or acting within space. In analysing anecdotal accounts of the urban environment, he notes that:

description oscillates between the terms of an alternative: either *seeing* (the knowledge of an order of places) or *going* (spatializing actions). Either it presents a *tableau* ("there are..."), or it organises *movements* ("you enter, you go across, you turn...")⁴⁶⁸

The former kind De Certeau describes as the 'map [...] a plane projection totalizing observations', the latter he terms the 'tour', or as he refers to it here 'the itinerary (a discursive series of operations)'.⁴⁶⁹ Such a distinction brings into focus the possible disparity between space as it is officially conceived ('the map') and space as it is experienced and negotiated ('the tour'). De Certeau's conception of the itinerary/tour

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁶⁸ De Certeau p. 119.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

is significant because it signifies agency – it suggests a capacity to negotiate, get around or overcome boundaries and borders as opposed to being delineated and defined by them. In contrast, the ‘map’ suggests immobility, stasis. In the colonial context this raises the possibility that forms of resistance and subversion can be detected in the way that individuals perceive and negotiate space. It also suggests that dominant attitudes can also be linked to ways of seeing and doing. In this respect, the mode of perceiving space that is closely associated with the official discourse of imperialism, as seen through the traders’ eyes, resembles that of the *tableau*. As we have seen, Africa is experienced by the traders as a series of discreet images: ‘the river, the forest, all the great land throbbing with life’.⁴⁷⁰ The land is reduced to the status of the spectacle. Similarly, at the climax of the story, we see Kayerts’s view of the surrounding landscape as he flees from Carlier around the verandah:

He ran as quickly as he could, grasping the revolver, and unable yet to understand what was happening to him. He saw in succession Makola’s house, the store, the river, the ravine, and the low bushes; and he saw all those things again as he ran for the second time round the house. Then again they flashed past him.⁴⁷¹

The land is presented as a repeating series of images from which Kayerts is unable to escape. The presentation of space as *tableau* emphasises Kayerts inability to act effectively within it, and inscribes the domestic space of the traders’ home, again and again, as corresponding to the metropolitan model of *separation*, detached and differentiated from the public sphere. Ironically, this list of images traces a line of causation between the Makola’s domestic space (‘the home’), the focal point for trade and negotiation (‘the store’), and the world outside of the trading station (‘the river, the ravine’). The Makolas’ home is implicitly integrated into the economy of the trading station and the boundaries between the domestic and the ‘commercial’ zone of the station and the wider world, dissolve. In contrast, Kayerts and Carlier’s murderous game of cat and mouse merely emphasises their isolation. They are imprisoned in their perception of the domestic as separate from the public sphere.

⁴⁷⁰ Conrad, p. 7.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., p. 21.

In stark contrast, as we see in the example of Mrs Makola, she appears to be not only describing the physical landscape but indicating trajectories of movement within it: ‘She rattled away shrilly, pointing here and there at the forests and at the river’.⁴⁷² She is demonstrating both a command of her own discreet domestic space and the enveloping space of commerce. If, as De Certeau claims, the map ‘pushes away into its prehistory or into its posterity, as if into the wings, the operations of which it is the result or the necessary condition’, here we find Mrs Makola re-inscribing those operations in the landscape.⁴⁷³ When the map ‘wins out [...] the tour describers have disappeared’.⁴⁷⁴ In the dialogue that Mrs Makola has with the Loandan tribe, those ‘tour describers’ re-emerge and an alternative model of space becomes apparent: one in which the private/public boundary is disrupted by the discursive agency of Mrs Makola.

In the introduction to the collection *Inside Out: Women negotiating, subverting, appropriating public and private space* (2008), Janet Wolff describes contemporary feminist approaches to the model of the separate spheres as follows: ‘We are less preoccupied with identifying bounded areas and their exclusions, and much more interested in the blurring of boundaries, the negotiation of spaces and the contradictory and open-ended nature of urban social practices’.⁴⁷⁵ As is perhaps apparent, Woolf’s references to spatial negotiation, blurred boundaries and social practices betray the influence of De Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* on recent scholarship, something which is certainly evident in *Inside Out*. In this respect, my reading of Mrs. Makola in ‘An Outpost of Progress’ appears to align with the kinds of analysis which Woolf suggests is now common practice within feminist criticism. However, as I have illustrated throughout this chapter, the ideology of the separate spheres can also offer a productive model through which to read the colonial fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, in a way that seems simultaneously attentive to both the instability of colonial authority *and* to the role that native women play in these fictions. The social practices which Woolf describes do not have to be strictly urban or metropolitan ones but may be equally discernible in the colonial setting. In this respect, thinking about the public and private in this

⁴⁷² Ibid., p. 11.

⁴⁷³ De Certeau, p. 121.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 121.

⁴⁷⁵ Janet Wolff, *Inside Out: Women negotiating, subverting, appropriating public and private space*, ed. by Teresa Gomez Reus, Arnzazu Usandiza, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008) p. 15.

context illuminates an area in which the concerns of feminist and postcolonial criticism intersect. To conclude this chapter, and to extend an analysis of the trading station which also foregrounds native female agency, I now want to turn to the short story 'The Beach of Falesá' by Robert Louis Stevenson. In doing so this analysis also serves to highlight an important affinity between Conrad and Stevenson from a postcolonial perspective, one which becomes particularly apparent when we read their stories with an eye to the presentation of the public and the private spheres.

Spatial indeterminacy in 'The Beach of Falesá'

In 'The Beach of Falesá' the trader, Wiltshire, arrives at the South Sea Island in the uncertain moment between one day and the next: 'I saw that island first when it was neither night nor morning'.⁴⁷⁶ After being greeted by a fellow trader, Case, and his assistant Black Jack, he is immediately encouraged to marry a native girl, Uma, and a mock wedding ceremony is held in the trading station home of Case, Black Jack and the elderly and dissolute Captain Randall. The next day Wiltshire suspects something is amiss when he notices a crowd of children gathered outside, silently watching his new home. When it appears that the natives are boycotting his store he accompanies Case to a meeting of the village elders and is told that, for reasons which are unclear, he has been tabooed by the local community. Wiltshire soon discovers that Case, eager to maintain a monopoly on the island's Copra trade, has conspired to nullify Wiltshire's commercial operation by encouraging him to marry Uma who, as an 'out-islander', has been ostracised by the native community, particularly by the native girls jealous of her beauty. Case also holds great influence over the natives who believe him to be in possession of diabolical powers, primarily because of the strange things they see and hear at a temple he has constructed in the forest. After discovering that these demonic noises and visions are produced by Case's crafty use of luminous paint and stringed instruments, Wiltshire conspires to destroy the temple with dynamite. Following a violent struggle in the forest Wiltshire kills Case and the story concludes, some years later, as the happily married Wiltshire resigns himself to a future in the Pacific whilst considering the fate of his 'half caste' children.

⁴⁷⁶ Stevenson, p. 3.

A sense of indeterminacy marks Wiltshire's first sight of the island. From the deck of the ship he sees a 'tangle of woods and the breach of the surf, and the brown roofs and the black insides of houses peeped among the trees'.⁴⁷⁷ He also notes that his house is 'Coral built, stands high, verandah you could walk on three abreast'.⁴⁷⁸ The natural and the man-made fuse in Falesá, the boundary between nature and culture, central to colonial discourse, presented here as indistinct and uncertain. This indeterminacy extends to his first steps ashore. Having had 'a glass or two' on board the ship with Case we are told 'The world was like all new painted [...] Falesá might have been Fiddler's Green'.⁴⁷⁹ Wiltshire's sense of detachment from Falesá as a real place is reflected in his choice of image, the mythical after-world of maritime folklore, Fiddler's Green. The strange and exotic as mediated through Wiltshire's perspective becomes prosaic and signals a gap between the reality which Wiltshire is encountering and his mode of representing life on the island. It is the first of a number of such examples which occur so frequently throughout the text that it becomes clear that Stevenson is drawing our attention to the way that the colonial setting is constructed in the minds of the typical colonial subject. In other words, we are repeatedly shown how Wiltshire employs a certain mode of discourse to domesticate the world around him. For example, looking down on the village green he notes that the natives are 'wrapped in their many-coloured sleeping clothes like Bedouins in Bible pictures'.⁴⁸⁰ Similarly, the young children gathered outside Wiltshire's station 'with their shaved heads and bits of top-knots, and queer faces [...] looked like figures on a chimney piece'.⁴⁸¹ Stevenson thus presents us with an individual whose perception of Empire and of non-Europeans is shaped by stereotypical and commodified forms of representation.

There is also a sensation of spatial indeterminacy that plagues Wiltshire in the early part of the narrative. In the article 'Piracy, Slavery, and the Imagination of Empire in Stevenson's Pacific Fiction', Roslyn Jolly discusses the fictional island of Falesá in relation to the indeterminate nature of British rule in the period.⁴⁸² Britain was reluctant to acquire territories within the Pacific during the 1860s and 70s, both

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., p. 15.

⁴⁸² Roslyn Jolly, 'Piracy, Slavery, and the Imagination of Empire in Stevenson's Pacific Fiction', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 35, (2007), 157–173.

because of the cost and responsibility of colonial administration, and because of the presence of well-established European powers such as France and Germany in the region. However, whilst official policy stated that Britain had no plans for imperial expansion in claiming Island territories as their own, it nevertheless wanted to extend legal influence over rogue British subjects operating within the labour trade, commonly understood to involve the kidnapping and enslavement of Pacific Islanders. The Pacific Island Acts of 1872 and 1875 were therefore designed to control the practices of British subjects in the Pacific whilst simultaneously disavowing any right to ‘invest Her Majesty, her heirs or successors, with any claim or title whatsoever to dominion or sovereignty over any such islands’.⁴⁸³ In this light it becomes clear that Stevenson is ironising Wiltshire’s claims at key points in the narrative to rights as a British subject. Jolly notes that ‘when viewed in relation to the body of legislation [...] to regulate the activities of British subjects in the region, the colonialist practices of Stevenson’s Pacific traders emerge as not only informal, but illegal’.⁴⁸⁴ This legal indeterminacy is also accompanied by the sense of cultural indeterminacy which is brought sharply into focus in the uncertain space of the trading station.

The first indication that Wiltshire is entering an unusual space occurs before he enters Case’s station. Wiltshire describes the place as ‘the house of these three white men; for a negro is counted a white man, and so is a Chinese! a strange idea but common in the islands’.⁴⁸⁵ Traditional racial categories are disturbed by an alternative mode of indigenous racial discourse which unsettles Wiltshire’s way of thinking. On a simple level this sense of indeterminacy also extends to the traditional gendering of the domestic space: Wiltshire observes that there are no signs of feminine comforts inside: ‘The three men’s beds were on the floor and a litter of pans and dishes’.⁴⁸⁶ Similarly the goods in the store characterise the space as a particularly masculine one, ‘the only thing well represented being the contraband, firearms and liquor’.⁴⁸⁷ The feminised interior is neglected in favour of the ‘well presented’ masculinised space of the store, the masculine sphere of commerce spilling over into the private sphere inside. If Wiltshire’s preconceptions about the gendering of space

⁴⁸³ clause 7 of the Pacific Islanders Protection Act of 1875, quoted in Jolly, p. 160.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁴⁸⁵ Stevenson, p. 7.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

is troubled here then his assumptions about white racial superiority are also severely shaken when he enters the back room of the store. Firstly, the sense of privacy is troubled by Wiltshire finding Captain Randall ‘naked to the waist’.⁴⁸⁸ More alarmingly the traditional opposition of savage and civilised is troubled when he describes Randall ‘squatting on the floor native fashion’.⁴⁸⁹ Most abhorrent to Wiltshire is the knowledge that Randall ‘had once commanded a ship, and come ashore in his smart togs, and talked big in bars and consulates’.⁴⁹⁰ In other words Randall had once epitomised the kind of hero of popular adventure fiction who embodied Wiltshire’s ideal of imperial self-confidence. Now he finds a figure reduced to living and acting like an animal ‘covered with grey hair and crawled over by flies’.⁴⁹¹ Randall embodies Wiltshire’s latent fears of degeneracy in colonised space and he tells himself that ‘you must not come to be a man like this’.⁴⁹² Stevenson thus presents us with a space in which Wiltshire’s assumptions about race and space are challenged, Captain Randall the uncanny presence who unsettles Wiltshire’s assumption of colonial authority.

Fa’avao and the troubling of public and private space

Wiltshire’s anxiety is compounded by the arrival of Uma’s mother, Fa’avao. Unbeknownst to Wiltshire Fa’avao’s appearance is an act of reconnaissance, intended to ascertain whether the offer of marriage, and the possibility of financial security for her and her daughter, is genuine. It also appears intended to impress upon Wiltshire the gravity of his commitment to her daughter, thereby formalising the marital arrangement through a performative act of praise. Yet all the events that we witness are organised and impelled by Case’s greed; the strange inversions of the private and the public which take place in the trading station are a consequence of Case’s determination to maintain a monopoly on trade on the island. To recall Harvey’s quote, they provide an illustration of the way that ‘when placed in the context of capital accumulation [the] fixity of spatial organisation becomes

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² Ibid., p. 9.

heightened into an absolute contradiction. The effect is to unleash capitalism's powers of 'creative destruction' upon the geographical landscape'.⁴⁹³ When viewed in this light we can see how any dominant distinction between the public and private becomes secondary to the determining influence of capital, the separate spheres become blurred, inverted, interchangeable. At the same time, whilst Uma and Fa'avao are used as pawns by Case in the larger game of commercial domination, a more acute sense of their agency emerges when we see that, faced with the prospect of social isolation and a life of penury, they regain a foothold within this colonised society by carefully navigating the border between the public and the private.

Fa'avao enters the store, murmurs a form of incantation or poetry whilst prostrating herself before Wiltshire in gratitude, then quickly departs. It is worth looking at more detail at the passage which describes her arrival because it illustrates a number of ways that the hybrid nature of the space comes into play in the representation of Fa'avao:

It might be four in the afternoon, perhaps, when the back door was thrust slowly open, and a strange old native woman crawled into the house almost on her belly. She was swathed in black stuff to her heels; her hair was grey in swatches; her face was tattooed, which was not the practice in that island; her eyes big and bright and crazy. These she fixed upon me with a rapt expression that I saw to be part acting. She said no plain word, but smacked and mumbled with her lips, and hummed aloud, like a child over its Christmas pudding.⁴⁹⁴

The concluding reference to 'Christmas pudding' is another example of Wiltshire's habit of framing native culture within a system of reference which appears clearly ill-fitting to its subject. But it is also characteristic of the kinds of ambivalence which can be found in the passage. We might see, for example, a process of mimicry in operation here; the fact that Fa'avao is 'part acting' creates space for doubt – is this a knowing parody of racial otherness designed to obscure some hidden purpose or agenda? We might also note that Wiltshire's discourse works to convey a distinct otherness of Fa'avao, whilst at the same time drawing her into a familiar field of representation. At the same time there are other conflicting kinds of signification at work within the text. The initial strangeness of the 'old native woman' is then

⁴⁹³ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 258.

⁴⁹⁴ Stevenson, p. 9.

followed by a reference to Fa'avao's facial tattoos which are 'not the practice in that island'. This emphasises the materiality of local customs and draws attention to a locatable cultural specificity, the kind of detail which undermines the initial impression that Fa'avao has appeared from another order of reality entirely.

Most significant is Wiltshire's observation that Fa'avao is staging a performance. Wiltshire is momentarily unsettled by Fa'avao's presence, to be sure, and part of this unsettling is connected to a sense of spatial disorientation. Asked to explain the meaning of Fa'avao's performance Randall tells Wiltshire 'she was making up a quantity of poetry in my praise because I was to marry Uma'.⁴⁹⁵ The assumed private space of the station is thus appropriated by Fa'avao for a public display of deference and gratitude in a way that is intended to cement the bond between Wiltshire and Uma with Randall as witness. Wiltshire's sense of disorientation is twofold: Fa'avao is doing everything in her power to formalise Wiltshire's commitment to her daughter to alleviate their own financial worries. At the same time the operations of the market, manipulated by Case, intrude into the private space of the traders' home.

Many critics have found the depiction of Polynesians like Fa'avao and Uma in Stevenson's fiction troubling. Just as 'Heart of Darkness' and Conrad's Malayan fiction has been accused of reinforcing colonialist views of non-Europeans despite its imperial scepticism, Stevenson has also been seen to offer little more than one-dimensional or stereotypical representations of South Sea Islanders and non-Europeans. Katherine Bailey Linehan suggests, for example, that despite evidence of a 'generous humanitarianism' in the late work, and a clear rejection of white supremacy as a 'wholesale proposition' there is nonetheless 'a recidivist strain in Stevenson: a tendency to type Polynesians as children and black-skinned people as savages, reserving attention for white men as figures of high-level moral complexity'.⁴⁹⁶ In 'The Ebb-Tide' (1893), the Polynesian crew members are referred to as 'kindly, cheery, childish souls' whilst in *In The South Seas*, the Marquesans are described as 'childishly self-indulgent'.⁴⁹⁷ ⁴⁹⁸ In 'The Beach of Falesá', Uma is

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 10.

⁴⁹⁶ Katherine Bailey Linehan, 'Taking up with the Kanakas: Stevenson's Complex Social Criticism in "The Beach of Falesá"', *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, 33.4 (1990), 407-422 (p. 409).

⁴⁹⁷ Stevenson, p. 168.

⁴⁹⁸ Robert Louis Stevenson, *In the South Seas*, (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1971) p. 169.

similarly characterised as childlike, innocent, with a ‘shy, strange, blindish look, between a cat’s and a baby’s’.⁴⁹⁹ Yet, as we have seen with more recent Conrad scholarship, critics have looked for other kinds of evidence at work in the texts which undercuts the stereotypical representations of non-Europeans, attesting to a more knowing and complex engagement with the kinds of discourse which upheld colonisation in the period.⁵⁰⁰ There is clear evidence in ‘The Beach of Falesá’, both in Fa’avao’s knowing performance, and in the numerous references to mass-produced representations of non-Europeans (‘Bedouins in the Bible’, ‘figures on a chimney piece’), Stevenson was clearly conscious of the kinds of racial stereotype which critics have claimed he simply recycled uncritically. Linehan herself offers a reading of ‘The Beach of Falesá’ identifying ‘passages of language and imagery too carefully orchestrated to be accidental’ which provide evidence of Stevenson’s ‘proto-feminist insight into the workings of sexual domination’.⁵⁰¹ As I have argued throughout this thesis, when we read a text in light of ideas of space, other possibilities are made available to us which appear to trouble the stereotypical surface representations of character. So it is with Uma who, despite seeming childlike and passive, can be seen, like Fa’avao, to possess more agency than at first sight, something that becomes more apparent when we think in terms of what Woolf describes as ‘the contradictory and open-ended nature of urban social practices’.⁵⁰² Uma employs spatial practices which trouble the dominant distinction between the public and the private.

Uma’s command of the public/private border

A telling moment occurs during the wedding ceremony between Wiltshire and Uma. Struck by her beauty he remarks, ‘I felt for all the world as though she were some girl at home in the Old Country, and, forgetting myself for the minute, took her hand to walk with’.⁵⁰³ Wiltshire again alleviates his conflicted feelings through reference to the familiar and domestic. Yet we might also read this as a clear moment of the

⁴⁹⁹ Stevenson, p. 7.

⁵⁰⁰ For example, Katherine Baxter’s ‘Geography and Law in *Almayer’s Folly*’, or my own analysis of the same title in this thesis.

⁵⁰¹ Linehan, p. 413.

⁵⁰² Woolf, p. 15.

⁵⁰³ Stevenson, p. 12

uncanny, in which ‘the borders between home and world become confused’, the public and the private become one.⁵⁰⁴ Whilst it is Case who has engineered the public ceremony in the private space of the trading station it is Uma who has served to destabilise Wiltshire’s world view entirely. Whilst Uma’s appearance is striking to Wiltshire, her conduct has the greater effect: ‘She showed the best bearing for a bride conceivable, serious and still; and I thought shame to stand up with her in that mean house and before that grinning negro’.⁵⁰⁵ Uma deploys the performance of the wedding ceremony to legitimise her bond to Wiltshire through a display of dignity and formality, despite the ceremony itself being a sham. On the walk between Case’s and Wiltshire’s home Uma presents a very different persona, ‘You good!’ she cried, and ran ahead of me, and stopped and looked back and smiled, and ran ahead of me again [...] and the thing was done so like a child or a kind dog, that the best I could do was just to follow her whenever she went on’.⁵⁰⁶ Uma’s alternately dignified then coquettish performance elicits the required effect of mastery over Wiltshire. That Uma is performing for effect and can modify her behaviour in light of the circumstances, is made more apparent when they arrive at Wiltshire’s home: ‘She played kitten with me now when we were alone; but in the house she had carried it the way a countess might, so proud and humble’.⁵⁰⁷ Uma therefore displays an ability to switch between public modes of conduct and intimate, private behaviour. In other words, Uma possesses a knowledge of performative spatial practices and their subversive effects on those in positions of relative authority, the kind of thing that James C. Scott describes as the ‘fugitive political conduct of subordinate groups’.⁵⁰⁸ As a consequence, the ceremony appears to have eradicated Wiltshire’s preconceptions of Uma as ‘other’ and his prior assumptions of racial superiority are inverted, now feeling himself unworthy of her: ‘it came over me she was a kind of countess really, dressed to hear great singers at a concert, and no even mate for a poor trader like myself’.⁵⁰⁹ Wiltshire’s colonial authority appears to have been destabilised by Uma in the uncertain space between the public and private spheres.

⁵⁰⁴ Bhabha, p. 13.

⁵⁰⁵ Stevenson, p. 10–11.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 12.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 12.

⁵⁰⁸ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (London: Yale University Press, 1990) p.xii.

⁵⁰⁹ Stevenson, p. 12.

Wiltshire's ongoing experience of Falesá as an uncanny space continues in significant ways as the narrative progresses. For example, resolving to find out why his store is being boycotted by the local community Wiltshire is spooked by the sight of the silent crowd gathered outside the trading station and remarks 'I felt I was getting daunted, and began to be afraid I looked it, which would never do'.⁵¹⁰ Wiltshire expresses a need to control the border between his private feelings and his public image, which is clearly under threat in the uncertain space of Falesá. Later in the village he passes a church door and is seen by the pastor inside who 'looked up suddenly and caught my eye, and I give you my word he staggered in the pulpit; his eyes bulged out of his head, his hand rose and pointed at me like as if against his will, and the sermon stopped right there'.⁵¹¹ Wiltshire's feelings of horror at the sight of the preacher – 'I ran away; and if the same kind of a shock was given me, I should run away again tomorrow' – can be read as a disjuncture between his self-image and the public perception of him, something he realises is uncannily beyond his control. Wiltshire is split between a sense of who he perceives himself to be, and the view of the community which sees him as something else entirely. This split, as we soon discover, has been engineered by Case, who is the source of the rumours which shape the community's perception of Wiltshire. Yet if we see Wiltshire as displaced and powerless in the first part of the story, the second part sees him discover the source of Case's power, something which enables him to assume a position of authority and commercial dominance on the island. This authority, as I shall show, can be understood in terms of Wiltshire's assertion of control over the imaginary border between public and private space.

Wiltshire's awakening

In the first part of the story, as we have seen, Wiltshire arrives in Falesá carrying with him a particularly limited view of the world, a received way of thinking which is registered in his propensity for interpreting the strange and exotic into recognisable and familiar figures. This is also apparent in his first impressions of Case and is one reason why he appears to implicitly trust him. He tells us that 'Case would have passed muster in a city [...] he was of English speech; and it was clear he came of a

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., p. 15.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., p. 21.

good family and was splendidly educated'.⁵¹² In other words, Case, despite his uncertain origins, is the epitome of the colonial ideal, and Wiltshire uncritically accepts Case's authority. Wiltshire is disabused of this belief when he comes to learn that Case is responsible for ostracising Uma from the local community and, by extension, for sabotaging Wiltshire's own commercial viability on the island. Crucially, this new knowledge finds expression when they next meet, when, rushing to intercept the missionary Tarleton's boat as it arrives on shore Wiltshire confronts Case and asserts his authority over his rival, threatening to shoot him if he is seen near his house. Case replies, 'You do as you like about your house [...] but this is a public space'.⁵¹³ Wiltshire replies, 'It's a place where I have private business [...] I have no idea of a hound like you eavesdropping, and I give you notice to clear out'.⁵¹⁴ Wiltshire's assumption of authority is registered, then, in spatial terms, an appropriation of the public space of the beach as his own private domain. Wiltshire becomes an active agent, no longer in thrall to the disorienting forces at work on the island, showing instead an ability to challenge the imaginary distinction between public and private space.

The trajectory of the narrative that follows can also be understood in spatial terms, Wiltshire ultimately gaining control of the mysterious temple in the jungle, the private space which Case uses to fashion an image of himself as someone in possession of diabolical powers. Approaching the site of the temple, and unsettled by the strange noises ringing through the trees, Wiltshire anticipates an encounter with the supernatural but instead glimpses a square box through the leaves: 'The trouble was that it seemed kind of square, and the idea of a square thing that was alive and sang knocked me sick and silly'.⁵¹⁵ Read figuratively, Wiltshire comes to see that the forces that shape and influence society are not natural or metaphysical at all but are entirely man-made. Whatever it is that makes the temple a hallowed space, and something to be feared, is simply a construct of human design. Wiltshire's realisation of this fact enables him to ultimately see the secret of Case's power as one in which the logic of commerce prevails over the dominant distinction between the public and the private.

⁵¹² Ibid., p. 5.

⁵¹³ Ibid., p. 33.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid., p. 52.

Whilst Wiltshire comes to see beyond the hegemonic distinction between the separate spheres, and acts accordingly, on another level he is unchanged from beginning to end. This concerns his attitudes to the question of race, which come to the fore in his closing reflections on the fate of his daughters who ‘are only half-castes of course [...] and there’s nobody thinks less of half-castes than I do [...] I can’t reconcile my mind to their taking up with Kanakas, and I’d like to know where I’m to find the whites?’.⁵¹⁶ These two conflicting currents of signification in the text highlight the central ambivalence of Wiltshire: his understanding of the contingency of colonised space is at odds with his essentialist, fixed views about racial difference. Linehan describes Wiltshire as ‘a protagonist whose capacity to act upon humanitarian impulses is seriously compromised by his implacably racist mentality’.⁵¹⁷ Here Linehan captures the important contradiction in Wiltshire, which is a difference between his *mentality* and his *actions*, between what he claims to believe and what he actually does. In this respect Wiltshire embodies the ambivalence at the heart of the story, his fixed ideas at odds with his fluid negotiation of the public/private boundary in the disorienting space of Falesá.

Conclusion

For Stevenson, Becke and Conrad, the trading station was an appropriate site through which to explore some of the official claims of colonialism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their stories reveal how assumptions of a fixed cultural identity and an avowed mission to bring progress and stability to the uncivilised regions of the earth could be called into question in a setting in which the stability of the ‘station’ was always dependent upon a healthy supply of trade. The separation of the world into public and private spheres, which to many in the metropolitan centres of the West seemed permanent and inviolable, seemed incongruous in the centre of an African jungle or by the shores of a remote South Sea Island. By exploring in fictional form how the pressures of commerce or the encroaching influence of an indigenous culture could destabilise an imaginary social order carried over from the West, the trading station in the work of these writers

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., p. 71.

⁵¹⁷ Linehan, p. 408.

became emblematic of colonialism itself, as unstable and unsustainable as the border between public and private space.

Chapter Six: The Cultivated Land

The Village in the Jungle and 'The Planter of Malata'

The *OED* tells us that a secondary meaning of the term to 'domesticate' is to 'cultivate (a plant) for food'.⁵¹⁸ It might be argued that any study of the domestic space in colonial fiction which failed to consider representations of agriculture would, therefore, be incomplete. It is also worth remembering that 'colony' derives from *colonus*, the Latin word for 'settler, farmer' which is itself derived from the word *colere* which means 'cultivate'.⁵¹⁹ The domestic and the colonial are, it seems, intimately bound up with ideas of the land and cultivation. We can, then, look beyond the built environment to the spaces which border the village, the settlement or the compound, to see what the cultivated space might tell us about colonialism. In this chapter I look at two works of literature – Leonard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle* (1913), and Joseph Conrad's 'The Planter of Malata' (1914) – which have at their centre depictions of agriculture which can be read as emblematic of colonialism. Whilst there is a clear line of influence between Woolf and Conrad, I show that these writers use the land to explore very different aspects of the colonial enterprise. I show how Woolf used the cultivated space in *The Village in the Jungle* to express deep anxieties about the efficacy of colonial rule in Ceylon. However, whilst the novel can be read as a compelling critique of British rule it also registers a deep ambivalence about indigenous peoples, often reinforcing many of the assumptions of colonial discourse which prevailed in the period. In contrast Conrad uses the plantation to challenge dominant ways of thinking about the colonial venture, contrasting a public-spirited and collective sense of imperial endeavour with a more speculative and opportunistic form of commercial enterprise.

Leonard Woolf and Ceylon

Writing in his final volume of autobiography *The Journey Not the Arrival Matters: 1939-1969*, (1969) Leonard Woolf described the transformative effect of his time as a colonial administrator in Ceylon between the years of 1904 and 1911:

⁵¹⁸ *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Eleventh Edition) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) p. 424.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

My seven years in the Ceylon Civil Service turned me from an aesthetic into a political animal. The social and economic squalor in which thousands of Sinhalese and Tamil villagers lived horrified me; I saw close at hand the evils of imperialism and foresaw some of the difficulties and dangers which its inevitable liquidation would involve.⁵²⁰

Woolf's statement brings to mind the words of Joseph Conrad who, after witnessing first-hand the horrific realities of Belgian imperialism in King Leopold II's Congo Free State, allegedly remarked to his friend Edward Garnett that "Before the Congo I was just a mere animal."⁵²¹ For both writers their lived experiences belied the official narrative of the times which maintained that the acquisition of territory overseas would bring civilisation and progress to the primitive peoples of the world. Woolf, undoubtedly inspired by Conrad's example, set to work on his fictional re-imagining of Ceylon almost immediately upon his return to England in 1911 after leaving colonial service.⁵²² *The Village in the Jungle* however, is distinctly different from Conrad's early colonial fiction in its depiction of the East. In these early novels Conrad occasionally destabilised the Eurocentric perspective of the third person narrator by focalising the narrative from an indigenous point of view, incorporating other non-European subjectivities within the text.⁵²³ In contrast, *The Village in the Jungle* presents a narrative almost entirely from the perspective of the marginalised and impoverished villagers. As Elleke Boehmer suggests, *The Village in the Jungle* is 'probably one of the first in the English language to present the experience of colonisation from the inside, and from below, that is, from the vantage point of its

⁵²⁰ Leonard Woolf, *The Journey and not the Arrival Matters* (London: Hogarth Press, 1970) p. 153.

⁵²¹ G. Jean-Aubry, *Joseph Conrad: Life and Letters*, 2 vols., (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Page, 1927, vol. 1) p. 141.

⁵²² J. H. Stape recalls how E. M. Forster advised Woolf to tone down the overt Conradian influence in a short story written in 1912 'Pearls and Swine': 'Forster felt that the story required further revision, singling out an imperfectly assimilated Conradian influence – a frame narrator who provides a long introduction but plays no role in the action'. J. H. Stape 'The Critic as Autobiographer: Conrad under Leonard Woolf's Eyes', *Literature in Transition*, 1880-1920; 36.3 (1993), 277–285 (p. 277). Similarly a lecture Woolf presented in 1913, 'Conrad's Vision: The Illumination of Romance', attests to the considerable influence Conrad had on Woolf and his circle during this time. *Ibid.*, 286–302.

⁵²³ see, for example Hampson, 'Verdi in Berau'.

victims'. To Boehmer the novel is 'iconoclastic in its representations of indigenous people'⁵²⁴.

Yet, if the novel is iconoclastic it is because of the way it employs the kinds of representation which we might think of as Orientalist. Douglas Kerr has described the novel as Woolf's 'heterocentric project' in that the novel actually entertains multiple perspectives on the colonised and on colonised space, producing a text which is undecided or ambivalent.⁵²⁵ This, quite rightly, counters Priyasha Mukhopadhyay's assertion that the novel displays 'an absence of the sort of exotic stereotypes that made this kind of writing popular'.⁵²⁶ A characteristic feature of the text is Woolf's careful staging of both stereotypical and non-stereotypical representations of the colonised. For example, early in the novel the third person narrator observes that the villagers are 'very near to the animals which live in the jungle around them. They look at you with the melancholy and patient stupidity of the buffalo in their eyes, or the cunning of the jackal'.⁵²⁷ In contrast, in chapter eight, the white magistrate questions the stereotypical views of the *ratemahatmaya*, a native employee in the colonial administration, who articulates a similarly reductive view of the novel's main protagonist Silindu:

"Savages, you mean? Well, I don't know. I rather doubt it [...] I expect he's a quiet sort of man. All he wanted was to be left alone, poor devil [...] it's really the same with the other jungle animals, even your leopard you know. They just want to be left alone, to sleep quietly in the day, and to get their food quietly at night. They won't touch you if you leave them alone".⁵²⁸

The passage encapsulates the central ambivalence which we find throughout the text. Whilst questioning the traditional opposition of savage and civilised central to colonial discourses the magistrate advocates a policy of non-intervention on the basis

⁵²⁴ Elleke Boehmer, 'Intentional Dissonance: Leonard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle*' (1913), *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 2015, 50 (2015), 3–9. (p. 3).

⁵²⁵ Douglas Kerr, 'Colonial **Habitats**: Orwell and Woolf in the Jungle', *English Studies*, Vol.78:2, (1997), 149–161 (p. 160).

⁵²⁶ Priyasha Mukhopadhyay, 'Of Greasy Notebooks and Dirty Newspapers: Reading the Illegible in *The Village in the Jungle*', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 50.1 (2015), 59–73 (p. 60–1).

⁵²⁷ Leonard Woolf, *The Village in the Jungle* (London: Eland, 2008), p. 15.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 146.

that Silindu is much like an animal. A similar inconsistency is evident in Woolf's autobiographical writings. In his memoir *Sowing* (1970) Woolf expressed an unsentimental view of indigenous people: 'I am not one of Rousseau's latter-day disciples who believe in the nobility of the noble savage and in the wisdom of peasants, children, and imbeciles'.⁵²⁹ Yet there is, as we shall see, substantial evidence in *The Village in the Jungle* which registers a great deal of sympathy for the figure of the noble savage. *The Village in the Jungle* is, then, an ambivalent piece of work, a novel that charts the devastation inflicted upon indigenous communities as a result of colonisation which, at times, reinforces ideas of essential difference between Europeans and the aboriginal peoples of colonised territories. In the analysis that follows I examine the presentation of cultivated space to explore some of the ambiguities and contradictions which comprise *The Village in the Jungle*.

The Village in the Jungle

The novel details the struggles of a man called Silindu and his immediate family in the remote village of Bedagama. Silindu is considered to be '*tikak pissu* (slightly mad)' by his fellow villagers because of his unorthodox ways; whilst village life is centred around the cultivation and harvesting of the adjoining *chena* fields, he spends much of his time in the surrounding jungle, hunting and conversing (as he imagines it) with the wild animals. Silindu's eccentricities bring him into conflict with the other villagers, including the headman Babehami, who exploits his position as middleman for the colonial authorities to make life difficult for Silindu and his family. Babehami is one of many unscrupulous individuals, including a band of traders who make spurious claims to the villagers' crops at harvest time, who enslave the villagers within a system of debt. Silindu also clashes with the malevolent Punchirala, the village *vederala* (medicine man), when Punchirala's offer of marriage to Silindu's daughter Hinnihami is declined. Feeling himself cursed by the *vederala*, Silindu takes his family on a pilgrimage to Bergama to seek advice from a *sinyasi* (holy man). On this pilgrimage the abject condition of the villagers is thrown into relief as they pass through more prosperous towns and villages, are treated with kindness and generosity by their fellow pilgrims, and connect to a transformative

⁵²⁹ Leonard Woolf, *Sowing*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1970), pp. 151–52.

religious tradition which seems to be rightfully theirs. Advised by the *sinyasi* to surrender Hinnihami to the *vederala* the pilgrims return to the village with Silindu freed from his curse but disconsolate at the loss of his daughter. Hinnihami soon returns to the family home and has a child whilst also nursing and raising a fawn, Punchi Appu, which Silindu brings back from the jungle. Appalled by the family's adoption of the animal, the villagers torture and kill Hinnihami and the fawn. Further trouble arises with the arrival of Fernando, a native of the capital Colombo, who has come to Bedagamma to retrieve the money owed to him by the villagers. His desire for Silindu's other daughter, Punchi Menika, leads him to conspire with Babehami to have her husband Babun and Silindu imprisoned for theft. When Silindu is acquitted he returns to the village and brutally murders Babehami and Fernando. The novel ends some years later as the village is finally reclaimed by the jungle and the last surviving inhabitant, Punchi Menika, is attacked by a wild boar.

Whilst the novel has clear affinities with the family saga genre, detailing the lives of Silindu and his family over a period of around forty years, a noteworthy feature of *The Village in the Jungle* is the extended prologue to the human drama which occupies the main body of the narrative. The first five pages are given over entirely to the jungle that surrounds Bedagamma, and construct an image of the natural landscape which precedes and informs the presentation of the colonial presence as represented by the cultivation system. These passages work strategically within Woolf's larger critique of colonial rule by foregrounding the natural world and the natural forces against which the colonial presence is assumed to occupy a position of dominance. The jungle in this instance is an example of the kind of landscape which we find in colonial fiction which, as Kerr suggests 'stand in as metonyms for the country controlled'.⁵³⁰ Significantly, in these passages we are presented with the kind of space which appears resistant to *any* form of control.

A key feature of this introduction is a blurring of the boundary between the assumed place of culture, the village, and the natural world. We are told that 'the village was in, and of, the jungle'.⁵³¹ The site of human habitation is always under threat from a jungle which 'stood at the door of the houses, always ready to press in upon the compounds and the open spaces'.⁵³² An incautious man who shows no fear of the jungle never returns: 'among his bones lay a bunch of peacock feathers [...]

⁵³⁰ Kerr, p. 150.

⁵³¹ Woolf, p. 9.

⁵³² Ibid.

his betel-case, and the key of his house', the symbol of domesticity here rendered inconsequential in the face of the hostile forces which reside in the jungle.⁵³³ We are presented with a space which is both deathly and regenerative, static and immobile – an 'impenetrable tangle of thorns' – yet constantly in motion, 'like a great sea over which the pitiless hot wind perpetually sends waves unbroken'.⁵³⁴ It is also deceptive, a space so still 'that you might believe that nothing lives in it [...] yet the shadows are full of living things [...] slinking, under the bushes and peering through the leaves'.⁵³⁵ If the jungle is unassailable and unknowable in its mystery, it is also a nightmarish, uncanny space, ('there is fear everywhere'), containing enormous cactuses 'evil-looking and obscene, with their great fleshy green slabs', and trees 'which look like a tangle of gigantic spiders' legs'. Finally, the jungle is unrelenting, stretching away from the village 'on all sides unbroken', bursting 'out again into green every year when the rains come', forcing 'its way forward into any open space'.⁵³⁶ As Charne Lavery notes, 'The jungle is imbued with a sense of oceanic infinitude, highlighting its disorienting, dangerous, unknowable nature'.⁵³⁷ This is a land which appears ungovernable.

The 'chena' system

Against the backdrop of the jungle we come to the village, the fields and the system of cultivation which the villagers depend on for survival. The men of the village clear 'an acre or two' at the beginning of August, set fire to the undergrowth in September, clear the ash from the ground in October and sow the seed in November. The grain is reaped in February. The system structures the villagers' year and produces the conditions whereby the villagers are indolent for long periods of time. We have,

⁵³³ Ibid., p. 10.

⁵³⁴ Ibid.

⁵³⁵ Ibid., p. 11. In this instance Woolf's description of the jungle calls to mind the passage in Conrad's 'An Outpost of Progress' which reflects the limitations of the traders' Eurocentric view of the land: 'They lived like blind men in a large room [...] The river, the forest, all the land throbbing with life, were like a great emptiness'. (Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales*, p.7).

⁵³⁶ Ibid., p. 11.

⁵³⁷ Charne Lavery, 'Outsides and Outsiders: Environmental Critique in Leonard Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle* and Romesh Gunsekara's *Reef*'. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 50.1 (2015), 87–98 (p. 88).

then, the appearance of the grid, a rationalisation of space and time which, in contrast to the space of nature engulfing the village, seems as incongruous as it is inefficient. Importantly the earth is so sterile that once the land is cultivated it ‘will yield no crop again for ten years’.⁵³⁸ The representation of the cultivation system thus provides an illustration of what Boehmer describes as ‘the entropic tendencies of the colonial system’.⁵³⁹

Strangely, whilst the principal crop is kurakkan, the villagers maintain that their occupation is the ‘cultivation of rice’, strange because it rarely rains enough to enable this to happen.⁵⁴⁰ The disjuncture between the villagers official designation as cultivators of rice and the actual conditions might strike the reader as puzzling and raises a number of questions. Is this a reflection of a regressive tendency in the non-European which presents the East as outside of modernity, fixed in what McClintock terms ‘anachronistic space’?⁵⁴¹ Does it similarly reflect an assumption that the colonised, in the words of Said, ‘did not have it in them to know what was good for them’ and were incapable of managing their own affairs, in a way that legitimised colonial intervention in Ceylon?⁵⁴² One answer lies elsewhere in the text when a more plausible reason for the villagers to think of themselves in this way becomes clear: this is the role which is officially sanctioned by the colonial authorities. We soon learn that the villagers ‘owned no jungle themselves; it belonged to the crown and no one might fell a tree or clear a *chena* in it without a permit from the Government.’⁵⁴³ Later, when the rains come rumours spread that ‘the Government was going to make advances of seed’.⁵⁴⁴ The villagers’ role as cultivators is shown to align with government policy. Rather than finding other ways of utilising the land for their survival – hunting being the most obvious example (something which Woolf clearly advocates throughout the narrative) – the villagers are tied to the *chena* system. Of further significance is the fact that the kurakkan crop is not actually native to the region but is a legacy of colonial occupation. Permani C. Weerasekara notes that ‘since the 1500s, when the imperial powers of Europe sought to expand their empires through the colonisation of Sri Lanka, the presence of ancient

⁵³⁸ Woolf, p. 14.

⁵³⁹ Boehmer, p. 5.

⁵⁴⁰ Woolf, p. 13.

⁵⁴¹ McClintock, p. 30.

⁵⁴² Said, *Orientalism*, p. 37.

⁵⁴³ Woolf, p. 27.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

indigenous knowledge, including an incredible wealth of experience about food habits, health, and longevity, has progressively waned'.⁵⁴⁵ Kurakkan, which derives from the Latin *Eleusine coracana*, actually originates in East Africa where it is commonly known as 'finger millet'.⁵⁴⁶ The fact that the villagers maintain that they are cultivators of rice suggests that this is a role which has long-resided in the cultural memory of the people, whilst in reality they have had an alternative crop introduced as a consequence of colonial occupation, a crop which is actually injurious to their health. We are told, for example, that 'the grain sown in *chenas* is an evil food, heating the blood, and bringing fever and the foulest of all diseases, parangi'.⁵⁴⁷ Through the presentation of the cultivation system Woolf thereby shows a clear disjuncture between the processes of colonisation and the needs and traditions of the native population.

The cultivated land as discursive space

Kerr suggests that the novel reflects the 'marginality of colonial discourses and institutions to [the natives] way of life'.⁵⁴⁸ This is true and key passages in the narrative vividly illustrates the distance between the centres of power in Ceylon and the inhabitants of Bedagamma. However Kerr goes on to say that Woolf's anti-imperialist critique is not, therefore, an indictment of 'colonial injustice or maladministration' but registers its opposition to colonial rule through 'the respectful attention it gives to the lives of those indigenous people of Ceylon whose sufferings colonialism was not large enough either to create or to alleviate'.⁵⁴⁹ In the reading that follows I contend that Woolf actually shows how colonial discourses and institutions pervade rural society and determine the villagers' way of thinking about their world. I argue instead that we should read the cultivated land as a discursive space which instantiates the fundamental colonial structures of the time, reflecting the larger oppositions of culture and nature, human and nonhuman, civilised and

⁵⁴⁵ Permani C Weerasekara, 'Nutrition Transition and Traditional Food Cultural Changes in Sri Lanka during Colonization and Post-Colonization.' *Foods* (Basel, Switzerland) 7.7 111. (2018), <doi:10.3390/foods7070111> [accessed 12.07.22]

⁵⁴⁶ doi: <<http://www.theplantlist.org/tpl1.1/record/kew-410607>> [accessed 12.07.22]

⁵⁴⁷ Woolf, p. 27.

⁵⁴⁸ Kerr, p. 159.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

savage, which were central to the discourses which upheld colonisation. Like the ship, the hotel, the family home and the trading station which have been discussed in previous chapters, I show how colonial discourses structure and permeate this space which appears to be, in the words of De Certeau, ‘merely the background of social activity’.⁵⁵⁰ A dominant social order and a dominant way of thinking has a determining influence on the lives of the villagers and is the reason for their abject condition and their eventual demise.

One way that this is registered in the narrative is in the way that the villagers differentiate themselves from the natural world. They draw a false distinction between themselves and the wild nature which is found in the jungle which they associate with Silindu’s family who they call *veddas* and who they consider to be more like animals: “‘Their compound smells of their own droppings, and of the offal and rotten meat on which they feed’”.⁵⁵¹ This process of othering is partly reflective of the villagers’ jealousy of the family’s superior health but also because Silindu refuses to adhere to the traditional pattern of village life which is structured around the huts and the *chena* fields. Silindu is ‘the laziest man in the village. His real occupation was hunting’, indicates how Silindu’s thoughts are oriented around the space outside of the cultivation system.⁵⁵² Indeed, Silindu’s displacement is even registered in his physicality, he spends all day in front of his hut ‘staring before him, and no one could tell whether he was asleep or awake’.⁵⁵³ His sister, Karlinihami seems similarly displaced from the prevailing discourses which shape village life: ‘her eyes often had in them the look, so often in his, as if she were watching something far away in the distance’.⁵⁵⁴ Significantly, Karlinihami, who ‘very rarely took much part in the interminable gossip of the other village women’, later brings the village together with the tales passed down to her from her mother, an act which unites the native community in a way that contrasts with the dominant gendering of social space which divides village life between the masculine space of work (the fields) and the assumed feminised space of domesticity (the village compounds): ‘the

⁵⁵⁰ de Certeau, p. xi.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., p. 24. In the analysis that follows I make a distinction between Silindu and his immediate family as ‘*veddas*’ and the other inhabitants of Bedagamma who I refer to as ‘villagers’. Woolf notes that ‘The *veddas* are the aborigines of Ceylon, and are or were hunters. They are often identified with *Yakkas* or devils’. (p. 23.n1.)

⁵⁵² Woolf., p. 15.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

women and many of the men would gather in Silindu's compound to listen to one of her stories. They sat round the one room or outside round the door, very still and silent, listening to her droning voice as she squatted by the fire and stared out into the darkness'.⁵⁵⁵ It is a rare moment of harmony in a village which is atomised and discordant because of economic pressures and the constant threat of starvation. This is later illustrated when the village women gather at the tank to collect water and are united in their shared contempt for the *veddas* but soon disperse when the subject of debt arises: 'An uneasy movement began among the little group of women at the mention of debts [...] the *chatties* of water placed on their heads, [...] they began to move out of reach of the sharp tongue of the headman's wife'.⁵⁵⁶ As Mukhopadhyay observes, 'the social dynamics of the village are [...] closely tied up with the very complex interactions of its debtors and creditors'.⁵⁵⁷ Economic realities are shown to destabilise the dominant discourse of the village which differentiates the civilised from the savage.

Our attention is later drawn to the link between social relations and economic conditions with mention of a more prosperous village, described as 'a pleasant place – rain in plenty, and the little streams always running into the rice fields, and coconut and areca nut trees all around'. "Ohé!" murmured one of the villagers, "it is easy to avoid killing in a place like that".⁵⁵⁸ A similar moment of contrast occurs during the pilgrimage to Bergama when the villagers come across the village of Maha Potana: 'they came out into a great fertile plain. The green rice-fields stretched out before them, dotted over with watch-huts and coconut trees and red-roofed houses, and the immense white domes of *dagobas* gleaming in the sun'.⁵⁵⁹ The contrast with Bedagamma is clear. Maha Potana is a place where the inhabitants might justly describe themselves as 'cultivators of rice', because the appropriate meteorological conditions allow this to happen. There is a plentiful supply of rainwater, the land is fertile and, accordingly, the built environment of 'red-roofed houses' and *dagobas* is of a superior standard to Bedagamma's 'mean huts of mud plastered upon rough jungle sticks'.⁵⁶⁰ Woolf thus shows how the homogeneity of cultural and territorial colonisation is injurious to those on the very margins of native society, those subject

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 25.

⁵⁵⁷ Mukhopadhyay, p. 62.

⁵⁵⁸ Woolf., p. 158

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 64.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

to a system which is insensitive to regional variations both cultural and geographical. Importantly, Woolf shows that villagers are unable to see the reality of their social conditions as determined by the distant colonial authorities. Instead, they greet Maha Potana like a religious vision, seeing the comparative wealth of this village as a sign of divine providence, rather than simply a product of favourable circumstances. Struck by a vision of 'the water, and the green fields' they 'raised their hands, salaaming, and cried aloud, '*Sadhu! Sadhu!*'.⁵⁶¹ Religion in this instance is thus presented as a form of false consciousness, underlining the tragedy of an impoverished community who are unable to comprehend the 'unseen and unintelligible powers' that shape their lives.⁵⁶²

Once the villagers arrive in Maha Potana we are presented with an image of native village life which is healthy and vibrant, 'crowded with pilgrims, Hindus and Buddhists, and Indian *fakirs* and Moormen'.⁵⁶³ A stranger 'who had noted the poverty of Silindu and his family' gives them 'rice and curry and plantains', a stark contrast to the staple *kurakkan* diet which the villagers are used to.⁵⁶⁴ Indeed it is a meal 'such as Hinnihami had never eaten before'.⁵⁶⁵ This meal appears to have a restorative effect on Hinnihami and awakens in her a sense of identity outside the discursive structures of Bedagamma and the *chena* system: 'For the first time the bareness and fear and wildness of life had fallen from her; she fell asleep in the peace of well-being, and the merit which she had acquired'.⁵⁶⁶ Food in this instance becomes emblematic of the alienation which the cultivation system produces in the villagers. Woolf also places food at the centre of the natives' activities in this scene because, on the level of the novel's realism, it throws into relief the scarcity of food in Bedagamma and the consequent effect that it has on social relations in the village. As we have seen, the system of debt which attends the cultivation system for the villagers produces a society which is fragmented and atomised, far different from the kind of society which we find in Moho Potana in which the free exchange of food helps enhance social cohesion and the wellbeing of its inhabitants. In contrast to the divisive culture of the village, we are presented with an image of diversity and harmony, Hinnihami glimpsing a kind of native society which is not determined by

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., p. 64.

⁵⁶² Ibid., p. 21.

⁵⁶³ Ibid., p. 64.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 65.

the corrosive effects of the cultivation system: ‘All about them were other little fires, around which sat groups, like themselves, of pilgrims eating the evening meal [...] Hinnihami grew heavy with sleepiness. A great peace came upon her’.⁵⁶⁷ Food is thus shown to be central to the health of a society both as a source of sustenance and as an agent of social cohesion. Through Hinnihami, Woolf shows how the system perpetuated by the colonial authorities affects the health of the individual and the community as a whole.

On a simple level the corrosive effects of the cultivation system are shown through a contrast between the health of the Silindu family and the rest of the villagers. Silindu himself embodies this contrast, his physicality and demeanour transformed through his contact with the jungle: ‘Silent, inert, and sullen he worked in the *chena* or squatted about his compound, but when he started for the jungle he became a different man. [...] he glided through the impenetrable scrub with a long, slinking stride, which seemed to show at once both the fear and the joy in his heart’.⁵⁶⁸ Similarly Silindu’s daughters Punchi Menika and Hinnihami are transformed once they are initiated into the lore of the jungle by their father: ‘Their limbs were strong and straight, for their wanderings with Silindu had made their muscles firm as a man’s, not soft like the women’s who sit about in the compound, cooking and gossiping and sleeping all day’.⁵⁶⁹ Our attention is drawn to the weakening effects of a society which is structured along gendered lines between the feminised village compounds and the masculinised *chena* fields, the irony being that those who are weak and unproductive deride the more healthy and robust daughters of Silindu for transgressing this gendered model and ‘wandering in the jungle like men’.⁵⁷⁰ Infant mortality is also clearly linked to the *chena* system. Angohami’s children die because they are malnourished in part, but their father denies any responsibility: “Does the rain come in August? he says. “Can I make the kurakkan flower in July? [...] August is the month in which the children die. What can I do?”. The natives are trapped in a cycle of cultivation which renders them helpless in the face of natural forces. In contrast, Silindu, ‘the madman, the *vedda*, the pariah’, is able to adapt and live in a way that is more likely to ensure his children’s survival: ‘it was seldom that he returned to the hut without bringing them some wild fruit or a

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 16.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 23.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 24.

comb of the wild honey'.⁵⁷¹ In forbidden space, outside the discursive structures of the village and the *chena* fields, there are sources of sustenance which remain inaccessible to the villagers.

Bedagamma's status as a space of civilisation is also destabilised in the narrative through a contrast with the metropolitan centres of power on the island. The indeterminate nature of Bedagamma is made apparent with the arrival of the moneylender Fernando from the capital Colombo. We are shown that from the perspective of the native elite Bedagamma is a kind of in-between space. This is registered in Fernando's sense of displacement: 'He was quite alone among people whom he did not really understand, far away from the boutiques and the police court, the busy little town which he understood, and where alone he felt really secure'.⁵⁷² The distance registered here from the boutiques and the police courts, the commercial and the legal centres of colonised territory, invites us to think of Bedagamma as a liminal space, caught somewhere between nature and civilisation. Yet the villagers live as if they are distinct from the natural surroundings, superior to the animal life and the animal-like *veddas* they decry. Fernando's disquiet registers the sense that Bedagamma is instead a de-centred, uncanny space, in which the distinction between civilisation and the natural world is confused. Much like Almayer's Sambir, or Wiltshire's Falesa, in Bedagamma there is a clear disjuncture between the assumed dominant culture, which shapes the outlook of its inhabitants, and the realities of lived experience.

Silindu, Hinnihami and the transgressive space of nature

In the previous chapter I underlined the significance of Mrs Makola's role in Conrad's 'An Outpost of Progress' with reference to Michel De Certeau's distinction between 'the map' and 'the tour'. I suggested that, when read in light of these ideas, Mrs Makola can be seen to be transgressing a dominant social order as it appears to be represented through the actions and attitudes of its European characters, Kayerts and Carlier. I want to return to this model, and De Certeau's notion of 'the itinerary', to explore a similar contrast between indigenous agency and the structures of colonial power with reference to Silindu's exploration of the jungle. I will suggest

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., p. 32.

⁵⁷² Ibid., p. 91.

that the model of *the map* and *the tour* provides a way of illustrating the disparity between the designs of colonial authority and the lived experience of colonised subjects. Silindu's entry into the jungle with his daughters is preceded by our being told that the villagers were 'astonished and shocked'.⁵⁷³ Stepping outside the space which is constituted by the *chena* fields and the village compounds represents a transgression of social norms and indicates the discursive effects of the systems which shape village life. Once inside this transgressive space Silindu schools his daughters in the ways of the jungle: 'he taught them to walk so that no leaf rustled or twig snapped under their feet, to creep up close to the deer and the sambur and the pig'.⁵⁷⁴ Silindu's knowledge of the jungle, in contrast to the map which splits the land between the village and the *chena* fields, approximates to that of the tour describers. His awareness of the various feeding and resting habits of the animals shows a knowledge of the landscape which takes into account variables concerning the changes which occur at different times of day ('the sambur lying during the day in the other great caves'), the variations in climate and how the climate affects the behaviour of the animals ('where the elephant hides himself from the heat of the day'), the pace of the elephant as it feeds on the trees ('snapping of great branches to feed upon the leaves as he strolls'), and of how to tread more carefully when approaching the wild animals.⁵⁷⁵ The description of his interaction with his daughters also implies the act of speech as he shares his knowledge: 'He showed them the waterholes upon the rocks [...] the caves where the bear and leopard make their lairs', and also denotes a *movement* through the jungle as Silindu leads his daughters from one place to the next, detailing the peculiarities of the environment that only he knows.⁵⁷⁶

All of these specific details which are concerned with the everyday experience of the environment, and which are partly determined by the non-human, are lost by the homogenising discourses of colonial authority. Silindu thus displays a very different, and much more complex, kind of spatial knowledge from that which approximates to the map, which is represented in the story by the rationalisation of the cultivation system, the specific area of land allotted to each villager by the authorities, the strict calendar which the villagers must follow. We have, then, an

⁵⁷³ Ibid., p. 22.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid.

example of a contrast between what De Certeau describes as ‘two symbolic and anthropological languages of space’.⁵⁷⁷ One is produced by the tour and takes the form of an ‘itinerary (a discursive series of operations)’, the other is determined by ‘the map (a plane projection totalising observations)’ reflective of a distant authority which is insensible to the complexity and variation present within colonised space.⁵⁷⁸ Woolf’s critique rests on the fact that the space of the jungle, in all its richness and diversity, is clearly preferable and more sustaining to the natives than the spaces which are determined by the map, which work to eradicate this complexity. It also troubles this binary distinction between the space of civilisation and the wild space of nature, revealing a more complex order of space to be evident in Silindu’s navigation of the jungle.

In the contrast between these distinctly different ‘languages of space’ we might ask where this leaves us in thinking about the representation of Silindu and his family. In presenting a positive, if not idealised, image of the *veddas*’ relationship to wild nature, Woolf advances the idea that the aboriginal peoples of Ceylon are unsuited to ‘civilised’ society, and would be better off without it. In this respect we return to the central ambivalence which I am suggesting lies at the heart of *The Village in the Jungle*, a novel which, on one level, domesticates the colonised subject through Woolf’s imaginative identification with the natives, yet at the same time pushes them back into primitive space. This latter aspect of the text appears to belong to what David Spurr describes as ‘a European tradition which identifies non-European peoples with the forces of nature and then places nature in opposition to culture’.⁵⁷⁹ To illustrate this further I want to now turn to a scene which critics have tended to overlook. This concerns the torture and killing of the adopted fawn, Punchi Appu, and the subsequent death of Hinnihami.

Kerr suggests that in the novel ‘the relationship between human beings and their natural surroundings is [...] a matter of brutal economics, glossed by the animistic beliefs and the fatalism of people like Silindu and his family’.⁵⁸⁰ The economic question is clearly important, as illustrated by the presence of the black market in animal meat, an unofficial currency which Silindu uses in his attempt to curry favour with Babehami. But the significance of animals in the case of Punchi

⁵⁷⁷ De Certeau, p. 119.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁹ Spurr, p. 158.

⁵⁸⁰ Kerr, p. 158.

Appu is also discursive – our attention is drawn to how the villagers adhere to dominant ways of thinking in a way that does violence to native society. Like the example of the murderous Mr Burr in Becke's *By Reef and Palm*, the border between the private and public or its corollary here, domesticated space and wild nature, is defended by an act of brutal violence. This violence represents a displacement of the anxieties and fears which characterise life in Bedagamma. The irony in this scene is also, of course, that in order to defend the idea of the village and *chena* fields as the site of civilisation, the villagers resort to barbarism.

After giving birth to her daughter, Hinnihami also nurses a fawn which Silindu brings from the jungle. We are told 'Hinnihami suckled the child and the fawn together. The village looked on with astonishment and disapproval'.⁵⁸¹ Subsequently, when the crops fail, hunger returns to Bedagamma, and the son of the headman dies 'apparently for no cause', the villagers look for a reason for their misfortune, concluding that the *veddas* are responsible because of their strange, bestial practices.⁵⁸² The next day the boys and men of the village ambush Hinnihami and the fawn in the *chena* fields, stoning and beating the fawn to death and leaving a badly beaten Hinnihami to die by its side. On one level the scene can be read as a vivid illustration of discursive practices – the wild fawn is killed on the *chena* field, illustrating the villagers' determination to uphold the boundary between domesticated and undomesticated space, culture and nature. But what is also interesting about the scene is the way that, on the textual level, Woolf destabilises this dominant discourse by blurring the line between the human and the nonhuman. Woolf uses the male pronoun 'he' and clearly humanises the deer in the killing scene. 'He bounded forward. Hinnihami cried out and ran towards him: at the sound of her voice he stopped and looked around. A shower of blood began to trickle down his flanks [...] The deer was moaning in pain'.⁵⁸³ Hinnihami is left for dead but she tries to help Punchi Appu: 'She tried to lift him with some vague idea of carrying him back to the house. But he screamed with pain at the slightest movement, and he had grown too big for her to carry'.⁵⁸⁴ We come to an aporia at the centre of the text. Woolf blurs the traditional binary opposition of culture and nature central to colonial discourse in a way that calls into question the colonial presence as a force for good.

⁵⁸¹ Woolf., p. 84.

⁵⁸² Ibid., p. 86.

⁵⁸³ Ibid., p. 87.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 88.

Yet he also upholds a colonial view of the non-European as innately closer to nature. In the space of civilisation, the burnt out *chena* fields, the dead fawn becomes a symbol of the damage inflicted upon indigenous communities as a result of colonisation, a symbol which also suggests that the native people of Ceylon would be better off left alone, at one with the natural world.

Cultivated space in ‘The Planter of Malata’

It would be little more than a truism to state that Woolf’s presentation of native life in *The Village in the Jungle* owes a great deal to the early Malay fiction of Joseph Conrad. By focalising the narrative through his native characters Woolf is clearly extending the kinds of technique which Conrad employs in *Almayer’s Folly* which, as Allan Simmons notes, produced ‘an instability in the narrating voice that, in turn, suggests its unease with the civilised/savage opposition’.⁵⁸⁵ Yet where Conrad occasionally blends in the perspective of the indigenous subject whilst a third person narrative voice predominates, Woolf inverts the formula by momentarily incorporating the perspective of the white male voice of authority – in this instance the judge who resides over Silindu’s trial – within a narrative largely focalised through the native Ceylonese. That the judge is presented in a positive light, as kindly, thoughtful and sympathetic to Silindu’s plight, also signals a similarity with Conrad in offering a seemingly reassuring message about British colonialism to his readers, one which the text does not necessarily endorse. One is reminded of the much-quoted line from ‘Heart of Darkness’ when, surveying the map on the wall of the Company office Marlowe remarks, ‘There was a vast amount of red–good to see at any time because one knows that some real work is done in there’.⁵⁸⁶ As Robert Hampson has shown, the early part of the narrative, which presents Marlowe’s eulogy to the great British tradition of adventure and exploration, is riddled with details which destabilise this discourse of imperialist triumphalism.⁵⁸⁷ In turning now to Conrad’s ‘The Planter of Malata’ we can see that there are further affinities between Woolf and Conrad in their presentation of agriculture in the way that they use the cultivated space as a ‘background to social activity’. But in Conrad’s story

⁵⁸⁵ Simmons, p. 44.

⁵⁸⁶ Conrad, *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales*, p. 110.

⁵⁸⁷ Robert Hampson, *Joseph Conrad*, pp. 79–81.

we find the cultivated space being used for very different ends. Whilst Woolf uses the theme of agriculture to focus on the inadequacies of colonial rule in Ceylon, Conrad explores the tensions and inconsistencies between a public-spirited and collective sense of imperial endeavour and a more speculative and opportunistic form of commercial enterprise.

The Experimental Garden, Silam

That the cultivation of land in colonised territory was a highly lucrative process can be seen in the documents produced by colonial administrators charged with managing the cultivation of land in the period. As we know, Conrad's first two published novels were set in North East Borneo, a territory nominally under Dutch rule. The territory further East in North Borneo was administered by The British North Borneo company, a chartered company which ruled the British protectorate as North Borneo from 1888 until 1941. Before I proceed with an analysis of the short story I first want to refer to a report from the period which documents the cultivation of land by the British colonial administration. The report is of value for what it can tell us about the commercial potential of agriculture for the colonial authorities, above and beyond the avowed civilising ideals of colonisers in the period. Whilst this particular plantation differs in important ways from the experimental plantation at the heart of Conrad's story, the document nevertheless offers a valuable insight into the significance of agriculture for colonisers, and in the relationship between government and private interests in a way that can be used productively when compared to the plantation in 'The Planter of Malata'.

Published on the 10th January 1884, the document, *Report on the Experimental Garden, Silam*, details the cultivation of a number of crops between July 1883 and January 1884, in order to assess their suitability to the regional climate and soil.⁵⁸⁸ The garden was cultivated under the supervision of the then Colonial Secretary, L. B. Van Donop, in order to demonstrate to planters and their investors what kinds of produce could be cultivated on the land and the potential profits which were there to be made. From a postcolonial perspective certain features of the report are noteworthy, such as Van Donop's essentialising reflections on the Chinese and

⁵⁸⁸ L B Von Donop, *Report on the Experimental Garden, Silam*, 10th January, 1884.

Malay workforce and the sense of paternalistic superiority which the colonial administration enjoys: 'I find the Malays are much hardier than the Chinese [...] and find no difficulty in getting as many as I require'.⁵⁸⁹ Similarly, the telling references to British North Borneo as 'a new country' reflects a Eurocentric view that the territory did not exist in any meaningful way before the British assumed control.⁵⁹⁰ In a practical sense the document also provides a valuable illustration of the homogenising effects of imperial expansion, detailing the introduction of crops such as cinammon, tea, nutmeg, sugar and ginger which originated in other British possessions, such as Ceylon and India. Similarly the mention of other produce such as African palm oil, Liberian coffee and the rubber plant also indicates how territories were swiftly incorporated into larger commercial networks, linking distant parts of the empire through the introduction of non-native crops. Moreover, by detailing the resultant financial value of the garden the report underlines Van Donop's powerful position in relation to the knowledge he has acquired.

For the purpose of the analysis of 'The Planter of Malata' that follows, the document provides a valuable illustration of the way that colonial expansion was driven by commercial opportunity. Having taken over the administration of this 'new country' on July 1st 1882, the colonial authorities began the work of cultivating the land in order to make it an attractive proposition to commercial interests. Scientific knowledge acquired through the cultivation of this experimental garden was therefore used both as an incentive and a blueprint for private individuals and their financial backers. Van Donop outlines the financial value of the garden itself and stresses its desirability to a potential buyer, in part because, having already done the groundwork in importing the various plants and seeds for cultivation, individual planters would be spared the cost and the trouble of doing the same. However, Van Donop recognises that prospective planters may be uninterested in the kind of diverse crops which had been cultivated in the garden opting instead for a more familiar crop: 'I am quite prepared to hear that [...] sugar is the product everyone is going to plant and what is the use of Liberian Coffee, Cocoa, etc?'.⁵⁹¹ In this respect private interests appeared to exercise a degree of independence from the colonial administration and could cultivate the land on the basis of what was most likely to sell. Nevertheless, Van Donop recommended that 'should [...] private enterprise not

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 1.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., p. 4.

step in [to purchase the garden], I consider it the duty of Government to keep up the Garden' primarily because 'its value to those proprietors who have large extents of land in this country to open and plant up would be immense'.⁵⁹² Van Donop then cites the example of the Botanical Gardens in Ceylon which provided alternative seeds to planters when their staple crop was destroyed by disease.⁵⁹³ In this case the colonial administration offered a form of insurance against the more speculative and risky practices of private interests. Overall the picture that emerges from the report is one in which commercial interests predominate over other considerations and indicates how the priorities of private interests might not necessarily have aligned with government plans or ideals. As we shall see, the tension between the two is central to 'The Planter of Malata', a conflict which is embodied by the planter himself, Geoffrey Renouard.

It is this question of difference between the aims and priorities of private entrepreneurs and those of the colonial administration which I believe can be put to use in thinking about the significance of the plantation in Conrad's short story. I argue that Conrad uses the cultivated space to explore the disjuncture between the dominant narrative of colonisation and the reality of a new global economy, contrasting a public spirited and collective sense of imperial endeavour with a more ephemeral and opportunistic form of commercial enterprise. In this respect the text can be read as deconstructive of the discourse within which 'The Planter of Malata' operated. In addition, I consider that the relevance of Renouard's experimental plantation which, when placed in the context of contemporary debates about the value and uses of artificial silk, helps to bring Conrad's concerns with the links between metropolitan modernity and the colonial enterprise more sharply into focus.

Innocent adventure and commercial money grubbing

Many influential critics have noted how Conrad's work registers an historical and cultural shift from an earlier period of exploration and adventure to a more aggressive form of commercial imperialism in the later years of the nineteenth century. Edward Said notes in *Culture and Imperialism* for example, how 'Heart of

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

Darkness' recognises that 'during the 1890s the business of empire, once an adventurous and often individualistic enterprise, had become the empire of business'.⁵⁹⁴ Similarly, in *Rule of Darkness*, Patrick Brantlinger observes how Conrad 'contrasts a past of innocent adventure and a present of commercial money grubbing'.⁵⁹⁵ Whilst it would be inaccurate to describe the 'eminent colonial statesman' Old Dunster in 'The Planter of Malata' as embodying an age of 'innocent adventure', it is certainly the case that Conrad presents Old Dunster, who is described at different points in the narrative as 'sentimental' and 'senile', as representative of an outmoded way of thinking about the colonial enterprise.⁵⁹⁶ In this respect Conrad contrasts Old Dunster's pioneering approach to agriculture and his sense of civic responsibility with the more speculative venture which Renouard operates. This contrast is made apparent in a series of significant encounters between the two individuals throughout the narrative.

In chapter five, at one of a series of social gatherings at the Dunsters' house in which Renouard's obsession with the young London socialite Felicia Moorsom develops, we are told of Old Dunster's former life before his ascendancy to the position of 'eminent colonial statesman'.⁵⁹⁷ Old Dunster's curious habit of eating a raw tomato and drinking a glass of milk, rather than taking tea, is then explained as 'a habit of his early farming days, long before politics, when, pioneer of wheat-growing, he demonstrated the possibility of raising crops on ground looking barren enough to discourage a magician'.⁵⁹⁸ It is the first disclosure of Old Dunster's background as a farmer and illustrates the centrality of agriculture to the colonial venture as depicted in the narrative. In this context we can see how Old Dunster's farming background would have a legitimising function within colonial discourse, illustrating how the land could be made inhabitable and the European presence sustainable by virtue of Western rationality. Dunster's scientific knowledge, a product of his Western education, has enabled him to make productive land which would otherwise have been seen as unusable, and helps justify the act of colonisation. The cultivated space therefore appears to occupy a privileged place in this narrative in terms of its role within a dominant discourse of colonisation.

⁵⁹⁴ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 25.

⁵⁹⁵ Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism, 1830–1914*, (London: Cornell University Press, 1988) p. 43.

⁵⁹⁶ Conrad, p. 7.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 46.

We can assume that Dunster's skill in domesticating the land has led to his ascendancy within the colonial administration, illustrates why he appears to take a particular interest in Renouard's project, and why he has granted him the Malata concession. Indeed, as Renouard leaves the party, Dunster encourages him to return that evening and his identification with Renouard is made clear: 'He liked this young man, a pioneer, too'.⁵⁹⁹ Renouard then hears Old Dunster remarking of him: "... the leading man here some day ... Like me."⁶⁰⁰ When Professor Moorsom alludes to Renouard's reputation for making "an enemy of almost every man who had to work with him" Dunster retorts: "That's nothing. He did his work ... Like me."⁶⁰¹

Of significance here is the vision of the colonial enterprise which Old Dunster articulates and assumes that Renouard shares. We can see, for example, how a sense of mission is implied in Dunster's brief statements. Dunster's retort to Moorsom reflects a view of the colonial venture as a manifestation of a higher purpose, the fulfilment of a higher ideal as signified by the concept of 'work', which carries with it in this instance, like the notion of a 'vocation', suggestions of moral duty and service to a higher ideal. Similarly, his assumption of a shared vision and identity in considering himself and Renouard 'pioneers' reflects a dominant view of the colonial enterprise, (like Van Donop's experimental garden in a 'new country') as the triumph of Western ingenuity in bringing civilisation to the 'blank spaces' on the map. Possession of a certain temperament and knowledge of agriculture appears to be, in Dunster's view, a condition for political power.

In *Rhetoric of Empire* David Spurr identifies a range of rhetorical features of colonial discourse which, building on Edward Said's paradigm of Orientalism, he suggests recur across space and time in a range of colonial settings in travel writings, journalism, colonial administration documentation and literary works. Spurr identifies one particular feature as 'affirmation', which he describes as 'that element in colonial discourse which continually returns to an idealisation of the colonialist enterprise against the setting of emptiness and disorder by which it has defined the other. Colonialism must always reaffirm its value in the face of an engulfing nothingness'.⁶⁰² In this respect Old Dunster's self-image of the 'pioneer' and his transference of that image on to Renouard appears to correspond with Spurr's

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² Spurr, p. 108.

description of a self-idealisation which needs to be continually reaffirmed, Renouard seeming to fit Old Dunster's idealised vision of colonial endeavour. A second quality which Spurr argues characterises the rhetoric of affirmation is that it is 'deployed on behalf of a collective subjectivity which idealises itself variously in the name of civilisation, humanity, science, progress etc. [and] carries with it a sense of mission that must be affirmed repeatedly as the foundation [...] for colonising activity'.⁶⁰³ Thus in Dunster's defence of Renouard as doing 'his work ... Like me', we have the sense of old Dunster drawing on the authority of a collective subjectivity, the two being united, in Dunster's view, by a shared ideal which is larger than either one of them. In this way it appears to be the case that Old Dunster sees Renouard's plantation in the same light as his own pioneering agricultural practices, as a reflection and reinforcement of imperial culture.

However, this being the case, there are key moments throughout the narrative which appear to indicate the possibility of a slippage between Dunster's totalising discourse of colonialism and Renouard's practices. In the opening passages of the story Renouard recounts his first meeting the previous evening with Old Dunster, who is responsible for granting the Malata concession. Renouard remarks, 'Old Dunster was civil to me of course, but he did not even inquire how I was getting on with my silk plants. Forgot there was such a thing probably'.⁶⁰⁴ In other words the plantation is less a real space to Old Dunster than an abstract ideal which has a symbolic value to the colonial enterprise. In contrast Renouard emphasises the importance of his own specific practices ('my silk plants') in defining the space. In this respect a De Certeauian reading might be suggested, in which Renouard indicates the importance of his actions in determining the nature of the space, against Dunster's preconceived idea of what it represents to the larger colonial enterprise. Old Dunster's totalising vision is troubled by Renouard's discursive practices. This in turn points to the possibility of variation or discontinuity within colonial space, the primacy of individual motivation and aspiration troubling the larger designs of colonial authority. The idea recurs again in Renouard's encounter with Felicia, registered in his irritation when she asks, with regards to her missing fiancé, what it is that would bring anyone to this part of the world, 'as if I could guess and foretell from my experience the fates of men who come out here with a hundred different

⁶⁰³ Ibid., p. 110-111.

⁶⁰⁴ Conrad., p. 7.

projects, for hundreds of different reasons'.⁶⁰⁵ Renouard's relativism troubles the idea of a unified purpose in support of the colonial enterprise.

A further disparity between Old Dunster's lofty view of the land and Renouard's practice is in evidence later when Old Dunster informs Renouard that his 'next public task would be a careful survey of the Northern Districts to discover tracts suitable for the cultivation of the silk plant'.⁶⁰⁶ Yet Renouard's detachment from Old Dunster's sense of civic responsibility, or what Spurr identifies as the authority of a 'collective subjectivity', is registered by his hazy recollection of this encounter and his feeling that 'it was indeed as absurd as a dream'.⁶⁰⁷ Old Dunster's vision appears insubstantial and confusing to Renouard and suggests his uncertainty as to where he really fits within Old Dunster's strategy for colonial expansion. The disjuncture between the two characters is also registered in terms of their relationship to colonial society. Old Dunster is a figurehead, 'retired from active politics' but now taking ceremonial tours of Europe and receiving a 'very good press indeed'.⁶⁰⁸ His representative role is captured in the phrase 'the colony was very proud of him' illustrating his metonymic relationship to colonial society.⁶⁰⁹ Renouard, in contrast, expresses his alienation from the general public, articulating an acute sense of estrangement from those he encounters in 'the great colonial city' when he arrives from Malata with his silk crop. Whilst Old Dunster is at the centre of social gatherings, the locus of metropolitan culture, Renouard tells the Editor: 'Everybody knows I am not a society man'.⁶¹⁰ The important point is that whilst Renouard shares Dunster's view of colonial expansion as a product of adventure and ingenuity, thinking of himself as 'the pioneer of the vegetable silk plant industry', he is presented as alienated from Dunster's totalising discourse of colonialism.⁶¹¹ Whilst Old Dunster sees the plantation as central to the public or national interest, Renouard sees it only in terms of his own subjectivity: 'Malata was himself. He and Malata were one'.⁶¹² It is in relation to this last statement that we might consider that Renouard appears to be occupying a distinctly *post*-colonial place. This cultivated

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 36.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., p. 11.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., p. 36.

⁶¹² Ibid., p. 63.

space is not integrated into a coherent whole within a larger colonial space as Dunster envisions it but is instead an expression of Renouard's alienation. Renouard appears to be articulating an uncanny sense of space in which 'He and Malata were one', a space where, as Bhabha suggests 'the borders between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disoriented'.⁶¹³

Renouard as ambivalent figure

To return to the dichotomy that many critics have identified in Conrad's colonial fiction, the transition from what Brantlinger describes as 'a past of innocent adventure [to] a present of commercial money grubbing', Renouard embodies the tensions between the realms of adventure and commerce, between high ideals and financial imperatives.⁶¹⁴ Whilst the Malata concession has been acquired as a result of five years of 'scientific adventure, of work, of danger and endurance', Conrad's choice of crop, the vegetable silk plant, serves to ironise Renouard's disavowal of commercial considerations. Renouard, after all, expresses some disdain for his employer, Willie Dunster, who he describes disparagingly as 'a commercial monster' who clearly *is* motivated primarily by economics. As he tells Renouard, "You may yet change the history of our country. For economic conditions do shape the history of nations. Eh? What?"⁶¹⁵ Similarly, when the Editor, Renouard's friend and champion, who also has a financial stake in Renouard's enterprise, anticipates the 'great success' of the plantation, Renouard's muttered repetition of the word "Success" before slamming the newspaper office door registers his suspicion of success when measured in financial terms.⁶¹⁶ Yet all of Renouard's feats of daring and scientific exploration have, nevertheless, culminated in the cultivation of a plant that will, in all likelihood, be used in the manufacture of commercial products. As we

⁶¹³ Bhabha, p. 9.

⁶¹⁴ Brantlinger, p.43.

⁶¹⁵ Conrad, p.37. Critics have noted similarities between 'The Planter of Malata' and Conrad's novel *Victory* which was written during the same period. Axel Heyst has much in common with Renouard in terms of his vague ideals and his uncertain place in the world: 'We doubted whether he had any visions of wealth – for himself, at any rate. What he seemed mostly concerned for was the "stride forward" as he expressed it, in the general organisation of the universe, apparently'. Conrad, *Victory*, p. 9.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid., p. 31.

shall see, Renouard's assumption of a higher purpose is undermined when we consider the kinds of mass market product for which artificial silk was used, and which Conrad probably had in mind, particularly when we also consider the author's attitude to comparable manifestations of consumer culture and metropolitan modernity in the period. As Brantlinger suggests, Conrad's stories expressed 'the diminution of chances for heroism in the modern world', a world that 'seemed to be collapsing into a bland, not quite honourable or even respectable domesticity'.⁶¹⁷ If, as Renouard believes, he and the plantation are one, it might be argued that Renouard has followed a similar path from 'five strenuous years of adventure and exploration' to a life spent meeting the needs of the metropolitan consumer.

Artificial silk and the metropolitan consumer

In order to examine why Conrad chose to make Renouard a cultivator of a plant likely to be used to manufacture *artificial* silk, it is worth noting how in the early twentieth century, as now, real silk was considered a luxurious and desirable commodity.⁶¹⁸ Indeed, in what appears to be a judicious example of editorial positioning, when 'The Planter of Malata' first appeared in *Metropolitan Magazine* in New York in June 1914, it was bordered by advertisements for silk clothing products, including 'Holeproof Hosiery' for all the family, and Cluett, Peabody & Co's 'Arrow' Silk Shirts (fig.1). Conrad's critical attitude towards Renouard's artificial silk venture may well have become more apparent to readers in view of these attractive images of real silk goods. Adverts for silk clothing were also part of the advertising culture in the more exclusively literary journals which featured Conrad's work such as *The English Review*. The July 12, 1912 edition carried a full-page illustrated advert for Debenham and Freebody's Women's sports coats made

⁶¹⁷ Brantlinger, p. 42.

⁶¹⁸ In *Victory* Conrad uses this for ironic effect in giving Mrs. Schomberg a silk dress. The dress can be seen as a reflection of Schomberg's pretensions of civility and sophistication, given that Mrs. Schomberg is little more than a display piece for customers. It also adds to the poignancy of Mrs. Schomberg's predicament, the silk dress representing an ideal of glamour and luxury sadly absent from the brutal reality of her life in the hotel.

ARROW SHIRTS

Silk—Exquisite colors and patterns in durable washable silks
\$3.00 to \$10.00

Madras and other desirable shirtings in specially attractive
designs, in authentic styles suitable for town and country wear
\$1.50, \$2.00, \$2.50
and up

*Cluett Peabody & Co., Inc.,
Makers, Troy, N.Y.*



A detailed illustration of a man in profile, facing left. He is wearing a long-sleeved, vertically striped shirt with a matching tie and light-colored trousers. His hands are on his hips, and he is standing with a confident posture. The illustration is rendered in a classic, etched style typical of early 20th-century advertisements.

Fig. 1. Advertising for Cluett, Peabody & Co's 'Arrow' Silk Shirts⁶¹⁹

⁶¹⁹ *Metropolitan Magazine*, New York, June 1914.

<<http://www.conradfirst.net/view/image-id=14549.html>> [accessed 20.08.21]

NOVELTIES IN SPORTS COATS



Real Silk Sports Sweater (*as sketch*), made from extra bright quality silk in a plain stitch. A most popular garment for all kinds of sport. Stocked in over 100 shades. **73/6**

Neapolitan Cap to match (*as sketch*), in same quality silk, **21/-**



"Chameleon" Real Cashmere Sports Coats (*as sketch*) in a wonderful range of two-tone colours, beautifully soft and warm. Perfect fitting. Made exclusively for Debenham & Freebody. Cannot be obtained elsewhere. **52/6**

CATALOGUES POST FREE.

Debenham & Freebody

Wigmore Street, Cavendish Sq., London, W.

fig.2 Advertising for Debenham & Freebody Sports Coats and Sweaters⁶²⁰,

⁶²⁰ Debenham & Freebody Sports Coats and Sweaters, *The English Review*, July, 1912, p. i. : <<http://www.conradfirst.net/view/image-id=18933.html>> [accessed 15.08.21]

from ‘*Real Silk*’ and ‘*Real Cashmere*’ (my emphasis), the authenticity of the fibre appearing to offer buyers a guarantee of quality (fig.2). The images of the two young middle class women, one pictured by a harbour or waterside, the other mid-swing on a golf course, promote the practicality as much as the aesthetic appeal of silk, and present a rather progressive image of young womanhood in the early years of the twentieth century. That these advertisements featured in publications on both sides of the Atlantic also underlines the universal value of natural silk as an emblem of status and success. In this context Conrad’s decision to make Renouard a cultivator of a plant used in the production of *artificial* silk serves the purpose of questioning the integrity of Renouard, the press and government that support his venture, and the powerful private interests which are depicted in ‘The Planter of Malata’. If, to Western metropolitan society, silk carried with it associations of authenticity, glamour, elegance and sophistication, artificial silk could only represent a poor imitation of those things.

The search for a silk alternative

Conrad also seems to have used artificial silk because it enabled him to illuminate the link between the colonial enterprise and the highly volatile and risky world of venture capitalism. In ‘Joseph Conrad’s ‘The Planter of Malata’: Timing, and the Forgotten Adventures of the Silk Plant Arghan’, Ann Lane places the story in the context of the contemporary drive to discover an industrially viable artificial silk. In the late nineteenth century the relatively high price of natural silk increased with the adoption of protectionist policies by the United States which placed a 60% tariff on European silk goods.⁶²¹ The search for a cheaper alternative to silk, which had been undertaken at various times since the discoveries of English naturalist Robert Hooke in 1664, intensified in the period and led to the development of various new technologies and production methods. This included the viscose and acetate processes which enabled the production of new fabrics such as rayon, which had many of the characteristics of silk and cost less than half the price of raw silk. However, these new fabrics, whilst resembling silk in lustre and general appearance,

⁶²¹ Ann Lane, ‘Joseph Conrad’s “The Planter of Malata”: Timing, and the Forgotten Adventures of the Silk Plant Arghan’, *Textile: The Journal of Cloth and Culture*, 5:3 (2007), 276–99 (p. 281).

did not possess the elasticity or the strength of natural silk. The pursuit of the elusive silk plant therefore continued unallayed into the new century. Lane identifies Arghan, which gave rise to a company created in its name, as a possible candidate for the plant that Renouard appeared to be cultivating on the Malata plantation. The plant, discovered by the celebrated explorer Henry Wickham in Honduras, attracted the support of colonial government (including the then Secretary of State for the Colonies, Winston Churchill), the approval of scientists and textiles specialists, and the considerable interest of investors, and led to the granting of 30,000 acres of land for cultivation in British Malaya in the 1920s. Yet, after much anticipation, the company collapsed with the loss of £100,000 to its stakeholders when the land was found to be unsuitable for the cultivation of the plant.⁶²²

Lane's article illustrates the economic and political value of a plant-based substitute for natural silk in the period and also reveals Conrad's remarkable prescience in producing a work of fiction that closely resembled that of an actual venture which failed spectacularly some years after the story was published. Lane also details the broad range of uses to which silk was put, from wallpaper and stockings to early aeroplanes and parachutes, but acknowledges that Conrad clearly has clothing in mind as the likely end product for Renouard's fibre. However, Lane overlooks the implications of artificial silk as a cheap substitute for something more costly and luxurious and of how this might offer an insight into Conrad's critical perspective on the colonial enterprise. To explore the implications of Conrad's choice of an artificial silk plant I now want to turn to an historical document which is of great interest in terms of what it can tell us about contemporary attitudes to the artificial silk industry.

The textile designer Thomas Brough delivered a lecture to the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce on the 17th November, 1926, some ten years after the publication of Conrad's story. Interestingly, as further evidence of Conrad's prescience, the preface to the lecture reveals that in those ten years artificial silk appears to have had a significant impact on the clothing industry, as 'many of the fabrics now known as lustrous fibres, and which had become so fashionable during the last ten years, contained more or less of artificial silk, and it

⁶²² To add further intrigue to the case of the Arghan plant, it appears that the 'new' plant as allegedly discovered by Henry Wickham was actually one which had been in common use in textiles manufacture for many years in South America, leading to speculation that the venture had been a stock market scam. (Lane, p. 291.)

was from the artificial silk that they derived their lustre'.⁶²³ Whilst the lecture is intended to detail the production methods involved in the making of artificial silk to a specialist audience, it also registers some of the scepticism or even disdain within the scientific community towards modern artificial silk products, which Brough attempts to parry.⁶²⁴ In the introduction to the lecture, for example, Brough states that 'the most unfortunate thing about artificial silk is its name, because there is nothing artificial about it [...] Artificial silk is not artificial anything; it is very real'.⁶²⁵ Later, somewhat anxiously, Brough acknowledges that 'the word "artificial" suggests to a good many minds something in the nature of a sham or fraud'.⁶²⁶ Subsequent questions from the audience reveal some of the problems with artificial fibres, including one account of a lady who had left a silk jumper in a bowl of water overnight to clean it but found that 'the next morning when she went to look for the jumper she found it had entirely disappeared' and another who was left unimpressed by the durability of the material when, after travelling by train to see a friend, 'found that her jumper had become almost a frock'.⁶²⁷ Despite these concerns Brough is eager to stress a healthy link between technological and societal progress, the demand for silk-like fabric attributable to 'the world-wide rise in the status and position of women during the past decade [which has] brought with it a demand for silk-like under as well as outer garments'.⁶²⁸ Adopting a tone and style more characteristic of advertising discourse than a scientific lecture, Brough closes the lecture by suggesting that the fibre has 'added a new lustre to life' and given less affluent members of society the opportunity to enjoy the *appearance* of luxury that would have ordinarily been inaccessible⁶²⁹: 'Artificial silk is also playing its part in helping to brighten and glorify life, by giving increased fullness, richness and

⁶²³ Thomas Brough, 'Artificial Silk', *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 75.3864 (1926), 97–115 (p.97).

<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/41357379.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A36d5b397dce5bae820444d7ec2088dc5>> [accessed 9.07.21]

⁶²⁴ Lane identifies Courtaulds as being at the vanguard of the artificial silk industry since its production of the first viscose Rayon in 1905 (Lane, p. 282.) Established in 1793, the company had played a highly significant role in British textile manufacturing, principally because of its manufacture of silk.

⁶²⁵ Brough, p. 99.

⁶²⁶ Ibid., p. 99.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., p. 113.

⁶²⁸ Ibid., p. 107.

⁶²⁹ Ibid., p. 97.

luminosity to colour, and by placing garments with at least the outward charm and loveliness of silk within reach of the average woman'.⁶³⁰

Conrad and commodity retail

It is not difficult to imagine Conrad's response to the claim that artificial silk was helping to 'brighten and glorify life'. We know that Conrad was extremely wary of the kind of advertising discourse which permeates Brough's lecture and which appeared to be an increasingly potent feature of life in the metropolis. A letter detailing his preparations in London prior to his trip to the Congo betrays, as Stephen Donovan notes, Conrad's 'underlying unease about the "fantastic atmosphere" of commodity retail' in the metropole.⁶³¹ Similarly, Conrad's hostility towards the medium of advertising was apparent in an earlier short story 'The Anarchist' (1906) in which the narrator describes the advertising for a meat-extract drink as 'written in a sickly enthusiastic style'. Similarly the narrator's mock-adulation of 'the love that Limited Company bears to its fellow-men' registers a withering scepticism towards the altruistic claims of the company's promotional materials. The narrator continues, 'I am saddened by the modern system of advertising [...] it proves to my mind the wide prevalence of that form of mental degradation which is called gullibility'.⁶³² Critics have illustrated how Conrad was acutely sensitive to changing trends in contemporary society and explored these various manifestations of modernity throughout his novels and short stories. Donovan's book *Joseph Conrad and Popular Culture* (2005) for example, comprehensively details Conrad's fictional treatment of a range of contemporary social and cultural phenomena, from the rise of advertising and the package holiday, to the fashionable interest in walking outdoors which became popular in the early years of the new century and which is playfully examined in the novel *Chance* (1913). Whilst it is impossible to know whether Conrad was aware of the rather comic shortcomings of some artificial silk clothing it is likely that he had women's clothing in mind as the end product for Renouard's fibre. After all, the Editor describes England, which is also the destination of

⁶³⁰ Ibid., p. 113.

⁶³¹ Donovan, p. 115.

⁶³² Joseph Conrad, *The Complete Short Stories of Joseph Conrad* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1933) p. 521.

Renouard's silk consignment, as dominated by the dual concerns of 'the two big F's [...] Fashion and Finance'.⁶³³ Further connections are suggested by the heightened effect of Felicia Moorsom's clothing on Renouard throughout the narrative, including their initial meeting: 'She was different from everybody else in that house, and it was not only the effect of her London clothes'.⁶³⁴

It is also likely that Conrad would have been amongst Brough's 'good many minds' who would have considered artificial silk something 'in the nature of a sham or a fraud'. A fabric which had none of the durability or elasticity of a superior original but was marketed on the basis of its surface appeal, or what Brough describes as 'at least its outward charm', would have been representative of the kind of cheap, mass-produced commodity which Conrad saw as emblematic of a culture which valued cheap imitation over authenticity. The unflattering depiction of the new generation of tourists when set against the more noble ideals of the age of adventure and exploration in *Lord Jim* provides some indication of Conrad's attitude towards emergent forms of commercialism in the early years of the twentieth century. To Conrad they represented, as Donovan suggests, 'a deformation of the true nature of sea travel'.⁶³⁵ In this respect the plantation at the heart of 'The Planter of Malata' appears emblematic of the aggressively commercial form of imperialism which prevailed in the period. The colonial enterprise, constructed in a dominant narrative as one of scientific exploration and progress, appeared in Conrad's fictional version as impelled instead by market forces, where progress was now measured in terms of the development of new technologies to meet the growing demand for cheap imitation goods.

Conclusion

In the final passages of the story we are left with an image of Renouard's prized crop withering in the sun, 'no sight of a human being anywhere, the plants growing rank and tall on the deserted fields'.⁶³⁶ Whatever the manufacturers in Liverpool may have made of the crop, this venture, like the mysterious Arghan company touted by Henry

⁶³³ Conrad, p. 21.

⁶³⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

⁶³⁵ Donovan, p. 92.

⁶³⁶ Ibid., p. 89.

Wickham, ended in miserable failure. We should not conclude though that Conrad was strictly opposed to this kind of enterprise. Hampson notes how in 1895 Conrad ‘seems to have invested almost all his money in South African gold mines’, an investment that failed spectacularly.⁶³⁷ Conrad knew that just as fortunes could be made, so could they be lost overnight, such was the volatile nature of the world of imperial commerce. Whilst colonising powers presented themselves as a force for progress and stability, Conrad knew from bitter experience that the colonial enterprise was often impelled by forces far less dependable or predictable than was widely assumed. In ‘The Planter of Malata’ Conrad presents us with a site in which these contradictions are exposed, where colonial ideals rooted in the certainties of scientific rationality are compromised by the uncertain forces of the imperial market.

Woolf’s *The Village in the Jungle* presents us with a different kind of ambivalence. If we were to read the novel in light of Woolf’s later statement that he did not ‘believe in the nobility of the noble savage and in the wisdom of peasants, children, and imbeciles’ we might be moved to conclude that despite its evident anti-imperialist message, the novel was deeply reactionary in its view of the natives of Ceylon.⁶³⁸ To do so would be to make the same mistake Chinua Achebe made in concluding that Conrad was a ‘thoroughgoing racist’ on the basis, in part, of statements made in sources not directly related to ‘Heart of Darkness’.⁶³⁹ Such an approach obscures the ambiguities of the text itself, a text that may reveal a more undecided or complex view of the colonised than secondary evidence might suggest. So it is with Leonard Woolf’s *The Village in the Jungle*. Whilst in his later years Woolf may have adopted a more conventional view of the inhabitants of colonised lands, when we take a close look at his only published novel we find, from our postcolonial perspective, a text rich in possibilities, a text which simultaneously entertains deeply conservative views of the native Sinhalese but also, in its imaginative investment in the lives of Silindu and his family, a more progressive view of the natives in their complex negotiations with the land.

⁶³⁷ Hampson, *Conrad’s Secrets* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 15.

⁶³⁸ Leonard Woolf, *Sowing*, (London: Hogarth Press, 1970), pp. 151–52.

⁶³⁹ Achebe, ‘An Image of Africa’, p. 344. Achebe alludes to Conrad’s account of his first encounter with a black man in Haiti, which uses racist language, and is cited in Jonah Raskin, *The Mythology of Imperialism* (New York: Random House, 1971), p. 143.

Conclusion

I began this thesis by suggesting that the living spaces presented in the colonial fictions of Joseph Conrad and his contemporaries might tell us something about colonialism as it was viewed by these writers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Since the publication of works such as Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* in 1978, scholars have been made aware of how much of the fiction produced during the period seems to rely on ways of presenting the non-European world as fixed in an arrested stage of development and regressive in comparison to the supposedly forward-thinking West. Against the irrational forces of superstition, violence and instability which characterise the non-European world, the agents of the European world, it is claimed, are presented as a force for progress and embody the beliefs and values of a civilisation that is intended to bring stability and certainty to an unstable world. Yet something that is apparent in the work of Conrad and others is that despite often utilising fixed and stereotypical forms of representation, which Said and others suggest is central to the colonial discourse of the period, the everyday settings which provide the backdrop for the ostensible action of these narratives appear to be highly unstable spaces. Beyond the dilapidated physical condition of many of these settings, the agents of colonial powers can usually be found living in hotels, on board ships, or plying their trade within a distant trading station, where a steady supply of goods and produce is never guaranteed. The transitory nature of these dwellings seems at odds with an idea of a civilisation intended to bring permanence and stability to a primitive and unruly people. This being the case, it seems that a closer examination of these domestic spaces might reveal a more complex picture of the colonial enterprise, and a more undecided view of the power of the colonial discourse within which these fictions operated. This, as I show throughout this thesis, is certainly the case.

Looking at the domestic space in the colonial setting as a site of instability has significant implications for the study of Conrad's works specifically and for the field of postcolonial studies more generally. For postcolonial studies it draws our attention to an important layer of meaning which may be present in the text which can be read in dialogue with stereotypical kinds of representation. If colonial discourse is rooted in an idea of stability and fixed forms of representation then an approach which is attentive to the way that space is produced through social practices, and as always *in process*, offers a way of questioning that dominant

discourse. This has specific relevance to Conrad's work which, as I show in Chapter One, may actually include individuals who appear to resemble the traditional stereotypes which figure in the popular fiction of the day, but who inhabit unstable domestic spaces. As I show, Conrad repeatedly draws our attention to the way that the domestic space is produced through process in a way that is at odds with the stereotype. We find the domestic space to be a site where the ambivalence of colonial discourse is exposed in the meeting between the fixed mode of the stereotype and the fluid nature of practiced space. In recent years critics within Conrad studies have adopted new approaches to tackle the question of stereotypical representation in Conrad's works. Linda Dryden and Susan Barras explore theories of performativity in the essays in *Joseph Conrad and the Performing Arts* to show how the indigenous women in Conrad's early Malay fiction display various forms of resistance to colonial authority.⁶⁴⁰ More recently Katherine Baxter has explored the underlying instability of Conrad's Malay fiction from a legal and historical perspective.⁶⁴¹ What each of these approaches draw our attention to are the hidden layers of meaning, characteristic of Conrad's fictions, which mitigate against any simplistic or reductive reading of the work. Whilst these stories may contain examples of the kinds of stereotype which were common to the more conservative forms of colonial fiction of the period, there are also other layers of meaning at work within the text which unsettle those more stereotypical, fixed forms of representation. The important point to make is that these examples offer alternative ways of reading Conrad which are alive to a greater level of subtlety, complexity and possibility in the text than the more reductive frameworks which have informed readings by previous critics. As I show in Chapter One, Conrad's presentation of the home as a space that is practiced domestically provides a counter narrative to the stereotypical representation of the non-Western characters and shows how Conrad was using domestic space to undermine the colonial stereotype. In this respect my approach offers a fresh approach to Conrad which foregrounds his use of domestic space in order to gain new insights into these much-discussed works, to further our understanding of Conrad's critical engagement with the colonial fiction genre.

In Chapter Two the focus switches to a consideration of the indigenous domestic space in light of theories of colonial discourse. Far from merely providing

⁶⁴⁰ Dryden, 'Performing Malaya', pp. 11–27., and Barras, 'Sly Civility?', pp. 29–43., in *Joseph Conrad and the Performing Arts*.

⁶⁴¹ see Baxter, 'Geography and Law in *Almayer's Folly*', pp. 67–84.

an element of exotic interest to the European reader, I show how the domestic space was actually doing the work of reinforcing prevailing assumptions about the essential difference of the non-European. I show how this figures in the *Malay Sketches* of Frank Swettenham where the indigenous home was presented, against the Western domestic ideals of security and stability, as a site of instability. The domestic space thus performs a legitimising function within colonial discourse, confirming the need for intervention into a territory where the native population, in the words of Said, 'did not have it in them to know what was good for them'.⁶⁴² At the same time, by drawing on theories of colonial mimicry, I show how the domestic space can also be read as the site of ambivalence, one that draws the colonised Other into a familiar frame of reference whilst at the same time presenting the non-European as '*a subject of difference that is almost the same but not quite*'.⁶⁴³ At present no study of the significance of domestic space in relation to the colonial fiction of the period exists. By showing how the domestic space can be read as both a site of colonial power and, alternatively, as the location of colonial ambivalence, I show the domestic space to be a site of fundamental importance to postcolonial studies.

Besides Chinua Achebe's influential lecture 'An Image of Africa', critical perspectives on Conrad have also been shaped by Edward Said's studies of 'Heart of Darkness' and *Nostromo* in *Culture and Imperialism*. Whilst Said championed Conrad for powerfully illuminating how 'imperialism ha[d] monopolised the entire system of representation', he maintained that Conrad was unable to imagine the inhabitants of the non-European world as active agents in their own right.⁶⁴⁴ As Kaplan, Mallios and White note, Conrad, in Said's estimation, was 'unable to perceive as autonomous, discerning, and independent-minded human agents the various natives whose victimisation his novels nonetheless indict'.⁶⁴⁵ The question of indigenous agency has, then, been an important focus of debates for scholars within Conrad studies, Robert Hampson's 'The Case of Henry Price', (in addition to the examples by Dryden and Barras) being a significant example. In this respect, the second part of Chapter Two is an attempt to show how theories of spatial practices, when applied to the domestic space, can also open up a text to the possibility of

⁶⁴² Said, *Orientalism*, p. 37.

⁶⁴³ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 85–86.

⁶⁴⁴ Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 27.

⁶⁴⁵ Carola M. Kaplan, Peter Mallios, and Andrea White, ed. by, *Conrad in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2005) p. xviii.

indigenous agency. Through my reading of 'The Lagoon', I show how the stereotypical aspects of the text coincide with another kind of representation which enables us to see the non-Europeans as active agents, producing their own domestic spaces, in a way that is no different to the practices of the white trader who visits Arsat's home. To see the text in this way is to read against Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan's claim that the text simply reinforces primitivist discourse and against Said's influential view of Conrad articulated in *Culture and Imperialism* which suggested that Conrad denied the active agency of the colonised. In contrast to Said's view of a totalising discourse of imperialism, a more 'up-close' approach to the texts which reads the domestic as practiced place enables us to see Conrad in a way that contests Said's influential critique.

Chapter Three looks at the presentation of shipboard domesticity and takes its cue, in part, from recent developments in mobility studies, prompted by a series of questions in Tim Cresswell's influential article 'Towards a Politics of Mobility': 'How is mobility discursively constituted? What narratives have been constructed about mobility? How are mobilities represented?'.⁶⁴⁶ I explore the how, in 'Karain', the mobile living space is imagined by the narrator as a refuge, a space of rationality, metonymically connected to the European homeland, signified through the reassuring tick of the ship's chronometers synchronised to Greenwich Mean Time. Critics have often focused on the way that Conrad draws our attention to the constructed nature of Otherness in 'Karain'. Less attention has been paid to how the Self is discursively constructed through the presentation of space to mitigate against the unsettling encounter with the Other. When read this way the story illustrates how, in the words of Briganti and Mezei, 'humans [...] inhabit domestic space, but also [...] how domestic space inhabits us, and how potently and poetically it influences our ways of being, thinking and discourse'.⁶⁴⁷ This chapter therefore offers a fresh approach to thinking about how space is discursively constructed, and of how Conrad employs the unreliable first-person narrator, as he later did with Marlow in 'Heart of Darkness', to draw our attention to the limitations of a Eurocentric way of thinking about the inhabitants of colonised territories. As I have shown, the fluid nature of shipboard domesticity is also central to Becke's 'The Fate of the Alida' and Stevenson's 'The Ebb-Tide'. Both writers used the ship as a setting in which the

⁶⁴⁶ Tim Cresswell, 'Towards a Politics of Mobility', p. 21.

⁶⁴⁷ Briganti and Mezei, ed. by, *The Domestic Space Reader*, p. 12.

boundaries between the public and private are shown to be as unstable as the assumed distinction between the civilised European and the primitive non-Europeans on board. In the example of 'Karain' however, I argue that whilst Conrad has clear affinities with Becke and Stevenson, the presentation of a story set largely within the ship's interior also shows a greater attention to the interiority of the first-person narrator, a sign of Conrad's nascent modernism when read alongside the presentations of shipboard domesticity in the work of his contemporaries.

Whilst the hotel has become a site of key interest for modernist studies there is a scarcity of criticism relating to the hotel as a venue which figures frequently as setting in the colonial fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶⁴⁸ In this respect Chapter Four foregrounds the hotel as a site of key significance for postcolonial studies, and offers an original approach to thinking about the relationship between the stability of space and the stability of the discourses which upheld colonisation. As I show in relation to the novel *Victory*, Conrad presents the hotel as a place of contradictions, both a home and not-a-home, situated somewhere in between the private and the public. Its contradictory or ambivalent nature, and the duplicitous nature of the hotelier Schomberg, is read as a reflection of the instability of colonial authority, pulled in opposing directions between a need to present itself as a force for stability whilst at the same time *destabilised* by the unpredictability of capital. The hotel thus provides a vivid example of the way that space can be seen to have a deconstructive relationship to the stereotypical strategies of colonial discourse, the fluidity of a space that is both commercial *and* familial, public and domestic, is at odds with a way of thinking that determines to fix things in place forever. By way of contrast I show how the hotel functions in the work of Carleton Dawe to reinforce a set of assumptions and beliefs which legitimised British colonisation of territories in the East. In the context of Macao, where the once stable European presence is no longer in the ascendancy, the deceptiveness of the hotel as a part-domestic and part-commercial space is deeply implicated in the racist discourse which frames the non-European as similarly deceptive and unstable. In these contrasting studies of the hotel in the colonial setting I therefore illustrate how an approach which explores the shared concerns of spatial and postcolonial theory can highlight the significance of a site that has been largely overlooked in criticism of

⁶⁴⁸ see, for example: Emma Short, *Mobility and the Hotel in Modern Literature: Passing Through* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

colonial fiction, and suggests that the hotel warrants further critical investigation within the field of postcolonial studies.

In Chapter Two I show that an approach to the colonial text which is attentive to the domestic space as produced through spatial practices serves to highlight the agency of the native subject, a central concern of postcolonialism and of some importance in the context of Conrad studies. The question of agency is also a key concern in Chapter Five but, importantly, the focus shifts specifically to the role that women play in works by Conrad, Becke and Stevenson. I show how, in the context of the trading station, colonial power is repeatedly subverted, destabilised or simply ignored through the spatial practices of native women who transgress the dominant border between public and private space. This approach enables us to privilege the female subject in works by writers who have largely been considered unsympathetic to feminist concerns. According to Carola Kaplan for example, Conrad's fiction has been thought of as 'almost exclusively about a male world for a male readership', a view that would certainly apply to the work of Robert Louis Stevenson, Louis Becke and the genre of colonial fiction more generally.^{649 650} Chapter five therefore offers an approach to reading the colonial text, and specifically the work of these assumed masculinist writers, which, by highlighting the agency of the native female subject, reveals these works to be more sympathetic from a feminist perspective.

As I suggested in the introduction to this thesis, one of my aims in adopting a deconstructive approach to the idea of domestic space was to explore other etymological possibilities contained within the term 'domestic'. This was, in part, a response to the work of Briganti and Mezei, who, in considering the 'ramifications and possibilities' of the term recognise the 'domestic space – the very idea of home – is changing to incorporate [...] work spaces, salons, galleries, food production and

⁶⁴⁹ Carola M. Kaplan, 'Beyond Gender: Deconstructions of Masculinity and Femininity from "Karain" to *Under Western Eyes*', in *Conrad in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Carola M. Kaplan, Peter Mallios and Andrea White (London: Routledge, 2005) pp. 266–283., (p. 267) In recent years critics have brought new theoretical approaches to Conrad's work to complicate this view. Susan Jones for example, has considered the 'interrupted narrative, the gaps and hiatuses' in *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* in light of Hélène Cixous's well-known notion of *écriture féminine* to reveal 'the frequently unacknowledged aesthetic and philosophical problems he shared with women writers and readers'. Susan Jones, 'Conrad on the Borderlands of Modernism', in *Conrad in the Twenty-First Century*, pp. 195–211., (p. 197).

the home garden'.⁶⁵¹ In Chapter Six, I expand the boundaries of the domestic space beyond the traditional parameters of the home to also think about the spaces of cultivation, which attend the colonial project, as a kind of domestic space. In this respect I have shown how thinking about agriculture in relation to the question of colonial discourse reveals a range of different perspectives in the work of Conrad and Leonard Woolf, the domestic space being emblematic of the corrosive effects of colonisation on native society in Woolf's *The Village in the Jungle*, whilst being more indicative, in Conrad's 'The Planter of Malata', of the instability of the market forces which belied the higher ideals of colonising powers. At the same time, my approach highlights the heterocentric or undecided nature of Woolf's novel, and enables us to see more clearly how, in the way it appears to both question and reinforce colonialist views, the text is simultaneously both progressive and deeply conservative in its assumptions about the non-European.

In her book *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City*, Jane M. Jacobs explains how her analyses of the postcolonial city offer a way of counteracting what she sees as the ahistorical and generalising tendencies of much postcolonial theory. As Jacobs notes, 'while much of this [literary] theory is about difference, about deconstructing master narratives, about space, these concerns are often expressed through grand theory and not through the fundamentally deconstructive space of the local'.⁶⁵² The local, in Jacobs book, is manifested in the city of Brisbane, Perth, or, in the case of Spitalfields, the marginal space situated within the orbit of the metropolitan centre. A study of these spaces reveals, as Jacobs notes, how 'the imperial project [was] both global in scale but also messy in its local effects'.⁶⁵³ My aim in this study was to take a comparable dive into the 'deconstructive space of the local', and in some respects the present study might be seen, albeit from a literary perspective, as the logical end-point of the trajectory that Jacobs follows, for what could be more specifically 'local' than the individual home of the white European trader or that of the native inhabitant of colonised territories in these colonial fictions? By exploring domestic space in the colonial fiction of the period I have shown how colonialism was, in the context of the everyday, also 'messy in its local

⁶⁵¹ Briganti and Mezei, ed. by, *The Domestic Space Reader*, p. 12–13.

⁶⁵² Jane M. Jacobs, *Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City* (London: Routledge, 1996) p. 158.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

effects'.⁶⁵⁴ By doing so I have also demonstrated how central domestic space was to these fictions, in offering ways for writers to think through and challenge, or alternatively uphold and reinforce, dominant assumptions and beliefs about the colonial project and about the local populations of colonised territories overseas. The domestic space in the colonial setting, however temporary or unconventional it appeared, provided writers with a site through which they could explore the larger meanings of home and, in the context of the civilising mission, invite their readers to reconsider exactly who was civilised and who was not. By drawing our attention to the diverse ways that the domestic space functions in the work of these writers, this study therefore offers a fresh perspective on the work of Joseph Conrad and his contemporaries, whilst bringing to light the fundamental significance of domestic space to postcolonial studies in discussions of the colonial fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

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