

Cultural Studies' Networking Strategies in the South

Stephen Muecke

In the 1990s I started to take an interest in the networking capacity for Cultural Studies when I saw how Kuan-Hsing Chen set up the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies group, an alternative intellectual knowledge-exchange which now has an eponymous (Taylor and Francis) journal and a vital and well-funded network of scholars working among Taiwan, China, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, India, Korea, etc. For younger scholars in the humanities, this network has effectively displaced any need for them to work within the older Area Studies frameworks controlled by Anglo-American universities, nor do they necessarily feel the need to go to one of those universities for their graduate training. The local training in Taiwan or Hong Kong still uses English a lot, as a lingua franca, and still uses many canonical cultural studies texts, but the decolonisation process is well-advanced. It is an extraordinarily successful network, using interdisciplinary theory as another kind of lingua franca, breaking the hegemonic hold of the older disciplines and their area-studies foci, and opening up new specific areas of study not visible to those older networks: new media, gender studies, alternative globalisation studies.

This creates, in the process, a new set of intellectual voices, ones that don't sound like the older 'tone' in the language of the social sciences, some of which makes me want to characterise it as 'cargo knowledge'.¹ The speaking subject enunciates with assurance: '*This* is what I have found out, this is the true. Here's a "transparent" language with a "load" of content'. But this 'true' is a fictional truth of the coloniser, by virtue of what it does not reveal and the way it is distributed. The cargo knowledge the coloniser unloads goes only one way. It does not appear on the jetties of the South; it is packed up and shipped to the port cities of the North. It is 'packed' in the kinds of stories it tells, and in the kinds of stories it responds to; a fiction created by the encounter with different kinds of discourses which are selectively heard and translated. Stories are thus crafted with selected omissions and/or excesses, things which can't always be contained by the available concepts. Ethnography, for instance, is often a fiction to the extent that it masks its conditions of possibility: the funding from the Ford foundation or some Research Council. Or, historically, a story about the 'fabulous' wealth of the East blinds the European merchant-adventurer to the likelihood of the more meagre realities he will find on arrival.

This is why neither the language of fact nor the language of fiction is sufficient for describing how our new networking might work; neither the ostensibly transparent language of the social sciences that 'delivers' knowledge in its authoritative tone, nor the beautiful truth of nationalised and standardised literatures that also return ideas and images to the centre to be judged as more cargo of a different sort: 'commonwealth literatures' used to be the name for that particular kind of package.

A language that travels and inspires is not a uniform one, but it might have the kind of 'magic' implied by *fabulation*, a Bergsonian concept re-used by Gilles Deleuze. Fabulation involves *inventing* in relation to a problem or a situation that must be remedied, particularly with regard to the situation of 'the people who are missing' (Deleuze 1991, 4). If a contemporary Indian Ocean body of literature is 'missing' in that sense, it remains to be invented, something I attempted recently in a creolised retelling of *Paul et Virginie*, Bernardin de St Pierre's canonical Rousseauian text of 1788 (Muecke 2006). So fabulation involves writer and the people *moving towards one another*. Fiction in this model is freed from the imperative to create a true world, just as the 'cargo' social scientific voice is freed from the model of transparency to the true fact. Fabulation works best hovering between the oral and written, the real and the imaginary, being neither a document nor a fiction, but a fictocritical form of enunciation that oscillates between these poles. This is not the romance of the indeterminate; it is a listening method which 'hears' not only the words but the discursive frameworks which are the practice for putting words together as knowledge. The new southern networks, I argue, are ones that are developing in conjunction with new digitally-vehicled audio-visual literacies. They will be the future.

This is something I learned from the storytelling of Nyigina elder Paddy Roe (Roe 1983), when I started my association with the Indian Ocean in the North-west of Western Australia, sitting on the beach and gazing out 'to the islands' (to borrow the title of the famous Randolph Stow novel), the islands to which the spirits of the Aboriginal coastal people return, out in the Indian Ocean where the great storm clouds of the wet season gather and come rolling in like monstrous heads and give the North-west peoples the iconography of the Wandjina figures that they call their gods today.

There I began to take an interest in the links between oral histories and stories and the literary mainstream, with me as link and scribe. Were the Broome stories I recorded destined to be just a marginal note in the story that the Australian nation was constructing for itself, based on the traditions of England? Less than 100 years ago *that* small island, still rich from its imperial trade, invested its surplus in a cultural superstructure, a nationalism that involved the locals turning their attention from the illusion of the purity of the classical languages to make their own Creole (English as a combination of Romance, Germanic, Anglo-Saxon

and Nordic languages) into a Great Tradition, a great literary tradition through the institutionalisation of a canon of great writers. Once these cultural heroes had their reputations secured, they were also exported to the colonies. Quite a network, quite a turnaround in the fortunes of a once-despised vernacular. So that is what I was working against with 'Paul and Virginia', projecting Paddy Roe's vernacular across the Indian Ocean towards Mauritius and St Pierre's canonical text. The Indian Ocean might have a new network, but it would have to be invented.

In *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (Deleuze 1989), Gilles Deleuze conjures a moment of fabulation in which cultural forces regroup and start to generate their own stories. The places and the materials, in the form they take and the way they can be transformed, talk to the writing or to the way stories are told. This reassemblage of forces is a way of re-creating the Indian Ocean world, an ancient world reconstituted as a contemporary world through the practice of what I call 'artful politics'.

This is a politics of seeing and hearing such that a strange kind of language will have to come into being, a language that will challenge any firm distinction between description and fictionalisation and which will introduce a queer defamiliarisation into the heart of the most familiar experiences in order to project reality and not normalise it. The language of fabulation is one which 'deterritorialises' the cargo language, which in effect creolises it. 'What has to be filmed', says Deleuze, 'is the frontier, on condition that this is equally crossed by the filmmaker in one direction and by the real character in the opposite direction: time is necessary here: a certain time is necessary which constitutes an integral part of the film' (Deleuze 1989, 153-4).

Whether it is a matter of making films, telling stories or writing academic papers, we who are in the business of inventing cultures as we describe them have a stake in our own performances, like getting immersed in Indian Ocean studies, in which the time of the performance is an integral part of its quality. For some, time does not matter, and so the effect is delayed or displaced (anachronic or anatomic). Here, you could say, *here* is my piece of cargo writing, my academic report, delivered up on time to the funding body, to act on in *their* good time, or not act on at all, in which case one might have to question the value of the cargo. So delivery matters, and delivery involves thinking about the mode of enunciation, the decolonisation of the subject-object (master-slave) relation, and do I hear also a trumpet call for the retreat of the forward march of European modernity around the world?

But wait, you may say, wait a minute, these theoretical and rhetorical adjustments are all very well, but what if the delivery of cargo knowledge is not only on time but valued, that it does a good job with IMF money reforming government and industry in third-world countries? Social indicators are improving, there is

some economic growth and environmental sustainability as well. Maybe so, but that analysis belongs in someone else's paper. My thesis would be that the World Bank needs its spin doctors too; the red carpet is not always rolled out and waiting for the agents of capitalist reform; it too has to 'fabulate', to tie its threads of institutional thinking in with local desires and aspirations, to make things become, to make virtual realities before they exist concretely.

What I am seeking to do is to trace, as Bruno Latour says, 'the unique signature drawn by associations and substitutions through the conceptual space' (Latour 1999, 161). The fascinating 'conceptual space' that is constituted by Indian Ocean studies today is an historically formed image where we see European enlightenment thought (reflected back in waves to the seventeenth century) meeting the trans-continental mercantile-religious complex that was the pre-colonial Indian Ocean. That particular conjunction gives us the potential to see postcolonial thought, which, after all, developed out of the meshing of European theory and empirical analysis of the colonial situation, further localised in the Indian Ocean, instead of developed only elsewhere, in the northern diaspora for instance.

So let us consider different chains of associations drawn though that heterogeneous space that is the Indian Ocean, creating the 'unique signatures' that will be our renovated languages of analysis. Yes, the new area studies—let's call it the Indian Ocean Network—is both a critical intellectual project *and* a radically empirical one. One chain is the annual monsoon rhythm (OED: Arabic *mawsim*, lit. 'season' < *wasama* to mark) and the way it brings rains to the Subcontinent enriching the agriculture there. The rains link to vitality, to ritual, to the interlocking lives of plants, animals and humans. The monsoon becomes a sacred thing, not in itself, but precisely in the manner that, in its network of relations, it crafts a 'unique signature'. Between October and April it turns around, and blows from the north-east, encouraging departures, sailing and eventually trade; another network of associations is established here, one based on working the relations of the scarcity and abundance of goods. Techniques for the transcription of value have to be developed: coinage or letters of credit; the character of the merchant has to be forged as trustworthy by the way he dresses and speaks and can trace his social relations. Does all this culture trace back to the monsoon? Yes, at that time it was a natural-cultural continuum of connections that couldn't be broken.

And when the Portuguese, with da Gama, finally succeed in rounding the Cape in ships designed for 'remote control', as it were, since they are going such a distance, a different conceptual structure appears on the Indian Ocean scene (Law 1986). The notion of imperial force appears, as the sovereign drives these expeditions from a distance for the profit of the national capital; and there is a singular god overseeing a global world which remained to be envisioned by

Copernicus, but which Camoens was later to 'give' to da Gama in the great Portuguese national epic, the *Lusiad*, written some 70 years after the voyage. In Canto 10, set in India, a goddess speaks to da Gama of the extraordinary *máquina do mundo*:

'To you, my hero, God in his divine wisdom has granted to see with your bodily eyes what is denied to other mortals, whose vain strivings after knowledge but lead them into error and misery. Follow me, you and your men, with firm and courageous, yet prudent, step up this densely-wooded slope.' And so saying, she led him into a thicket where a mortal might only with extreme difficulty make his way.

Soon they found themselves on a lofty mountain-top, in a meadow studded with emeralds and rubies that proclaimed to the eye it was no earthly ground they trod. And there they beheld, suspended in the air, a globe of such transparency that the light shone right through it and the centre was as visible as the outer surface. What it was made of could not be divined, but it clearly consisted of a series of spheres contrived by the wand of God to rotate about a simple fixed centre in such a way that, however they revolved or rose or fell, the whole neither rose nor fell but showed the same from every angle. Its supernatural artifice in short had neither beginning nor ending, but was in all things uniform, perfect, and self-sustained like God its maker.

As da Gama gazed at it he was deeply moved, and stood lost in curiosity and amazement. Then the goddess spoke: 'This thing you see before you is a representation in miniature of the universe, that you may see where your path lies, whither it leads, and what the end of your desires. This is the mighty fabric of creation, ethereal and elemental ...' (Camoens 233-4)

I think it is significant that this fiction, this spectacle of the Machine of the World (*Máquina do Mundo*), and of the power of science, is located in India as a blessing bestowed on an imperial explorer. Its vision of the world is as a universal system, obeying mechanical laws whose evolution, as Jean-François Lyotard says, will 'trace a foreseeable trajectory and give rise to continual "normal" functions' (Lyotard 90). Thus Da Gama's goddess, rather than simply prophesying in the classical manner of the *Odyssey*, provides a machine so that 'you may see where your path lies'. This will become the predictive capacity of the scientific laws of the mastery of nature that will reach their height with Newton and Descartes. By 1800, says Michel Serres, 'Science alone is universal, in its practice of a verifiable reality, since it provides the very laws of the universe, whatever the latitudes. This is how our fathers saw it, and how we ourselves believed it to be. And this is why eighteenth-century Europe celebrated

the Enlightenment. And this is why the nineteenth century wrote of Absolute Knowledge' (Serres 128).

Nature and culture will be driven into separate realms by this line of thought, as A. N. Whitehead and William James, and more recently Latour et al have shown (Latour 2004). It is the physicist who has privileged access to the facts of the natural world in a relentless drive for immutable laws, but the multifarious and contingent experiences of the real world are lost in this: smells, aberrations, stray facts, beautiful sunsets—all this has to be bracketed out. It is the dream of the navigator rather than the pathfinder. It creates a different chain of associations to the one I described of the mariner linking to the monsoon.

But the rationalist Enlightenment had its rivals, in a different genealogy traceable from Montaigne to Rousseau and Diderot, who celebrated contingency and experimentalism, adapting themselves to the landscape as they proceeded, rejoicing at chance and the unexpected. 'Everything has its outcome in nature, the most extravagant as well as the most reasoned experiment. Experimental philosophy is always happy with what comes its way', Diderot said in *De l'interprétation de la nature* (qtd in Saint-Armand 102).

My version of a contemporary cultural studies finds itself descended from this rival enlightenment because we proceed from the contingencies of encounter rather than from founding principles. Strangers meet, like ships in the Condradian night, and ask each other what the game is, what the stakes are, what the matter is. They begin to fabulate. They don't seek to confirm available fictions, or fictionalise a truth. They meet with maturity and respect, and share wry humour, because they know that 'things must go both ways', as my old mentor Paddy Roe in Broome used to say. But their fabulations are not just for fun; they can be a valid and sturdy mode of existence, well-crafted yarns and memories reinforcing each other, lasting longer, perhaps, than mere paper knowledge.

Is it by chance that I thought of Alan Villiers and his experience of pearling, and picked up *Monsoon Seas* once again to prepare this essay? Is it by chance that Villiers found himself in the Gulf waters before the Second Gulf War and then wrote this? I quote at length for you to experience the fabulation or con-fabulation that goes on here as strangers meet respectfully and knowledge is disseminated through a story:

The waters of the Persian Gulf are rich with pearl oysters, particularly on the chain of reefs and banks near Bahrein, farther up the Gulf not far from the Bay of Kuwait, and off the coast of Trucial Oman. The best banks are on the Arab side of the Gulf. The season lasts for four months and ten days in summer, when the water is hot, for all diving is without gear except for a sort of clothespin nipped on the nose and a stone to go down with. In 1905 there were 4,500 boats and 75,000 men employed in Gulf pearling, according to statistics kept at Bahrein.

[...]

[In 1939] I spent some time with them on the banks, pearling, and also made a buyer's run among the fleets of Kuwait and Bahrein, with the expert buyer Sheik Mohammed Abdul-Razzaq, who had with him interesting paraphernalia, consisting of pieces of red flannel, a minute pair of scales which he held by hand, a large box of silver rupees, his brother, a clerk, a servant and a handyman, five sheep, several goats, and a large supply of sherbet, rice, ghee, and other necessities. We travelled in a small motorboat, and it was our custom to spend the day among the pearling vessels and the nights at anchor close off some pleasant beach, where we drew up our carpets out of the reach of the tide and slept on the sand, beneath the stars. It was a good life.

[...]

The sheik practiced a most curious method in his bargaining. When we approached a little pearler, or a big one, we would go aboard with quiet and unhurried dignity, be received with coffee and sweet confections, and discuss all manner of things for an hour or so before the subject of pearls was mentioned. Then in due course, out would come a piece of red flannel or an old black sock, and the nakhoda would carefully untie the bundle to display his take. They were always a lovely sight, and the sheik's eyes used to gleam, though he would invariably begin by decrying the gems and lamenting that the waters of the Gulf no longer produced pearls worth a buyer's attention. Then, in another hour or so, he would condescend to examine the take properly, sieving it and weighing the various grades, and examining some through a small magnifying glass. Only after several hours would the subject of a price be mentioned. Then would follow the usual sparring, always cheerful and conducted according to rule.

If he really intended to buy the pearls, the sheik would at last grab a spare piece of his red flannel, throw it over his right hand, grasp the right hand of the nakhoda beneath this flannel, and conduct the final negotiations by manipulation of fingers, according to some ancient code, in solemn and complete silence. Sometimes he varied the procedure by grabbing his brother's hand in the same manner, and working on his fingers, but this was when he wanted to get his brother's idea of the value of the parcel he was considering. (Villiers 236, 237, 238-9)

This to me is a kind of quintessential scene of Indian Ocean trade, where a chain of relations links natural value to cultural value in a describable continuum. Nature is not hidden, as in the western imaginary, where the savant removes Nature's veil to uncover her secrets (Hadot 2006). Here the art of concealment

is openly cultural: the piece of red flannel clearly signals, in something of a ritualised performance, what it is we should *not* know.

In any case, truth was never literal or transparent, that is only one of its fictions, as if anyone could be constantly exposed to its burning light. Truth was always a process of masking and unmasking, or a dancing movement between the general and the specific—proofs cast as syllogisms, for instance. It exists, I'm afraid, only in the movements of discourse, which is saying that it is never singular and never quite present either. Attached to the strings of artifice, it burst onto the scene like a *deus ex machina*, or like a flying carpet bearing Douglas Fairbanks in *The Thief of Baghdad*.

Ah yes, popular culture, it too, is part of our Indian Ocean scene, as I want to work to conclude by taking everything in this Indian Ocean world back to a fundamental idea: *everything in it is in a natural-cultural continuum*. Everything has some value; everything is worthy of respect. 'Everything has its outcome in nature', said Diderot. The Indian Ocean is full of popular culture, so let's not exclude it because it might seem trivial. Each story, artifact or flying carpet carries a bit of cultural value which, if you follow a zigzag path of associations, is linked to natural things and beings. In '*A Thousand and One Nights at the Movies*', Robert Irwin says that the thousand and one productions of *that* story in film,

are an important part of Orientalism, and they need to be considered as part of a broader cultural phenomenon that includes such diverse things as Turkish cigarettes, Flying Carpet Travel Agents, Flying Carpet Dry Cleaning outlets, cinemas called the Alhambra, Egyptian music halls, Orientalist sheet music, camel jokes, the Genie in advertisements for brass polish, three wishes jokes, Wilson, Keppel and Betty's Egyptian sand dance, Kettleby's 'In a Persian Market', the Bonzo Dog Doo Dah Band's 'Ali Baba and his camel', Fry's Turkish Delight, the posters for conjuring and circus shows, Tommy Cooper's fez, night club versions of the Dance of the Seven Veils ... (232)

Strange stuff, this popular orientalism: fabrications out of control, asking the analytic writing what it has learned. Edward Said didn't deal much with the popular, coming as he did out of a literary tradition. And he had an epistemological framework that doesn't help the schema I am trying to construct. His problem was one of representation, or rather misrepresentation. The reality of Asian worlds has nothing to do with the false representations made of them in western discourses. But the way he has set up the problem (not just him, but any ideology-critique) based on two characters, subject and object, self and world, facing each other across the abyss of the mystery of representation, will never be able to grasp anything new, because the only winner in that game is language, and meta-language, and the constant exhortation to close the gap:

If by 'epistemology' we name the discipline that tries to understand how we manage to bridge the gap between representations and reality, the only conclusion to be drawn about it is that this discipline has no subject matter whatever, because we never bridge such a gap—not, mind you because we don't know anything objectively, but because *there is never such a gap*. The gap is an artefact due to the wrong positioning of the knowledge acquisition pathway. (Latour 2007, 90)

Why should we acquire knowledge about Indian Ocean popular culture? Because it will tell us how people are connected via what they share, and today this extends with new media beyond the geography of the ocean. The flows are different now. Michael Pearson sets up a problem to do with the Indian Ocean, a familiar and important one about littoral cultures: 'Surat and Mombasa have more in common with each other than they do with inland cities such as Nairobi or Ahmadabad' (Pearson 345). The question is set up as an area studies one, in which the similarity matters to us as scholars, but how do we go from there—where we scholars now have a set of terms to debate in common—to making it matter to the poor fisherfolk who supposedly have the actual littoral culture in common? Perhaps now they continue to have cultures in common with a contemporary popular culture overlay; they are watching the same Bollywood movies for instance, so they are a part of an evolving network.

An artful politics expresses what matters for networks and helps improve the network, which involves time and construction work. People will build associations to deal with matters of concern that arise for their fishing, commercial and cultural communities: NGO and trade union linkages; research institutes that monitor ecosystems that provide livelihoods and export income.

At the same time there are networks working towards completely different ends, for instance in the Australian Indian Ocean Territories, including Christmas Island. At the time of the 2001 'Tampa' crisis, Christmas Island could have been a possible destination for asylum seekers because it was still Australian sovereign territory at that stage. Then a new law was passed excising it from Australia for that purpose, so any asylum seekers ('boat people') landing there could not expect to be processed. A new detention facility was built at huge expense (up to half a billion Australian dollars). But it is not a single thing, it is part of a network that makes it possible. This installation is only partly functional, designed for up to 800 detainees, but now with a change of government it may never house any. With what did it link? What is it or was it good for? It was clearly going to be good for the private security corporation that would have run it on a lucrative government contract; it was good for the builder Baulderstone and the labourers flown in from Australia at great expense; it underscored the previous Australian government's vote-winning exercise about being tough on refugees with brown complexions; it networked with a broader

global coalition of creating security fears as part of a capitalist-militarist complex (the so-called war on terror); it even linked to those individual share-holders who have no qualms about investing in one of the world's most lucrative investment lines: correctional management companies.

Networks thus co-exist, and are sometimes in competition. The right-wing Australian government voted out in 2007 wanted to build up associations of the things they believed would 'work', and they took the trouble to destroy networks that exist as alternatives, like trade unions and student associations. It is no exaggeration to say that they spent propaganda money to destroy the idea of such associations as well.

To return to Latour's idea, the point for critical theory and its place in Indian Ocean studies is to stop doing critical theory! That is to say, it is pointless continuing with a mode of discourse whose main platform, repeated endlessly, is one of scepticism about representations. 'There is a gap between what the government is telling us and what is real, they are not being truthful', as if, if they finally told the truth, we could trust them and all would be well. That is not the point, if what they are really doing is building up associations, and that includes stories, texts, objects, ideologies, military forces, cash, etc. That kind of 'constructive' effort creates a powerful network, tending to leave all opposition drowning in its wake. The facility at Christmas Island, looking like one of its failures, is a kind of eloquent expression of that network's capacity to mobilise itself rapidly and then move on.

I am not a political scientist, but my discussion of politics is designed to make us re-consider our modes of knowledge acquisition as we recraft Indian Ocean studies. The framework suggests that knowledge is a living, transforming set of relations, not a cargo traded on the cheap and deposited back in the rich north in single-discipline warehouses. Interdisciplinarity makes new things visible (like popular culture and security centres). Nor is knowledge a set of representations lagging behind the real, always trying to catch up, reporting on it. It is part of the real; it is in itself a mode of existence as well as but much more than language and representation.

Within that interdisciplinary discourse, or set of discourses, the abandonment of ideology critique will pave the way for the introduction of a radical empiricism that again will make new objects visible in their working relationships with other things.

I have worked with two concepts in this essay: Fabulation and the Network (artful politics). Fabulations are the kind of storytelling that takes off on a flight of becoming rather than repeating the available discourses and genres. It is fabulations that enable a subject to begin to feel engaged, or disengaged, to either belong or depart, but in any case to continue a process of becoming. Traditionally, literature is a set of textual mechanisms, commercialised into an

industry, that create and distribute forms of subjectivity. To the extent that it becomes fixed to a set of social values it doesn't work so well. But when it is articulated with feelings like 'hope for the future' then it engages a community and a set of subjects in a process of becoming—that is the task of fabulation. So it is not airy-fairy, it provides valid modes of existence. And one can see how it links to the politics of the network.

The type of network I have been sketching owes a lot to the science studies of Bruno Latour et al. But not being purely in the domain of science, my framework integrates human subjects via the mechanism of the fable, oscillating between description and fictionalisation, between speech and writing. There is no compulsion of the fact or of the fully-present truth. The network is not the domain of objective facts or things of the world (the world 'out there' that humans come to, trotting over the bridge of representations). It is a natural-cultural continuum of real empirical linkages which our analysis will have to trace in their complexity. Concepts, fish, sails, monsoon winds, songs, ceremonies, slave beads: all these are possible actors in the network.

As a concluding example, let us consider the position of my Réunion colleagues Françoise Vergès and Carapin Marimoutou in *Amarres: Créolisations india-océanes*:

When Europe used to think of itself as the centre of the world, and organised the world around this centre, we were somewhere over there at the end of the world. Then, we were moored to France, but it was an imposed mooring which strangled us on occasions. Today, now that Europe has become one of the provinces of the world, we are rethinking our moorings. Our project is now one of decentering the gaze and redrawing the cartography of the world from the Indian Ocean viewpoint, here where France, Africa, Europe, Asia and the Muslim worlds cross paths. (Vergès 8)

There is something politically at stake for this island culture; it does not see itself as 'just one culture among many', it must perforce see itself in somewhat more absolutist terms as it throws these mooring ropes overboard. This is a process of cultural negotiation: the more we jettison, the closer we get to what matters to us absolutely, that which we will *never* give away in a negotiation about how we share a culture with France. We can do without philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre in the Indian Ocean they might say; splash. Here are all of the popular songs of Trenet and Piaf, and Halliday may as well go too. Splash, we have our own music. *Nouvelle Cuisine*? Splash, we have our fish curry and rice. What about Sarkozy? Wait, that might be illegal; after all, here in Réunion we are a *Department d'Outre Mer*. And having thrown off one set of moorings in a critical gesture, what new links do we make, whom do we pull on board? Drowning souls who have yet to discover the joys of Indian Ocean scholarship and its networks?

Culture by its very nature is excessive, and like nature it is an organic set of strange and wonderful things that we can never quite pin down. If in Réunion someone finds a rusted iron shackle that once held a slave's ankle, then this rare artifact might appear in Françoise Vergès' museum to focus a regional identity centred on the history and identity of the slave or the *marron*. With scraps of historical evidence, with useful concepts like *créolisation*, a culture is assembled which has room to move even within the constraints of the French State. The president of the republic can't be thrown overboard, not yet, nor the French language, nor, ultimately, the power of the State which finds its absolute in its right to impose military force if necessary. These are the new questions for networking research in the Indian Ocean that I would modestly propose. Not so much the question of 'have we got the representations right?', but, as we construct the network of associations of facts, values, institutions, scholars, activists and fish: what can we afford to jettison? And then, what further allies can we acquire? Unlike the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies network, which is well-established, the Indian Ocean cultural studies network of scholars and activists is just beginning. Crossing languages, old imperial affiliations, vastly different continents (Africa, south Asia, Australia), the network faces difficulties that have yet to be analysed, let alone resolved.

Stephen Muecke is Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Technology, Sydney. Recent books are (with Devleena Ghosh, eds) Cultures of Trade: Indian Ocean Exchanges (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007) and Joe in the Andamans and Other Fictocritical Stories (Sydney: Local Consumption Publications, 2008).

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Notes

¹ This has also been termed the 'authoritative plain style' of the English-speaking protestant scientific community (see Bennett).