Dockside Reading
Hydrocolonialism and the Custom House

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For Merle Govind

And in memory of
Bhekizizwe Peterson (1961–2021)

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Introduction

Hydrocolonialism

The View from the Dockside

In the early 1950s, the South African Customs and Excise Department issued a list of "Prohibited and Restricted Imports and Exports."[1] At first glance, the items listed are predictable: protected flora and fauna, historical relics, poisons, pests, perishables, dangerous chemicals, drugs, adulterated foods—all those items that needed to be kept in, or out, to ensure the safety, security, and identity of the nation and its citizens.

Yet tucked into the list are some surprises. On the *C* list, lurking among cacti, carcasses, crocodiles, curios, and cuttlefish, we encounter copyright. On the *T* list, ticks, toads, tomatoes, tortoises, and toy pistols lead us to trademark,

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positioned just above treacle. Other surprises are books (placed among bodies [dead], bones, and boots), printed matter (surrounded by prickly pears, primates [other than man], projectiles, and prunes), and censors (located between cement and centipedes).

These *T*s and *C*s did not mean that copyright, trademark, and censors were prohibited. Quite the opposite, in fact, since Customs and Excise used these mechanisms to exclude material deemed undesirable or counterfeit. In a colonial context, much printed matter came from outside the colony and was funneled through the port, where Customs inspectors checked to see that it was not pirated, seditious, obscene, or (in some regions) blasphemous. In the realm of Customs and Excise, copyright and censorship hence cohabit with a band of troublesome objects that putrefy, perish, catalyze, deceive, poison, and adulterate. No longer just an abstract legal form, copyright subsists alongside the ooze and treacle of organic matter. Censorship likewise acquires strange bedfellows: cement, crocodiles, and centipedes.

Considered from the viewpoint of Customs and Excise, copyright and censorship appear almost visceral, a quality seldom associated with intellectual property mechanisms generally imagined as noiseless and odorless. We think of copyright as a quiet and dry institution, moving through registry offices with the barely audible rustle of paper. In a similar vein, censorship is generally imagined as silently sinister, with anonymous bureaucrats burrowing away in Soviet-style buildings.

Yet in the colonial port, copyright policy and censorship protocols took shape in the clamor of the waterfront and its imbroglio of incoming cargo. These commodities might be diseased, contaminated, undesirable, illegal, or counterfeit. The hold of a vessel hummed with microbes, weevily maize, rotting cargo, dogs, parrots, reptiles, and cattle (both dead and alive). Ships burped bilgewater, extruded diseased human bodies, deposited animal carcasses, secreted seditious pamphlets and obscene objects, and disgorged "undesirable aliens."

Dockside Reading locates itself in this noisome location, tracking printed matter as it made its way from ship to shore and through the regulatory regimes of the Custom House. Like any border crossing, these transitions had logistic and economic implications. The maritime setting with its epidemiological and ecological dangers further complicated these processes in a way that land-based borders did not necessarily. Books were cargo to be moved, objects to be classified and taxed, and items to be checked for potential danger, whether ideolog-

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ical or epidemiological. These protocols were to have far-reaching implications for how colonial print culture and its associated institutions came to be defined.

This book is particularly concerned with two such institutions—copyright and censorship. Rather than an institution associated with authorship, copyright became conflated with cargo and commodity markings, specifically an inscription called the *mark of origin* ("made in England," "made in Australia," etc.), from the 1880s mandatory across the British Empire. In the case of British copyright, the imprint indicated that the book had been manufactured in Britain and was implicitly "white." Colonial copyright hence became a type of logistic inscription and racial trademark. With regard to censorship of printed matter, this material was not read so much as treated like other forms of cargo, its outside scanned for metadata markings (title, cover, publisher, place of publication, copyright inscription, language, script), its inside sampled for traces of offensive material. Books were "read" whole, as objects rather than texts.

Damp and humid, the dockside may appear an odd choice of site for analyzing books and print culture. Yet this setting proves surprisingly productive for tracing historical themes of print culture while also allowing us to address contemporary debates on reading. From Nathaniel Hawthorne onward, the Custom House has been thought of as an antiliterary space of cloddish bureaucrats. *Dockside Reading* offers a different perspective, arguing that the object-oriented reading of the wharfside, and the coastal environment in which it unfolded, provides examples of reading that are of considerable interest to a posthumanist, Anthropocene age.

The setting is southern Africa, with glances toward Australia and Jamaica and some passing mentions of India and Canada. The time is the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, although at times the narrative moves further back and forward. While centered on southern Africa, the book aims to give some sense of Customs as an institution in the British Empire and its role in revenue generation, state formation, and, somewhat unexpectedly, the shaping of colonial literary institutions. As chapter 1 explains in more detail, Custom Houses across the empire reported not to the Colonial or Foreign Office (or their predecessors) but to the Board of Customs. These reporting lines made Customs something of an empire within an empire, a situation that changed with the end of the navigation laws in the mid-nineteenth century, after which most Customs services fell under the colonial legislatures.

The terms *dockside reading* and *hydrocolonialism* constitute the larger framework for contextualizing these reading and hermeneutical protocols. The first

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term provides a microview of dockside procedures in relation to cargo and the way these were transferred to books. The second term furnishes a larger framework for theorizing these types of shore-shaped literary formations. I discuss each of these concepts in turn before setting out a chapter synopsis.

Dockside Reading

Port cities aim to pave the ocean and assert sovereignty over the conjuncture of land and sea. Yet they are unstable spaces, perched on reclaimed land and propped up by submarine engineering. On this artificial ground, port authorities have long designed regulatory media and regimes of identification to manage the coastal seam on which they work and to control the passage of people and cargo from ship to shore. Fashioned as much around commodities as human bodies, these regimens rely on object-oriented hermeneutical practices. I describe these protocols as *dockside reading*, shaped in the regulatory regimes and coastal environments of the colonial port city. I explore this topic in four stages: objects, bodies, books, and reading (the latter topic explored through Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* with its famous Custom House).

Objects

Objects are the true protagonists of the port city, its raison d'être, shaping much of its infrastructure and architecture. Or, as a handbook on cargo observes, "A port is a shore-based installation for the transfer of goods from and to ships."[2] Such conveyance from ship to shore and through the port precinct is easier said than done. As Joseph Conrad observed, a discharged cargo, once spread across the quayside, seemed much larger and more disordered than it had in the hold from which it had emanated. This sprawl had to be lugged, heaved, classified, taxed, and transported. Conrad himself despised ports and their bureaucratic protocols. When a sailing ship docked, the "craft and mystery of the sea" withered before the "men of the earth." Driven by motives of "quick despatch and profitable freight," these "shore people" with their "lubberliness" tyrannized the ship and its crew.[3]

The shore people held views directly inverse to Conrad's. For them, a ship was generally an ark of "nuisances," a term from sanitary inspection much beloved of port authorities. Always a potential vector of disease, vessels discharged smelly stowage passengers and cargo, all still reeking of the ship. In some instances, both people and objects had to be fumigated before they could

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be admitted, or "landed," to use the language of the port itself. The term *landed* carries a dual meaning: the first is physical (being put on shore), the second legal, denoting legitimate entry, as in the phrase *landed immigrant*, someone lawfully and permanently admitted. The word was heavily inscribed in port protocol: the landing account, landing certificate, landing book, landing order, and, in Customs job descriptions, landing surveyor and landing waiter.[4] The prevalence of the term suggests that cargo had to be redeemed from the seafaring world (*unshipped*, to use another term) and inducted into the domain of shore people, as though the goods were undergoing an ecological rite of passage in moving from water to land, from one element to another.

In a colonial port, this passage was a perilous affair. In smaller ports and in the early history of larger ones, rickety port buildings and infrastructure perched precariously on sand spits where they were flooded by tidal rivers and battered by storms. Landing could involve dangerous journeys by lighter from the roadstead to a beach. In Durban cargo and passengers were carried by African laborers or ferried through the surf by Indian boatmen. For both people and objects, becoming landed was indeed a redemption from the ocean, a translation from one element to another.

Once they were on dry land, further rites awaited. These were precipitated by the colonial maritime boundary and its multiple routines of identification: epidemiological, fiscal, logistic, and legal. Cargo was scrutinized for signs of infection; it was classified for duty purposes; the markings on its exoskeleton were cross-checked with its accompanying documents; its contents were inspected to verify that they were not undesirable or diseased. These regimens made up the process of landing commodities, declaring them safe, legal, and productive, rendering up duty to the colonial fiscus.

This logistic work of the port was enabled by a dense semiotic environment of signs and symbols. Flares, buoys, beacons, and bells aimed to safeguard ships against the inconstant weather of the littoral. The port precinct itself was a semiotic mangle of cargo markings, semaphores, sirens, flags, signals, and documents. In about 90 percent of cases, cargo passed smoothly through this logistic relay without ever being opened, the consignments having been "read" by their exterior markings and associated documentation. In the remaining 10 percent of cases where goods fell under suspicion, a "stop note" was issued, and the cargo was opened, its contents searched, sniffed, tasted, counted, weighed, and measured. Such cases precipitated friction in the logistic chain, causing problems as much by the interruption they occasioned as by the contamination they portended.

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The hermeneutical practices of the dockside were shaped by an intimate interaction with objects and their accompanying logistic grammars.[5] Customs examiners grappled with these objects, arguing endlessly with each other and merchants about how they should be defined. Was a substance butter or margarine? Could medicinal herbs be the same as tea? Was a soup square the same as stock?[6] The Customs archive is filled with such debates, containing objects themselves (swatches of fabric, tinned condensed milk labels, packets of seeds) as well as endless correspondence on what exactly these things were.[7] Customs officials functioned as a species of dockside ontologist, decreeing what an object actually was, although they more than anyone else were aware of the contingency of such descriptions.

Customs classifications could not be unilaterally imposed on commodities. The nature and characteristics of each item decreed how it was to be examined, what kind of attention had to be paid to it, and where this would happen—in effect determining the work routines of Customs officials. Liquid required gauging; tea, sniffing; fabric, having its thread count reckoned. Heavy substances like iron or building stone had to be examined on the wharf, lighter, more portable material in warehouses.[8] The characteristics of objects determined where and how they could be marked: dried sheep- and goatskin, for example, resisted being stamped.[9] Objects exerted an influence on the built environment of the port. Meat required refrigerated storage; timber demanded cranes; wine in casks needed a temperature-regulated environment.[10] In larger ports, careers in the Customs and Excise service could be determined by particular commodities, with officials specializing in wood, tobacco, linen, or wine.[11]

Objects also influenced dockside protocols through the tariff schedules, manuals, compendiums, and inventories that shaped themselves around the things they enumerated. Like regulations on where and how objects were to be marked, or secret telegraph codes dedicated to particular commodities like cotton, the characteristics of the object determined how it would be cataloged. The cotton codes, for example, took account of color, quality, presence or absence of leaves and sand, stains, compression, and so on.[12]

These inventories and taxonomies have long fascinated scholars, famously provoking Michel Foucault's uneasy laughter in response to the list of animals in Jorge Luis Borges's imagined "Chinese Encyclopedia," which "shattered all the familiar landmarks of [Foucault's] thought" and implicitly defamiliarized the categories of Western rationality.[13] Yet paging through a tariff handbook is not unlike the Chinese encyclopedia in its strangeness. Take, for instance, the

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category "Boxes," from a South African tariff schedule of the 1920s, which includes the following:

> Accumulator
> Collar, leather
> Drain, for tram rails
> Fixture, wooden covered with coloured cloth
> Jewellery, not cardboard
> Mitre
> Partitioned, for delivery of eggs
> Partitioned, other
> Cardboard printed
> And cartons, cardboard
> Dummy chocolate boxes
> Wax cartons (jars) for food products.[14]

Rather than just being discursive grids, such lists illustrate how objects determine their own enumeration. Useful in this respect are Ian Bogost's observations on lists (or *ontographs*, as he calls them). For him, these are less discursive regimes than a form that captures the aloofness of objects. Lists approximate "the jarring staccato of real being" and decenter the "flowing legato" of supposed coherence. They "disrupt being . . . [and,] in doing so, a tiny part of the expanding universe is revealed through cataloging."[15]

Bogost belongs to what we might call the radical wing of object theorists, for whom there can be no pattern, context, or network with which to make comforting sense of an entity: all such schemas constitute a mere ontotheology. Graham Harman is unequivocal: "The network into which any object is thrust can only scratch the surface of its actuality"; it is "forever withdrawn from the swirl of exterior factors into which it is embedded."[16] Speculative realists like Steven Shaviro have softened this stance by outlining the legitimacy of both a radical object-oriented ontology approach and a network-oriented understanding. The former "addresses our sense of the thingness of things: their solidity, their uniqueness, and their thereness. . . . Every object is something, in and of itself, and . . . an object is not reducible to its parts, or to its relations with other things, or to the sum of the ways in which other entities apprehend it." A networked understanding, by contrast, is "an equally valid intuition: our sense that we are not alone in the world, that things matter to us and to one another, that life is filled with encounters and adventures."[17] This book veers toward the

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latter position, taking its cue from Jane Bennett, who has taught us about the "force of things" while demonstrating that networks and systems cannot be discounted: objects are "swirls of matter, energy and incipience that hold themselves together long enough to vie with the strivings of other objects, including the indeterminate momentum of the throbbing whole."[18]

Yet, whatever approach one takes, this book points to the Custom House as a rich site for thinking with and about objects. Indeed, the files in the Customs archives with their profusion of objects resemble an object-oriented ontology laboratory, while Harman sounds rather like a Customs officer debating the status of an object. The following sentence from Harman could as well be a description of a scene at the Custom House: "We never manage to rise above the massive clamor of entities, but can only burrow around within it. . . . The sanctuary of the human . . . has been jettisoned in favor of a dense and viscous universe stuffed absolutely full with entities."[19]

Taking a view from the colonial port widens debates on object ontologies that have thus far been focused on the Global North, seldom speaking to postcolonial contexts. In addition, as Katherine Behar points out, this scholarship has had little to say about those people who have been objectified.[20] A dockside vantage point gives us a longer trajectory on the histories of colonial object formation, which was wrought against a background of confusion between person and thing.

Bodies

Ports were shaped by their cargoes. Yet the historiographies of colonial port cities have had little to say on this theme, their attention focused on human bodies, especially those persons excluded by late nineteenth-century immigration-restriction policies that sought to enforce the global color line. As much distinguished scholarship has shown, these exclusionary practices shaped colonial forms of governance and the racialized categories of persons they elaborated.[21] The dramatis personae in these accounts have been immigration-restriction officials and the incoming passengers they dealt with. This book inserts Customs examiners and their objects more centrally into this picture, arguing that the dockside governance of objects had implications for bodies as well as books. Simply put, techniques for identifying and handling cargo were transferred to people.

This theme has been taken up by scholars of public health. Before the bacteriological revolution, objects were identified as sources of infection as much as,

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if not more than, humans were. Policies of fumigation, disinfection, and quarantine were first applied to objects, then to people.[22] On Ellis Island, immigrants were tagged, chalked, and marked as if they were cargo. Indentured Chinese laborers were classified as bonded merchandise.[23] This custodial orientation of Customs is especially apparent in its carceral language: commodities were routinely seized, detained, arrested, placed in custody or under observation, condemned, defaced, disposed of, or mutilated. In some cases, items could be corrected: an offending cover could be removed, an infected hide fumigated, an obscene image scraped from a "novelty pencil sharpener" or "keyhole tumbler" (but only by white labor).[24] Irredeemable objects were condemned and then "sentenced" to burning, drowning, or shredding into little pieces (as happened with some banned books).

The transfer of this carceral orientation to human bodies is clearest in the case of the Atlantic slave trade. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten argue that the enslaved constitute the first instance of "the shipped," branded like wine barrels and crammed into holds. For these two scholars, the Atlantic trade has to be understood in the framework of logistics (or what they call "logisticality"), a process in which the Custom House was centrally implicated.[25] Across the Atlantic world, Customs officials were intimately involved with receiving and processing enslaved people who were dutiable commodities. In southern Africa, the roots of Customs rest in Dutch and then British rule at the Cape. Like their Customs counterparts elsewhere in the empire, these officials worked in ports whose purpose and architecture had been shaped by the carceral prerogatives of receiving unfree labor, whether slaves, transported prisoners, or indentured workers. In many cases, the physical fabric of the port city itself had been built by this unfree labor. The objective of a colonial state based on a slave mode of production was to take in Black and brown bodies rather than exclude them. By contrast, immigration restriction aimed to keep such bodies out. While arcs of continuity certainly can be drawn between these different carceral initiatives of the colonial port city over the centuries, it also makes sense to draw distinctions between different periods and parts of port governance rather than seeing it as an unchanging and well-integrated machine.

Books

Like all cargo, books had to pass through the protocols for becoming landed objects. Their first rite entailed moving from sea to shore, an arduous process given the weight of books and printed matter. In some cases, their mass meant

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they never arrived at all. In severe storms, the heaviest cargo was thrown overboard to lighten the vessel—consignments of books were an obvious choice.

If they did make it, once on land, they were subject to their next rite of passage: classification according to the tariff schedule. In South African tariff schedules of the 1910s to 1930s, books fell into the category "Books, paper and stationery."[26] The Indian tariff shared a similar classification but was more to the point, placing books under the rubric "Paper and its Applications."[27] In these schedules, books are crowded out by a demimonde of paper commodities, mainly pro forma blank documents like receipt folios, reminder slips, membership certificates, letterheads, and labels. Where books do feature, they resemble forms: account books, birthday books, Boy Scout registers, cricket score books. For Customs agents, the ideal book probably approximated a form: easily legible, readily surveyable, designed for rapid use rather than extended reading, free from any taint of sedition or obscenity. Or, as Lisa Gitelman points out in her history of the document, the form is something to be "used . . . but not authored or read."[28]

Most books passed smoothly through the system, becoming landed commodities without their containers ever being opened. When books were suspect in some way, they were stopped for inspection, where one more ritual awaited, namely, being "read." Tax collectors at heart, Customs officers were reluctant readers who regarded the inside of any book as beyond their job description. Instead, they treated publications as a form of miniature cargo—their outer covering was perused for logistic inscriptions, their inside subjected to the same protocols of measuring, sampling, and counting deployed on other troublesome consignments. Customs officers assayed books rather than read them.[29] If deemed objectionable in some way, books had their covers removed or portions of text blacked out, being then allowed to proceed as radically revised editions. In other instances, offending volumes were "unlanded," returned to the water from which they had come or sacrificed to another element, like fire.

These methods of reading by rapid scanning and sampling were reproduced in the manuals and handbooks that Customs officials used as part of their jobs—volumes to be consulted but not read in detail. This use is encoded in their layout and arrangement: some Customs manuals start with an index rather than a table of contents.[30] While the latter gives an overview of the entire book, setting out a sequence that the ideal reader will follow, an index, by contrast, separates text from table.[31] Having the index up front announces that the book is something to be consulted rather than read in toto. The manuals' status as workaday books is also apparent from the waterproof covers that gen-

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erally encased such volumes and from the blank pages, either interleaved or included at the end, for taking notes.[32]

These handbooks constituted one of several genres of the dockside that took shape around incoming cargo, as already noted. With titles like *Clements' Customs Pocket Manual*, *The Tariff Dictionary: A Compendious Handbook to the Fiscal Question*, or *The Calcutta Customs Calculation Manual*, such books comprised lists of commodities, common shipping routes, summaries of maritime and Customs law, duty charged on goods in various ports, and synoptic trade profiles of a range of countries.[33] As a compendium of commercial pathways, the manual enabled readers to compare routes for their cargo and to calculate the amount of duty involved in each. A genre of international commerce, these volumes were consulted by merchants, importers and exporters, ships' passengers, and Customs officials—in short, anyone moving commodities (or luggage) around the world or governing this mobility. The titles for these manuals included words like *guide* and *assistant*, indicating the compliant role that books were expected to play on the dockside.[34]

These modes of dockside reading produced implicit definitions of what the colonial book should be, a theme that the conclusion to this book takes up. Some of these are predictable and accord with what we know about the hierarchy of books that took shape in colonial contexts. Customs helped to create and sustain such a hierarchy: at the top stood posh volumes from the metropole, sanctified by bearing the mark of British copyright. These books were embodiments of imperial power, instruments of "civilization," and calling cards of Englishness.[35] At the opposite end were books that fell under suspicion for sedition or obscenity. These books were treated as epidemiological objects, a pattern that helped lay the basis for models of censorship and gained an afterlife in library practices of fumigating books that had spent time in infected households.[36] In colonial contexts, books were relatively rare commodities, as opposed to newspapers and periodicals. Customs practices of elevation or demotion helped cement the book as a potent object, an orientation reinforced by Christian mission practices that invested the book with evangelical charisma.[37]

Another self-evident way in which the Custom House defined books was by specifying genre as an effect of the tariff schedule: in Canada novels were admitted duty-free, and duty-free books could well become novels, while in South Africa an extra 5 percent duty was levied on "paper-covered" books like comics, magazines, and dime novels, consigning these to one category, namely, dangerous trash.[38]

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Beyond these well-known outcomes, Customs practices consolidated less predictable definitions of the book. These arose from the two preponderant and related modes of printed matter on the dockside, namely, the book-as-form and the handbook. Whether a diary or school register, the book-as-form offered one unwitting model of colonial writing in which a template from the metropolis was filled with local scribblings—quite literally a case of form over content. Many colonial novels followed a similar pattern, with a generic blueprint from the imperial center filled with provincial content. Such texts established colonial authorship as bland and safe, avoiding the challenge of creating something new in a situation where the colony could only ever be a copy of the metropole.

At a less abstract level, the book-as-form took on a concrete existence in settler and immigrant handbooks, which included the forms to be completed on arrival.[39] These fusions of handbook and form helped to "land" immigrants, guiding them through disembarkation formalities and making them legal. These volumes acted in concert with the port infrastructure and its land reclamation, which quite literally reached out to incoming passengers of the right class and race, giving them their first purchase on the colony. We might think of these settler handbooks-with-form as a mode of textual land reclamation or landfill, extending literary infrastructure outward to enable the immigrant to become landed.[40]

The handbook form as a genre of the dockside can usefully be inserted into discussions on southern African literature and the postcolonial novel more generally. The genre stands midway between two key colonial narrative modes: the story of the shipwreck and the farm novel. While promoting the romance of maritime manliness, the shipwreck narrative simultaneously testified to the uncertainty of the imperial venture itself. As Michael Titlestad's work indicates, shipwrecks and the stories about them called port and harbor development into being as a way of obviating further disasters at sea.[41] In some instances, actual shipwrecks close to the coast were used as the basis for land reclamation, the submarine remains being filled with stones to create a foothold for artificially extending the coastal terrain. The port and its infrastructure sought to overwrite the shipwreck. As part of this infrastructure, the genres of the dockside, like the Customs manual and settler handbook, played their part, creating a textual landfill to enable settlers to become landed and to gain traction on the colony itself. The institution through which many settlers ultimately achieved this aim was the farm, and as J. M. Coetzee has famously argued, the farm novel in turn became an important intellectual instrument of land possession and

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dispossession.[42] As the conclusion argues, we might usefully think of this narrative mode as linked to the genres of the dockside.

Reading

Customs officials have always been considered ham-handed readers, and in most quarters they get a bad press. Literary representations are unforgiving, with officers portrayed as gruff (*Villette*, 1853), grim (Thomas Hardy's smuggler's tale "The Distracted Preacher," 1879), or egregious (Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies*, 1930).[43] In the last novel, a cloddish examiner at Dover lights on a copy of Dante: "'French, eh??' he said . . . 'and pretty dirty, too.'"[44] Nathaniel Hawthorne's famous preface to *The Scarlet Letter* equally depicts the Custom House as a philistine domain where he can find little "lettered intercourse" among his colleagues, more devoted to snoozing and sinecures than to Shakespeare. Hawthorne was himself a short-lived surveyor at Salem, relieved of his political appointment by a change of regime in 1849, and his Custom House is the nemesis of literary ambition. In a much-analyzed passage, he ruefully remarks that, as a surveyor, his name would no longer be emblazoned on the title pages of books but would now be stenciled onto pepper bags and cigar boxes "in testimony that these commodities had paid the impost." He continues, "Borne on such queer vehicles of fame, a knowledge of my existence, so far as a name conveys it, was carried where it had never been before, and, I hope, will never go again."[45]

In Hawthorne's calculation, the realm of the title page with a named author stands in stark opposition to the world of brute commodities in which the Custom House deals. The Custom House is inimical to literature itself. The manuscript setting out the circumstances of the scarlet letter that the narrator stumbles upon has to be removed from the Custom House and reworked before it can become a work of literature with a title page. In the Custom House, reading and writing are portrayed as limited and mechanical. The manuscript has been prepared by the hand of a previous surveyor and lists only the bare-bones facts; it needs rewriting to become literary. As Patricia Crain points out, when the narrator first encounters the fabric scrap of the scarlet letter, he approaches it as a surveyor would, measuring its length, each "limb" "three-and-a-half inches." Yet, to elevate himself into the realm of literature with a capital *L*, Hawthorne has to abandon the quantifying methods of the Custom House and "stamps his name on the A claiming with magisterial confidence the story of its origin as his own," thereby returning his name to the title page.[46] Draw-

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ing on Meredith McGill's incisive analysis that shows Hawthorne repositioning himself from a provincial and popular writer to a national figure, we can read his disavowal of the Custom House as part of this pattern.[47]

In short, for Hawthorne, the title page as a sign of inspired and individual authorship is entirely at odds with the corporate stupor and mechanical methods of the Custom House. The title page and Custom House occupy discrete circuits of value that should never intersect. Yet these two domains did overlap when Customs officials had occasion to scrutinize title pages. In these forms of reading, the name on the title page and the initials on the commodity become more or less equivalent. Both are logistic metadata intended to aid the passage and circulation of the object on which they appear. As the philistine reputation of Customs indicates, these modes of reading have invariably been treated as scandalous and outrageous. Nadine Gordimer's description of the South African censorship board (which in part grew out of Customs censorship) is apposite: in a letter of protest to the apartheid state written in 1973, she observed that censors treated literature "as a commodity to be boiled down to its components and measured like a bar of soap."[48]

Writing in the 1970s from the depth of apartheid South Africa, Gordimer mobilizes a humanist ideal of literary creation against the growing juggernaut of censorship, a move entirely understandable given the dark era from which she spoke. From this perspective, reading literature like a bar of soap can only be a sign of brutish antihumanism. Yet, as we move into a posthumanist, object-oriented, and digital age, literature is already being read like a bar of soap. In the realm of digital literary criticism, reading by metadata and algorithmic selection is routine. In massive corpus analyses, the text itself is not intended for the literary critic but rather for the algorithm, which will select appropriate portions. Such procedures are not far removed from the Custom House, where examiners read by metadata, did not regard themselves as the addressees of the texts, and proceeded by sampling rather than reading the text in its entirety. The Customs inspector and the algorithm have more in common than first meets the eye. Indeed, as others have argued, bureaucratic reading pretends to be algorithmic, universal, and dispassionate in its application while bureaucrats like to think of themselves as virtual machines, sitting atop the hardware of rules and procedures.[49]

Customs officials took a deflationary attitude toward books, an approach that dovetails with current book history methods that seek to unseat the codex from its humanist pedestal. Customs officials were more interested in the book's material substrate than its textual interior and treated books as but one

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item among many. Book historians follow similar "detexting" methods, tracing practices of not-, non-, half-, or semireading: recycling the book as paper, presenting it as a calling card more discussed than read, or trying to sidestep the laborious nature of reading by speeding it up.[50] To this list, we can add the epidemiological reading method of the Custom House in which text is imagined as a cloud of pathogens so that the reader wants as little exposure as possible to the book, a mode of reading that was to have a long afterlife in censorship practices. Another strategy was to speed up reading by sampling or by treating it as a mechanized activity. When inspectors perused one book, they were not simply dealing with a singular volume; they were reading the whole consignment, or even edition, treating the book as the industrially mass-produced commodity it was (and is).

Yet the more examiners demediated the book or treated it as uncooperative stationery, the more it doggedly asserted its textual being. There are of course many circumstances in which a book's textual nature can be happily ignored as it is repurposed to line drawers or pie dishes. Yet the hydrocolonial frontier was not one of these. As books crossed from land to sea, if suspect in any way, their wordy interiors demanded attention. Just as tea had to be sniffed and alcohol gauged, books had to be read. Customs officials tried to get around this reality but in the end had to accommodate themselves to the book as textual object, formulating methods of dockside reading as a compromise, an uneasy settlement shaped as much by the book itself as by the inspector.

The Custom House realigned the elements of the book, emphasizing its outer markings at the expense of its inner content—a type of texternalization.[51] This realignment took shape in the elemental environment of the port, occasioning redefinitions of what the book could or should be. The reading methods of the Custom House can hence be described as elemental, a topic that leads us to hydrocolonialism, the rubric under which such elemental reading is best discussed.

Hydrocolonialism

This book investigates shore-shaped methods of reading that crystallized around the Custom House and raises larger questions of literary formations across land and sea. The term *hydrocolonialism* is proposed as a conceptual framework for these themes.[52]

A neologism, *hydrocolonialism* riffs off the term *postcolonialism* and, like that concept, has a wide potential remit that could include colonization by way of

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water (various forms of maritime imperialism), colonization of water (occupation of land with water resources, the declaration of territorial waters, the militarization and geopoliticization of oceans), a colony on (or in) water (the ship as a miniature colony or a penal island), colonization through water (flooding of occupied land), and colonization of the idea of water (establishing water as a secular resource).[53] While the word *hydrocolonialism* is an invention, two related uses are encountered on the web. The first is *hydrocolony*, a Canadian term for a workers' housing development near a hydroelectric plant. The second is a grammatically incorrect synonym for *hydrocolonic*, that is, colonic irrigation, which at times appears as *hydrocolonial irrigation*. Both of these raise pertinent themes: the first points to the "fundamental connection between water, its management, and the colonial or neocolonial relations in the modern era," as Sara Pritchard argues in her account of hydroimperialism in Algeria.[54] Designating the workers' housing development as a colony speaks of an imperial imaginary in the management of water and the labor associated with it. Hydroelectric dams are showpieces of modernity, displacing communities and affecting aquatic ecologies and river flows. The hydrocolony consequently speaks to themes of colonial control and environmental degradation. The term *hydrocolonial/hydrocolonic irrigation* resonates with these themes by suggesting accelerated processes of waste making. However erroneous the term, it captures metaphorically the waste-making systems of colonial rule, where certain people were rendered as waste, whether through the slave trade, indenture, or penal transportation. The ocean itself functions as a dumping ground for the bodies of drowned slaves and other forced migrants.

One may of course ask whether we need the term *hydrocolonialism*. It has long been appreciated that water is centrally implicated in imperial and other social orders. Water sculpts political authority, whether in the ancient hydraulic empires of Central Asia, the water dynasties of South India, the rainmaking chieftaincies of southern Africa, or the modernist hydrologic projects of the colonial and postcolonial world.[55] Geographers and anthropologists have thickened understandings of water as an "informed material" implicated in hydronationalism, struggles around citizenship, settler hydrologies, and hydrocosmologies.[56] The classic hydrologic cycle of evaporation, condensation, rainfall, and runoff has been widened to become the hydrosocial cycle. This configuration tracks how H_2O becomes the social substance water, shaped as much by capital as by contours.[57] Dilip da Cunha and Anuradha Mathur have freed the hydrologic cycle from the fiction of neatly divided land and water. Working with a monsoon context, they demonstrate "an ecosystem that is neither land nor

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water but one of ubiquitous wetness in which rain is held in soil, aquifers, glaciers, snowfields, building materials, agricultural fields, air, and even plants and animals." They depict a world where water is "precipitating, seeping, soaking, evaporating, and transpiring in ways that defy delineation."[58]

While these rich bodies of work are crucial to understanding sociologies of water, they do not specifically address literary concerns. Modeling itself on postcolonial theory with its cultural remit, hydrocolonialism explores the literary implications opened up by overlaying the hydrologic cycle onto imperial and postimperial cartographies. This move requires us to think laterally, vertically, and contrapuntally between different water worlds and hydroimaginaries while exploring how such circuits have been or may be narrativized. There is now an exciting repertoire of scholarship exploring these themes: critical oceanic studies, coastal and hydrocritical approaches, elemental and atmospheric methods (of which more later). Together these fields have established water as a method for doing postcolonial literary criticism. While this is too extensive to discuss exhaustively, I sketch three pertinent trends across these various fields, which for the sake of convenience I dub high, middle, and low.

In the first trend, mega- or mesoscale meteorological patterns like monsoons and cyclones or hurricanes offer ways of defining literary regions and generic structures. Most obvious in this regard is the monsoon zone of the Indian Ocean world, now an analytic matrix to track multiple networks of cosmopolitan exchange.[59] From a literary perspective, the monsoon Indian Ocean provides a method for constituting genealogies, in the anglophone domain centered on Amitav Ghosh's masterful travelogue *In an Antique Land: History in the Guise of a Traveler's Tale*, which looks back to Conrad's Indian Ocean texts and forward to writers such as the British-Zanzibari novelist Abdulrazak Gurnah and the Mauritian Lindsey Collen.[60] Particularly in Ghosh's work, the monsoon Indian Ocean is given an ideological inflection as the "third world" ocean, in which the early cosmopolitanism of the Indian Ocean arena is interrupted by European imperialisms, in turn giving rise to anti-imperial networks. Ghosh's later novels *Sea of Poppies* (2008) and *River of Smoke* (2011) create a subaltern sea of characters drawn together in a miniature, maritime Afro-Asian front. In a related vein, Collen's novel *Mutiny* constitutes the cyclone as disruptive of post/imperial infrastructures and social hierarchies (somewhat akin to flood narratives, whether in Lincolnshire or the Mississippi delta).[61]

The architecture of these formations, like the spiral or the eye, is used biomimetically to illuminate literary structures. In a long tradition of Caribbean ecopoetics, the spiral of the hurricane informs a Haitian literary movement of

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the 1960s, known as *spiralism*. As Kaiama Glover indicates, the spiral, whether in DNA or the Milky Way, constitutes a building block of existence while providing "a primal point of relation to a world beyond the claustrophobia and creative asphyxiation of François Duvalier's totalitarian state." She continues, "On a formal, literary level, the spiral's perfectly balanced maintenance of the centrifugal and centripetal offers a neat allegory of the tension between insular boundedness and global intention that marks [the] work."[62]

We might read these various literary texts, taken together, as imaginative interventions into the hydrosocial cycle itself. Rather like African ritual specialist rainmakers who intercede in the hydrologic cycle via the ancestors, literary texts intervene in our understanding of the water cycle and its narrative possibilities.[63] Sarah Nuttall has extended this point in her analysis of "pluvial time," examining "rainfall in and as climate crisis, and what temporal logics and narrative forms this is producing."[64]

Descending to our next level—the middle—we arrive at the coast, the site of human evolution itself and hence one of the most enduring and productive artistic terrains.[65] Postcolonial literary critics have variously analyzed the littoral as an ecotone, a place of "fractal multiplicity" and amphibiousness, which writers use to complicate orthodoxies of all sorts.[66] As Meg Samuelson indicates, "Littoral literature and coastal form . . . muddle the inside-outside binary that delineates nations and continents, and which has been particularly stark in framing Africa in both imperial and nativist thought."[67] Coastal morphology and its associated water formations, or "waterside chronotopes" in Margaret Cohen's formulation, like lagoon, estuary, delta, shoal, white water, and brown water, constitute literary microregions.[68] As climate change increasingly buffets coastlines, these regions—like the Ganges-Brahmaputra delta, the Lagos lagoon, or the Bombay archipelago—become more prominent, producing narratives of coastal life and its perilous terraqueous futures.[69]

Below the waterline, the categories of oceanography that designate the different "layers" of the ocean (epipelagic, mesopelagic, abyssopelagic, and hadopelagic) are being deployed by literary scholars as engagement with the sea becomes more material and concrete. Stacy Alaimo and Joshua Bennett have both deployed the idea of violet/black, the dominant color spectrum of the abyssopelagic zone.[70] The imagination in Derek Walcott's famous "The Sea Is History" is largely epipelagic since formations and objects in the water are generally visible.[71] Given that his home island, Saint Lucia, perches on a volcanic shelf, this is perhaps to be expected. Other strands of Caribbean aesthetics, such as work by M. NourbeSe Philip or Aimé Césaire, invoke deeper formations—the volca-

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nic, the tectonic, and the basin—and so direct our attention deeper.[72] Charne Lavery has developed these ideas in relation to the Indian Ocean, exploring the layers of the "vertical ocean" in cultural and literary terms.[73]

One important dimension of postcolonial theory has been the imperative to move away from colony/metropole binaries and to trace multidirectional empire-wide interactions. Hydrocolonialism explores these considerations contrapuntally in relation to water. As Pritchard's work on French hydrology demonstrates, hydraulic expertise built up by French engineers in French North Africa was imported back home and used to improve the techniques of "backward" provincial farmers.[74] Likewise, as Erik Swyngedouw indicates in his analysis of twentieth-century Spanish hydrohistory, the country's arid environment was characterized as "African," the outcome of peasant ignorance, a "turning back of these colonial environmental imaginaries onto the European center."[75] In literary terms, one could take an empire-wide view of moral and social hydrology that saw surplus populations as stagnant sources of contamination needing to be channeled, drained, and carried away.[76] Themes of drainage, hydrology, and flow dynamics could be read contrapuntally across empire, focusing on themes like tidal circulation in *Great Expectations* (1861) and cross-hatching these with Namwali Serpell's recent novel *The Old Drift*, which draws together settler hydrologies and hydrocosmologies on the Zambezi.[77]

Together these techniques add water, depth, and verticality, extending land-focused and horizontal purviews. In a postcolonial context where land has been overdetermined and the sea overerased, such relativizing methods become especially pertinent. Land is favored both as an automatic platform of knowledge and as a locus of the colonial and anticolonial nation. The ocean, by contrast, has been forgotten, first by the emerging settler colonial nation attempting to erase its origins and then by anticolonial nationalism turning its back on the ocean as the source of imperialism. In a postnational age, the rich and creolized meanings of the ocean, both precolonially and colonially, are starting to be more systematically explored.[78] In a comparative spirit, *Dockside Reading* brings these perspectives to the emerging debates on oceanic, coastal, and elemental methods, providing a perspective from southern Africa and the Indian Ocean, to complement the North Atlantic, Caribbean, and Pacific perspectives that currently lead the way.

The various bodies of work I have set out thus far are literary critical in orientation. The primary focus of this book is on print culture and book history (although the conclusion of this book raises the question of literary genre). We turn now to consider what a hydrocolonial lens brings to these fields.

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Hydrocolonial Print Cultures

A hydrocolonial approach makes visible the mutually shaping relationship between print culture and the elemental politics of the colonial maritime frontier. It enables us to configure printed matter, colony, and ocean in ways that establish a more dynamic relationship among these three terms. This triad of print, ocean, and colony has certainly been explored in the rich research on printed matter and maritime circulation. This work has, however, largely proceeded in a "dry" register with the sea as a backdrop. Scholars have followed printed matter out to sea, tracing what Atlantic sailors read and wrote and how their shipboard activities shaped literary representations of the ocean.[79] Ships were textual machines (or "floating secretariats") that transported and produced vast numbers of documents and publications.[80] Books and publications were dotted across the ship: in the hold as cargo, in the captain's cabin as parcels, with sailors, with passengers, in ships' libraries.[81] Passengers themselves produced newspapers on board and scribbled poetry.[82] This scholarship suggests that this circulation produced a range of literary subject positions, whether shipboard identities, diasporic alignments, imperial loyalties, or colonial nationalist formations.

Hydrocolonialism takes a different tack, putting water and paper closer together, immersing printed matter in the elemental politics of the colonial port city. The burgeoning field of elemental media studies provides a useful framework for this purpose. As Nicole Starosielski indicates, "All media becomes environmental media, and all media studies becomes environmental media studies," while Derek McCormack urges us to trace the continuities "between entities and the elemental conditions in which these entities are immersed and in which they participate."[83] As John Durham Peters suggests, the elements themselves have come to be understood as "infrastructures of being" and "agencies of order."[84] As we have seen, printed matter was implicated in defining the elements, notably "the land" and the "anti-environment" of the ocean.[85] By becoming landed, printed matter affirmed colonial possession of the port city, while books that were "unlanded" designated the ocean as a place of disposal. Dry aspects of print culture like censorship became elementally implicated, with water being used as a medium of expurgation. British copyright, too, became embroiled in the elemental frontier of the colony, acting as a sign of propriety and a clearance for the book to become fully landed.

When applied to print culture on the dockside, a hydrocolonial method highlights printed matter as part of port infrastructure, both in terms of the

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manuals and forms that officials used and in terms of these as types of virtual land reclamation or landfill. Such an approach extends our attention underwater to focus on the submarine infrastructure and engineering that enabled the port in the first instance. Printed matter can be connected to the water and submarine infrastructure around it—entities and elemental conditions are made continuous. Jesse Oak Taylor's observation on atmospheric thinking, while looking more up than down, is apposite: "Atmospheric thinking emphasizes adjacency; it considers the way that bodies of all kinds influence the conditions of possibility in their vicinity."[86] A hydrocolonial method makes the Custom House and its object contiguous with the elements of the port city. This adjacency produces two important themes: colonization of water and creolization of water.

COLONIZED WATER Central to hydrocolonial thinking is how water comes to be colonized. Siobhan Carroll's work on elements and empire is instructive in this regard, showing how air, water, and ice initially appeared uncolonizable and empire-proof, largely because they could not be settled or occupied.[87] In the longer run, these elements were indeed rendered colonizable, whether as sites of performing imperial masculinity, as resources to be extracted, as dumping grounds for waste, or as methods of defining or redefining international law and geopolitics.[88] The long-term effectiveness of these strategies is apparent today if we turn to the ocean, which from its seabed to its surface has been prospected, militarized, mined, and laid claim to, as Elizabeth DeLoughrey has recently pointed out. As she indicates, a hydrocriticism for the twenty-first century needs to engage less with "the concepts of fluidity, flow, routes, and mobility [than with] less poetic terms such as blue water navies, mobile offshore bases, high-seas exclusion zones, sea lanes of communication (SLOCs), and maritime 'choke points.'" She advocates a shift from hydrocriticism to hydropower that can take account of "larger geopolitical and geontological (or sea-ontological) shifts."[89]

In southern Africa, coastal waters around port cities were colonized through "aquatic territorialism."[90] Through this, land was extended into the sea, either literally through reclamation and submarine infrastructure or by the extension of land-based methods of governance over the ocean: promulgations of sovereignty, port regulations pertaining to the intertidal zone, declarations of quarantine stations over areas around ships.[91]

Port cities contrive possession, of water and sediment as much as of dry land. As an antidote to the shipwreck, port engineering becomes a central narrative

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of colonial possession and a founding mythology of port cities themselves. The harbor engineer becomes a minor imperial figure, a tireless soldier who takes on the Sisyphean battle against sand. Yet the prominence of these narratives is short-lived as colonial possession moves inland and the sea recedes into the distance. Dredging, after all, is not easily mythologized. This submarine imperialism is only starting to find a conceptual vocabulary. Ben Mendelsohn's work on Lagos offers an instructive example that demonstrates how "sand and related coastal geomorphological processes interact with the city's political and imaginative trajectories as well as its historical legacies."[92]

Chapter 1 touches on this submarine engineering and, in so doing, engages with a vibrant body of critical oceanic studies that shifts away from older surface-oriented approaches and engages with the materiality of the sea by going below the waterline. One strand in this scholarship relativizes land-based epistemologies via the ocean. Terming these "dry technologies," this work immerses concepts and theories to produce new modes of analysis.[93] Whether based on actual diving experience, analytic immersion, the act of "thinking with" species, or submarine aesthetics, this work traces how, by what media and genres, and with what effects the unseen ocean is mediated to human audiences.[94] Critics adumbrate how these forms—whether speculative fiction, underwater photography, aquariums, rococo decoration, shipwrecks, coral reefs, or conceptual poetry—mediate the undersea and how they deal with representational problems of scale, depth, and visibility.[95]

While this book is largely located at, or on, the waterline, it draws attention to underwater sites as places of analytic possibility, tracing how these are mediated physically through submarine infrastructure and metaphysically through the spiritual congregations that assemble there in what I call *creolized water*.

CREOLIZED WATER As many rich studies have taught us, port cities are intense nodes of cosmopolitan exchange. These historiographies have, however, largely kept their eyes on land, an orientation that *Dockside Reading* shifts by directing our view offshore and, briefly, underwater. This perspective builds on work I have done elsewhere on Durban, while drawing on an emerging method that uses the harbor floor as a site to explore port cities from a submarine perspective. My particular investigation speculated on what kind of remains might have accumulated in Durban harbor and its hintersea.[96] In addition to shipwrecks, collapsed infrastructure, and detritus dumped by ships and port workers (including books thrown into the ocean by Customs officials), there would also have been traces that speak to the cosmopolitanism of the port city. These

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would have included the paraphernalia of Hindu-Muslim religious festivals that were immersed in the ocean.[97] These remnants in turn remind us of the variety of oceanic imaginaries to be found in any port city. In the case of Durban, these could have included maritime mythologies from South Asian groups, Zulu speakers, and African dockworkers from further afield, as well as port officials drawn from across the world. Speculating on and from the Durban harbor floor redefines water itself as cosmopolitan or creolized, containing both the material and imaginative remains of different communities around the port city.

While true for any body of water, such creolization would be especially pertinent in imperial and postimperial settings. Southern African waters, for example, are especially creolized, being the imagined domain of African ancestors, Khoisan ("first nation") water spirits and deities, and Muslim water jinn associated with enslaved communities brought to the Cape under the Dutch, as well as imperial ideals of maritime manliness.[98]

The concept of creolized water can usefully be put into conversation with Black hydropoetics and the Middle Passage. Ancestral and "aquafuturist" (to use Suzanna Chan's term), a body of creative and scholarly explorations experiment with the Atlantic undersea as a realm of speculative diasporic histories.[99] Notable examples include Ellen Gallagher's mixed-media explorations of the Black Atlantic submarine, the meditations of Christina Sharpe on the molecular remains of enslaved bodies and their "residence time," and the electronic music of Drexciya and the underwater realm it imagines, where the children of drowned captives have adapted to submarine living.[100] Together these constitute Black hydropoetics as a major focus of diasporic scholarship and constitute the undersea as a potent source of ancestral memory and imagination.

Putting Black hydropoetics in relation to southern African creolized water opens up suggestive submarine cartographies. These might map how southern African oceanic ancestral traditions relate to the drowned communities of both the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, the arena from which Cape slaves were drawn.[101] Once one considers this enlarged realm, the dramatis personae expand, taking in the jinn and genies of the Indian Ocean, the ancestors of the African oceans, the submerged deities of Indian indentured communities, and the drowned of both the Middle Passage and the Indian Ocean.

The Custom House was involved in both the colonization and creolization of water. As indicated, Custom Houses were located on unstable coastal terrain and were subject to the vagaries of the ocean, as job titles in the Customs service, like tide waiter, tide surveyor, beach magistrate, and receiver of wrecks, indicate. Customs officials were eager participants in debates on how best to

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engineer the port and extend its footprint into the ocean. We might describe them as a *hydrocracy*, ruling by and from the water's edge rather than from the desk of bureaucracy.

In undertaking this work, Customs officials nurtured cosmologies that fed into the hydroimaginaries of the ocean. Like much colonial thinking, these ideas were starkly dichotomized, with the sea defined, on the one hand, as a dumping ground for contaminated goods and, on the other, as the realm of naval heroism and seafaring manliness. The practice of dumping condemned goods instituted what was to become a long-standing technique of colonial governance, namely, using water as a site of erasure and in some cases execution—in the Dutch empire, those convicted of sodomy were in some instances sentenced "to be taken out to sea, thrown overboard and drowned."[102] In the twentieth century, the apartheid and Pinochet regimes routinely dumped the corpses of murdered political prisoners at sea.[103] During the period of decolonization, departing colonial regimes, especially in the Caribbean, regularly tipped incriminating documentation into the ocean.[104]

As regards the second view of the ocean, Customs officials were great admirers of the navy, whose uniforms, terminology, insignia, and hierarchies they mimicked. Customs officials deployed this naval mystique on land to buttress their authority and to present themselves as an officer class. Epauletted and brass-buttoned, the Customs officers formed a congregation of white men who attempted to separate themselves from the cosmopolitan cacophony of the port city. The singing of Zulu stevedores was abjured; Madrassi oarsmen who steered *masulah* boats through the surf to ships in the roadstead were ignored. The archival records of Customs create the impression that the officers inhabited a whites-only world. Only the odd job title like "native messenger" and "female typist" and architectural drawings showing segregated toilet facilities indicate otherwise.[105]

Structure of the Book

The introduction has focused on dockside reading as a site of hydrocoloniality. The remainder of the book explores this intersection in five steps: (1) the history of colonial Customs and its hydrocolonial modes of governance; (2) the interaction of Customs regimes of identification, objects, and environments; (3) copyright; (4) censorship; and (5) the way dockside reading shaped colonial authorship and literary genres. The substance of the chapters on copyright and censorship may seem drier, or less obviously hydrocolonial, than the other chap-

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ters. Yet the influence of the colonial maritime frontier is present in two ways. First, both chapters trace how epidemiological anxieties that originated with the ship as a potential vector of disease modulated into ideological imperatives of boundary making and exclusion that in turn shaped practices around copyright and censorship. Second, both chapters open on or near the waterfront, a reminder that this was the setting in which Customs examiners worked.

The details of each chapter are as follows. Chapter 1 sketches out the histories of English Customs and then colonial Customs in southern Africa (and other parts of the empire). This account is focused largely around one man, George Rutherford, who made his career in London, Kingston (Jamaica), Saint George's (Grenada), and Durban. In tracing his professional biography, the chapter describes the culture of colonial Customs and its modes of hydrocolonial governance. These entailed the extension of territorial forms of sovereignty to coastal waters while bringing quasi-naval modes of authority onto land. A coda to this chapter makes a brief foray underwater to think about the submarine infrastructure that kept the Custom House standing and gave its personnel a purchase on imperial mythologies of the sea. This harbor development adversely affected other communities' access to and imagination of the ocean, diminishing the creolization of the coastal waters.

Chapter 2 starts with a Customs scene, set on a beach in a small port in the Cape Colony. An image from the *Illustrated London News* shows goods being landed from a lighter by porters who wade through the water while a landing waiter on the beach tallies the cargo. The chapter uses this image as a starting point to explore Customs procedures and protocols, highlighting how their rituals of identification were shaped by the maritime environments and the objects with which they dealt.

Chapter 3 opens on board ship with passengers sorting their books before entering port. In some parts of the empire, reprints of British copyrighted works were not permitted and had to be tossed overboard. However, no one, let alone Customs officials, was entirely sure what the legal situation actually was, since different, contradictory levels of copyright legislation existed: imperial, colonial, and international. In attempting to deal with this confusion, examiners hewed to their everyday practice and the logic of the cargo mark, relying heavily on the Merchandise Marks Act of 1887, which dealt with trade descriptions and marks of origin ("made in England," "made in Australia," etc.) and construed copyright as an "indirect sign of manufacture." Under these circumstances, copyright became a poor semiotic cousin to the mark of origin and, in cases of British copyright, a sign of propriety that the object had been made in

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Britain and was hence respectable and implicitly "white." This latter practice was shaped by the ideological exigencies of a hydrocolonial boundary, which were translated into an epidemiological register, embroiling copyright in the elemental politics of the port city. The chapter traces how copyright played out beyond the port and concludes by discussing how these colonial instances feed into current debates on copyright.

Chapter 4 briefly shifts location and begins on the dockside of Sydney Harbour with two lowly Customs officials stuck in a small, hot office, hankering after the sea but required to leaf through piles of publications looking for signs of obscenity. The chapter explores how Customs officers like these two men dealt with undesirable publications. Tax collectors rather than readers, they "read" logistically by scanning metadata, sampling, and counting. These object-oriented modes of reading extend our understandings of censorship, which tend to look higher up the bureaucratic chain and to assume that censors read everything placed in front of them. The chapter focuses on two moments: the first is the South African War (Anglo-Boer War) of 1899–1902, when Customs took on a major role censoring and banning pro-Boer material. The second shifts to the 1920s and 1930s, a period of growing anticommunism. This mixture of military-style censorship and anticommunism laid the groundwork for a style of logistic reading that informed subsequent apartheid censorship regimes. Running through these various modes of censorship is a strong epidemiological strand, a reminder of the shaping influence of the colonial maritime setting and its hydrocolonial imperatives.

The conclusion explores the implications of these Customs reading regimes beyond the port. It examines the various models of the book that dockside reading produced and the implications of these for ideas of colonial authorship. These themes are traced at the level of literary genres, drawing out the relationships among the shipwreck narrative, port-city genres, and the farm novel. The analysis focuses on two texts: J. Forsyth Ingram's settler and merchant handbook, *The Story of an African Seaport: Being the History of the Port and Borough of Durban, the Seaport of Natal* (1899), and Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883).

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Notes

ABBREVIATIONS

AG	Attorney-General
AGO	Attorney-General's Office
CKN	Collector of Customs, Knysna
CSO	Colonial Secretary's Office
DCU	Director of Customs
DEA	Customs and Excise
IDP	Interior Directorate of Publications
KAB	Cape Archives Depot/Kaapse Argiefbewaarplek
LD	Secretary to the Law Department
NAB	Natal Archives Depot/Natalse Argiefbewaarplek
NASA	National Archives of South Africa
SAB	Central Archives Depot/Sentrale Argiefbewaarplek
T	Treasury Department
TAB	Transvaal Archives Depot/Transvaalse Argiefbewaarplek
TES	Secretary of the Treasury

INTRODUCTION: HYDROCOLONIALISM

1 "Consolidated List of Prohibited and Restricted Imports and Exports Issued by Customs Departments," Trade Board, Cologne (HKE), II, T5/7, 1952–58, Central Archives Depot/Sentrale Argiefbewaarplek (SAB), National Archives of South Africa (NASA), Pretoria.

2 Oram, *Cargo Handling*, 12.

3 Conrad, *Mirror of the Sea*, 220, 195, 196, 21.

4 Terms from Gregory, *Tariffs*, 391, 394, 429.

5 Relevant here would be Margaret Smith's suggestion that the title page itself can be seen as emerging out of the logistics of transport, initially being a blank leaf used to

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protect unbound quires during handling that then acquired a short "label-title" to identify the material. Smith, *Title-Page*, 47–58.

6 Details from "Contravention Customs Union Regulations. JE Bigwood—Standerton. 2 Cases Margarine . . . ," Director of Customs (DCU) 76, 670/06, 1906, Transvaal Archives Depot/Transvaalse Argiefbewaarplek (TAB), NASA, Pretoria; "Underentries of Duty: Foo Lee and Company. Tea Described as Herbs," DCU 85, 1416/06, 1906; and "H. Moschke, Pietersburg, Soup Squares, re Classification of," DCU 82, 1091/06, 1906.

7 "Importation of Poppy Seed," DCU 74, 574/06, 1906; and "'Gingham' (Flanelette) Tariff Item 175. Imported by Mosenthal Brothers, Limited," DCU 81, 1032/06, 1906.

8 Richard Wheatley, "The New York Custom-House," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, June 1884, 38–61.

9 "Merchandise Marks, Somaliland 1934," Colonial Office (CO) 535/101/10, National Archives, London. Thanks to Johan Mathew for this reference.

10 Oram, *Cargo Handling*, 12.

11 *General Instructions for the Landing-Waiters*.

12 For examples, see John McVey, "Cotton Codes," John McVey's website, accessed October 20, 2020, https://www.jmcvey.net/cable/cotton/index.htm.

13 Foucault, *Order of Things*, xvi. See also Duszat, "Foucault's Laughter."

14 Union of South Africa, *Customs Tariff* (1932), 130.

15 Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*, 40–41.

16 Harman, *Tool-Being*, 247, 259.

17 Shaviro, *Universe of Things*, 32.

18 Jane Bennett, "Systems and Things," 227; see also Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.

19 Harman, *Tool-Being*, 295.

20 Behar, "Introduction to OOF." See also Tompkins, "On the Limits."

21 On the colonial state, see Breckenridge, *Biometric State*; and Cooper, *Africa since 1940*, 156–90. On South African immigration restrictions, see Dhupelia-Mesthrie, "False Fathers and False Sons"; Hyslop, "'Undesirable Inhabitants'"; MacDonald, "Strangers in a Strange Land"; and MacDonald, "Identity Thieves." On Australian immigration restrictions, see Martens, "Pioneering the Dictation Test?"; and Heath, *Purifying Empire*. On immigration restrictions internationally, see Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line.*

22 Barnes, "Cargo, 'Infection'"; Bashford, "Maritime Quarantine," 10; and L. Engelmann and Lynteris, *Sulphuric Utopias*. Thanks to Charne Lavery and Nolwazi Mkhwanazi for the last reference. See also Mawani, *Across Oceans of Law*, 120, which discusses how the manifest, a document pertaining to cargo, extended to control passengers and crew.

23 Orenstein, "Warehouses on Wheels," 653; Dalbello, "Reading Immigrants," 179–90; and Ellis Island Immigration Museum, "The Inspection Process," accessed December 3, 2019, http://www.bringinghistoryhome.org/assets/bringinghistoryhome/2nd-grade/unit-2/EllisIsland_14.htm. My thanks to Marija Dalbello for drawing her work to my attention.

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24 "Merchandise Marks Law," Collector of Customs, Knysna (CKN) 3/9, 128/6/4, 1910–36, Cape Archives Depot/Kaapse Argiefbewaarplek (KAB), NASA, Cape Town; and "Prohibited and Restricted Imports. Indecent and Objectionable Articles," Customs and Excise (DEA) 199, A10/5X, 1958, SAB, NASA, Pretoria.

25 Harney and Moten, *Undercommons*.

26 South African Railways and Harbours, *Official Railway Tariff Handbook*; Union of South Africa, *Customs Tariff* (1932); and Union of South Africa, *Customs Tariff* (1936).

27 Department of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics, India, *Indian Customs Tariff*, table of contents.

28 Gitelman, *Paper Knowledge*, 52.

29 I am indebted to Geeta Patel for this point about assaying.

30 Coghlan, *Customs Manual*.

31 Duncan, "Indexes."

32 For an example with a waterproof cover, see *Instructions to Preventive Men* in the British Library; for extra pages, see Lewis, *South African Customs Union Tariff*; and, for interleaving, see South African Railways and Harbours, *Official Railway Tariff Handbook*.

33 Clements, *Clements' Customs Pocket Manual*; *Tariff Dictionary*; and Bengal, Customs Department, *Calcutta Customs Calculation Manual.*

34 *Wine and Spirit Merchant's Assistant*; and Clements, *Customs Guide*.

35 Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest.*

36 "City of Johannesburg. City Health Department. Disinfection of Library Books," Public Health Johannesburg/Staatsgesondheid Johannesburg (SGJ) 96, 4/25/3, 1915–43, SAB, NASA, Pretoria.

37 Hofmeyr, *Portable Bunyan*, 25–28.

38 *Tariff Dictionary*, 21; and "Prohibited and Restricted Imports. Objectionable Literature," DEA 200, A10/6X, 1950–52.

39 For Australian examples, see Adelaide Intelligence and Tourist Bureau, *South Australia*; and New South Wales, Intelligence Department, *New South Wales*. For a South African instance, see Ingram, *Story of an African Seaport*.

40 My thanks to Smaran Dayal and Claire Soh, who first pointed out the idea of thinking about literature as land reclamation.

41 Titlestad, *Shipwreck Narratives.*

42 Coetzee, "Farm Novel and *Plaasroman*."

43 My thanks to Trev Broughton and Sally Shuttleworth for these examples. Bell, *Villette*, 57.

44 Waugh, *Vile Bodies*, 22.

45 Hawthorne, *Scarlet Letter*, 39.

46 Crain, *Story of A*, 183–84.

47 McGill, *American Literature*, 218–69.

48 Nadine Gordimer, letter to the Secretary of the Interior, January 23, 1973, Nadine Gordimer Collection, A 3367, F 3, Censorship in South Africa, Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

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49 Graeber, *Utopia of Rules*, 26–29; Hull, *Government of Paper*; and Hoag and Hull, *Review of the Anthropological Literature*. Comments on the algorithm and bureaucrats are extrapolated from Dietrich, "Algorithm."

50 Price, *How to Do Things with Books*; Mukhopadhyay, "On Not Reading"; Hsiung, "Knowledge Made Cheap"; and Gitelman, "Not."

51 Stewart, *Bookwork*, 7.

52 For earlier discussions of the term, see Hofmeyr and Bystrom, "Oceanic Routes"; and Hofmeyr, "Provisional Notes on Hydrocolonialism." See also the special issue on hydrocriticism edited by Laura Winkiel: *English Language Notes* 57, no. 1 (2019).

53 I am grateful to Luck Makuyana for drawing the question of flooding as colonization to my attention.

54 Pritchard, "From Hydroimperialism to Hydrocapitalism," 591.

55 Mosse, *Rule of Water*; Fontein, "Power of Water"; McKittrick, "Making Rain, Making Maps"; Hughes, "Hydrology of Hope"; and Swyngedouw, *Liquid Power.*

56 Quotation from S. Engelmann, "Towards a Poetics of Air," 430.

57 Linton and Budds, "Hydrosocial Cycle."

58 Da Cunha, *Invention of Rivers*, blurb and p. x. See also da Cunha and Mathur, *Soak*.

59 There is extensive scholarship on this topic. A standard work is Pearson, *Indian Ocean.*

60 Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*; Gurnah, *By the Sea*; and Collen, *Mutiny*. See also Lavery, "Writing the Indian Ocean."

61 Issur, "Postcolonial Narratives." On floods, see Posmentier, *Cultivation and Catastrophe*, 132–57; and Jones, "'As If the Water.'"

62 "Insularity and Internationalism: An Interview with Kaiama L. Glover," The Public Archive: Black History in White Times, June 4, 2013, https://thepublicarchive.com/?p=3881. See also Deckard, "Political Ecology of Storms."

63 The classic study is Lan, *Guns and Rain.*

64 Nuttall, "Pluvial Time/Wet Form," 456.

65 Gillis, *Human Shore.*

66 Samuelson, "Coastal Form"; and Allen, Groom, and Smith, *Coastal Works.*

67 Samuelson, "Coastal Form," 17.

68 M. Cohen, "Chronotopes of the Sea," 649.

69 Ghosh, *Hungry Tide*; Okorafor, *Lagoon*; and Martel, *Life of Pi*.

70 Alaimo, "Violet-Black"; and Joshua Bennett, "Beyond the Vomiting Dark."

71 Walcott, "The Sea Is History," 364–7.

72 M. NourbeSe Philip, "Wor(l)ds Interrupted: The Unhistory of the Kari Basin," *Jacket2*, September 17, 2013, https://jacket2.org/article/worlds-interrupted, which mentions Césaire's use of volcanic images.

73 See Lavery's section "Deep Histories of the Indian Ocean" in Isabel Hofmeyr and Charne Lavery, "Exploring the Indian Ocean as a Rich Archive of History—above and below the Water Line," The Conversation, June 7, 2020, https://theconversation.com/exploring-the-indian-ocean-as-a-rich-archive-of-history-above-and-below-the-water-line-133817.

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74 Pritchard, "From Hydroimperialism to Hydrocapitalism."
75 Swyngedouw, *Liquid Power*, 43.
76 Graber, "Flow Dynamics."
77 Dickens, *Great Expectations*; Serpell, *Old Drift*.
78 This is the research focus of Oceanic Humanities for the Global South, accessed October 20, 2020, http://www.oceanichumanities.com.
79 Blum, *View from the Mast-Head*; and M. Cohen, *Novel and the Sea*.
80 Killingray, "Introduction," 5.
81 Delmas, "From Travelling to History"; Hyslop, "Guns, Drugs and Revolutionary Propaganda"; Liebich, "Connected Readers"; and Maynard, "'In the Interests of our People.'" My thanks to Samia Khatun for the last reference.
82 Rudy, *Imagined Homelands*; and Shaikh, "*The Alfred* and *The Open Sea*."
83 Starosielski, "Elements of Media Studies"; and McCormack, *Atmospheric Things*, 4. For a postcolonial angle, see Allewaert, "Super Fly," which can be read as an elemental approach to the materiality of colonial documents.
84 Peters, *Marvelous Clouds*, 1, 14; see also J. Cohen and Duckert, *Elemental Ecocriticism*.
85 Jue, *Wild Blue Media*, 7.
86 Taylor, *Sky of Our Manufacture*, 7.
87 Carroll, *Empire of Air and Water*, 6. See also Hensley and Steer, "Ecological Formalism."
88 Pertinent here would be the Blue (or Salt) Water principle that was debated in the United Nations in the 1950s and 1960s. This motion argued that for any unit to be defined as a colony (and hence to be eligible for decolonization), it needed to be separated from its colonizing power by at least thirty miles of seawater. Initiated by the Organization of African Unity and supported by the United States, the motion sought to counter attempts by Belgium, in the process of resentfully relinquishing the Congo, to extend definitions of decolonization to ethnic, indigenous, and "tribal" groups who could claim internal and land-based forms of colonization, whether by the Belgians or the new postcolonial regime. The principle enabled a narrow definition of colonization that shored up the authority of the nation-state. My thanks to Bruce Robbins for bringing this point to my attention. Robbins, "Blue Water: A Thesis," 2015, Bruce Robbins's website, http://blogs.cuit.columbia.edu/bwr2001/files/2016/02/Robbins.Blue-Water.pdf. There have been attempts to use the sea or, in this case, the seabed for anti-imperial purposes. As Anna Zalik's work on the International Seabed Authority demonstrates, this body has attempted to reanimate a "Bandung era discourse that frames the deep sea as the 'common heritage of humankind.'" Zalik, "Deep Seabed and Colonial Redress," quote from abstract. Also relevant is DeLoughrey, "Toward a Critical Ocean Studies."
89 DeLoughrey, "Toward a Critical Ocean Studies," 22, 27.
90 DeLoughrey, "Toward a Critical Ocean Studies," 26.
91 Colony of Natal, Natal Harbour Department, *Regulations of the Port*.
92 Mendelsohn, "Making the Urban Coast," 457.

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93 Jue, "Submerging Kittler."

94 On diving, see Jue, "Wild Blue Media," 1–12. Stacy Alaimo's page on Academia.edu features a picture of her snorkeling; accessed December 2, 2019, https://uta.academia.edu/StacyAlaimo. On "thinking with," see Hayward, "More Lessons from a Starfish"; see "coral imaginaries" from Khal Torabully, discussed in Ette, "Khal Torabully." On submarine aesthetics, see DeLoughrey, "Submarine Futures of the Anthropocene." For a range of underwater artists, dancers, and sculptors, see "Art beneath the Waves," *Pursuit of Beauty*, BBC Radio 4, last aired April 6, 2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m00013nr. See also M. Cohen, "Seeing through Water."

95 On speculative fictions, see Chan, "'Alive . . . Again'"; on underwater photography, see M. Cohen, "Underwater Imagination"; on aquariums and coral reefs, see Elias, *Coral Empire*, 125–26; on rococo decoration, see Quigley, "Porcellaneous Ocean"; on shipwrecks, see M. Cohen, "Shipwreck as Undersea Gothic"; two examples of oceanically linked conceptual poetry include M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* and Caroline Bergvall's *Drift*; on harbor engineering, see Hofmeyr, "Imperialism."

96 Hofmeyr, "Imperialism." On the harbor floor method, see "The Floor of Sydney Harbour," Sydney Environment Institute, University of Sydney, January 24, 2018, https://sei.sydney.edu.au/research/oceans/floor-sydney-harbour/; and Dredge Research Collective, "Mapping New York Harbor," September 2012, https://dredgeresearchcollaborative.org/works/mapping-new-york-harbor/.

97 Vahed, "Mosques, Mawlanas and Muharram"; and Vahed, "Constructions of Community and Identity."

98 Bernard, "Messages from the Deep." On Khoisan beliefs, see de Prada-Samper, "'Partial Clue'" (my thanks to John Parkington for this reference). On Muslim water jinn, see "Djin-Vrou" (my thanks to Saarah Jappie for this reference); and on "watermeisie" (water girl/spirit), see Mohulatsi, "Black Aesthetics."

99 On aquafuturism, see Chan, "'Alive . . . Again.'"

100 "Ellen Gallagher," Hauser and Wirth, accessed December 5, 2019, https://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/2783-ellen-gallagher; Sharpe, *In the Wake*; and Wikipedia, s.v. "Drexciya," accessed December 9, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drexciya. See also Philip, *Zong!*; Finney, "Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau"; Finney, "Shark Bite" (my thanks to Evie Shockley for making me aware of Finney's poems); and Nia Love, "g^{1}(host): lostatsea," Gibney Company Community Center, November 7, 2019, https://gibneydance.org/event/nia-love-g1host-lostatsea/2019-11-07/ (my thanks to Greg Vargo for the last reference).

101 Oupa Sibeko's "Bottled Seawater: A Sea Inland" explores intersections between African ancestral beliefs and Atlantic slavery, a theme also touched on in Koleka Putuma's "Water" in *Collective Amnesia*. For performances of "Water," see "Koleka Putuma—Water," October 2015, YouTube video, 6:48, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UGdqcEKlGhw; and "Koleka Putuma—Water (Official Video)," June 27, 2016, YouTube video, 7:09, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8dfq3C8GNrE. See also Baderoon, "African Oceans."

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102 Bergemann, "Council of (In)Justice," appendix, "1730s Criminal Database," case of Rijkaert Jacobsz and Claas Bank.
103 Schmidt, *Death Flight*; and Guzmán, *Pearl Button*.
104 Sato, "'Operation Legacy'"; and Wikipedia, s.v. "Operation Legacy," accessed December 5, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Legacy.
105 "Collector of Customs Wharf Accommodation at the Port," Colonial Secretary's Office (CSO) 595, 1877/1971, 1877, Natal Archives Depot/Natalse Argiefbewaarplek (NAB) NASA, Pietermaritzburg; "Collector of Customs Department. Messrs Harlem, Hooper and Mahoney Forward a Memorial on the Subject of Their Salaries," CSO 676, 1878/1394, 1878; and "Collector of Customs Says a Minute Paper from Colonial Office, in Reference to Custom House Premises Has Been Lost . . . ," CSO 676, 1878/1121, 1878.

1: THE CUSTOM HOUSE AND HYDROCOLONIAL GOVERNANCE

1 For a detective novel, see Seymour, *Untouchable.*
2 On England, see Ashworth, *Customs and Excise*; on the United States, see Rao, *National Duties*; see also the "biography" of the Custom House: Rideout, *Custom House*; and, on the Dublin Custom House, Robins, *Custom House People*. There is a small South African scholarship on the Customs Union and from economic historians working on taxation. Van der Poel, *Railway and Customs Policies*; Bruwer, *Protection in South Africa*; De Kock, *Selected Subjects*; Basson, "Regte op invoere"; and Colesky, "Comparative Study."
3 Ashworth, *Customs and Excise*.
4 Ashworth, *Customs and Excise*, 147.
5 "George Rutherford Esquire, Collector of Customs Applies for Permission to Retire from the Service in August Next," CSO 1212, 1888/C24, 1888; "Colonial Secretary re Pension to G Rutherford Esquire, Charles, Michael and George, on His Retirement from the Post of Collector of Customs," CSO 1211, 1889/862, 1889; and "George Rutherford Encloses a Letter Addressed to the Crown Agents on the Subject of His Pension, Which He Requests May Be Forwarded through This Office," CSO 1233, 1889/5266, 1889.
6 Da Silva et al., "Diaspora of Africans"; and Adderley, *"New Negroes from Africa,"* 42–43. On Cape Town, see McKenzie, "Daemon behind the Curtain"; and Shell, "Introduction."
7 Atton and Holland, *King's Customs*, 142, 153.
8 Carson, "Customs Plantation Records."
9 George Rutherford to G. Matthews, June 1, 1859, George Rutherford Collection, National Library of South Africa, Cape Town. Despite its rather grand-sounding title, this collection comprises only one letter.
10 Desai and Vahed, *Inside Indian Indenture*, 62.
11 Ellis, "Impact of White Settlers," 39.
12 Theal, *Records of the Cape Colony*, 27:226.

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