CHAIN OF OPPRESSION

An Aquapelagic Reading of Industrial Fishing in *Port of Lies*

[Received July 11th 2024; accepted October 23rd 2024 – DOI: 10.21463/shima.258]

Nick T.C. Lu

Marist College, Poughkeepsie, USA <Nick.lu@marist edu>

ABSTRACT: Tang Fu-jui's *Port of Lies* is a Taiwanese crime fiction that critiques the complex network of political and corporate interests undergirding Taiwan's fishing industry and the industry's historical exploitation of Indigenous and migrant fishers. Using Philip Hayward's concept of the aquapelago, this essay reads industrial fishing represented in the novel not simply as a mode of production, but as a more-than-human aquapelago that sustains itself by creating and maintaining specific social and human-nature relations. The essay first reviews Tang's representation of the major forms of violence in industrial fishing under the conceptual framework of hydrocolonialism to provide a historical context. With an aquapelagic reading, it then highlights the moments in the novel in which industrial fishing sustains itself by reproducing specific subjectivity, social relation, and human-nature relation. The essay concludes with a reflection on ways to decolonise human's fishing activities.

KEYWORDS: Aquapelago, Taiwan, industrial fishing, Island Studies, *Port of Lies*

Introduction

Industrial fishing or commercial fishing is known for its various detrimental effects on marine environments and human societies. Common practices such as longline fishing, bottom trawling, and dredging are known to have a destructive impact on marine life and ecologies. Further, as indicated by the International Labor Organization (ILO), industrial fishing has a long and controversial history of human rights abuse, with migrant workers from the global South forming the bulk of its victims. As a major consumer and producer of seafood and other marine products, Taiwan is among the four countries (alongside the US, Japan, and South Korea) with heavily subsidised fisheries that earn half of the world's deep sea fishing revenue (Armstrong, 2022). Its fleets of tuna longliners, specifically, are among the world's largest and have among the worst reputations for labour abuses (Urbina, 2019). How then does Taiwan understand and improve its role and practice in a global industry known for frequent abuses of human and nature, especially given its interest in being a responsible partner of global affairs?

Tang Fu-jui's *Port of Lies* (八尺門辯護人) seeks to tackle this question. Published in 2021 and later adapted into a Netflix series in 2023, *Port of Lies* is a Taiwanese crime fiction novel that critiques the complex network of political and corporate interests lying behind Taiwan's multi-billion fishing industry and its exploitation of Indigenous and migrant fishers. The novel revolves around the shocking murders of a family of three: a fishing vessel captain who is an Amis (one of Taiwan's Indigenous peoples) named Cheng Feng-chun, his wife, and their

two-year old daughter. The killer is an Indonesian migrant worker named Abdul-Adl, who was previously employed on Cheng's vessel and was regularly abused while on board. Abdul-Adl is soon sentenced to death. However, his lawyer, a government-appointed public defender who is also an Amis, Tung Pao-chu, continues to investigate the case, hoping to overturn Abdul-Adl's death sentence. Tung eventually discovers that Abdul-Adl was a minor when he committed the murders and cannot be lawfully sentenced to death. But Abdul-Adl is soon executed anyway. The reader learns at last that Abdul-Adl's execution is a carefully orchestrated political performance. The minister of justice, known for her agenda to abolish capital punishment, deliberately withholds information about Abdul-Adl's age submitted by Tung Pao-chu until after his death. Her plan is to portray Abdul-Adl as a martyr of an unjust execution in order to incite public mistrust of the death penalty in an imminent referendum.

This essay relies on Philip Hayward's concept of the aquapelago but provides significant revision of it to analyse the transnational and trans-epochal narrative of *Port of Lies*. I suggest that to make the concept more applicable in the context of global capitalism, we add the subset 'deterritorialised aquapelago.' In addition, using methods of literary and cultural studies, I show how an aquapelago can be understood not only as a socio-ecological assemblage but also an onto-epistemological and affective one. It is with a multidimensional understanding of industrial fishing, I argue, that we can begin to envision multivalent solutions to transform, and indeed decolonise, fishing to change human-ocean relation from one of destructive extractivism to one of harmonious coexistence.

In this essay, I first review Tang's representation of the major forms of violence in industrial fishing under the conceptual framework of hydrocolonialism to provide a historical context. Using the idea of the aquapelago, I then offer a close reading of moments in the novel that reveal industrial fishing not simply as a mode of production but as a multiracial and multispecies assemblage of exploitation that sustains and enlarges itself by reproducing specific subjectivity, social relation, and human-nature relation. Lastly, I conclude with a reflection on ways to decolonise human's fishing activities.

In recent years, the marrying of postcolonial theory and critical oceanic studies under a more-than-human principle has inspired productive debate in Anglophone literary scholarship and pointed to many new and exciting directions for research (e.g., Gupta, 2012; DeLoughrey, 2015; DeLoughrey, 2017; Gilroy, 2018; Samuelson & Lavery, 2019; DeLoughrey, 2022; Vandertop, 2022). As a related development, scholars of Taiwanese literature too have begun to construct a location-specific theoretical framework of posthumanist-oceanic criticism, as evidenced by an increased number of scholarly papers that adopted an archipelagic or oceanic perspective (e.g., Huang, 2014; Huang, 2017; Chang, 2022; Lin, 2023). This essay is intended as a contribution to this scholarship. As a further note, all English translations of quotations from Tang's novel are my own due to the absence of an official translation. However, where interest in direct referencing may exist, the original text in Chinese will be provided.

Hydrarchy as Exception

In her theorisation of colonialism that occurs through water, Isabel Hofmeyr (2022) suggested that hydrocolonialism can manifest in the following ways:

> *Colonization by way of 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 water (the ship as a miniature colony or a penal island), colonizing through water (flooding of occupied land), and colonization of the idea of water (establishing water as a secular resource).*(p. 16.)

Hofmeyr's typology represents a broader effort among scholars working in the intersection of critical oceanic and postcolonial studies to decentralise imperialism and colonialism that are traditionally construed as a land-based enterprise of territorial accumulation. By focusing on the traveling of colonial and anticolonial technologies, praxes, and ideas through various waterways, studies of hydrocolonialism highlight the myriad ways in which colonies and postcolonies are historically, geographically, and even atmospherically connected. In this way, they paint a more complex picture of imperialism and colonialism without replicating or reinforcing Western- or Northern-centric thinking.

Among the different forms of hydrocolonialism, the ship as a miniature colony and a penal island is especially relevant to the present discussion. The ship as a vehicle par excellence of capitalist expansion and, in itself, a quasi-state of authoritarian management of human bodies, has been well theorised in an impressive body of scholarly and literary accounts. In their pathbreaking work *The Many-Headed Hydra*, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker (2000) demonstrated two fundamental ways in which the ship epitomises modern capitalism and its authoritarian nature. On one hand, the very functioning of the ship necessitated a large number of workers to collaborate on "complex and synchronised tasks, under slavish, hierarchical discipline in which human will was subordinated to mechanic equipment, all for a money wage" (p. 150). This, they argued, makes the ship "a prototype of the factory" (p. 150). On the other hand, owing to a perennial need to man long-distance ships cheaply, violence and terror were used to coerce "the poorest, most ethnically diverse populations" (p. 151). One can reasonably add here that "violence" refers not only to physical violence but symbolic and epistemic violence (i.e., cultural narrative and scholastic discourse), which make some lives appear less valuable and therefore more readily exploitable and killable than others.

The ship as a hydrocolony – a floating garrison of racial capitalism – that facilitates continuous extraction of natural resource and human labour around the globe has at least one obvious incarnation in our contemporary world: the industrial fishing vessel. The ILO (2013) has for years warned that fishers on board long-distance vessels (many of whom migrant workers from low-income regions) are highly susceptible to human rights abuses. These include but are not limited to human trafficking, forced labour, physical and psychological abuses, excessive workloads, and unsafe and unsanitary environments leading to severe injuries, illnesses, and deaths. Moreover, the physical isolation of long-distance vessels and their remoteness from territorial waters mean that fishers are cut off from basic social services at all times, including proper emergency care and any state protection of personal safety (see also Armstrong, 2022, Chapter 6). To prevent desertions, many vessel owners would also require migrant fishers to surrender their identification documents and cellphones. The practice of confiscating migrant workers' passports and means of communication in wealthier South-East Asian countries amounts to what anthropologist Aihwa Ong (2006) called neo-slavery.

Tang's *Port of Lies* represents migrant fishers' predicaments as outlined above in explicit detail. In doing so, it transforms what appears to many as an abstract knowledge of distant sufferings on the High Seas into vivid images of a personalised nature. Abdul-Adl, the Indonesian migrant fisher sentenced to death for murdering his captain and the captain's

family, was initially scammed into boarding the Taiwanese-owned *Ping-Chun 16* by a Singaporean recruitment agency despite Abdul-Adl's complete lack of experience. On board, Abdul-Adl is then subjected to frequent beatings due to his inaptitude for fishing work and his inability to understand and communicate with Mandarin-speaking deck officers. A fellow Indonesian crewman, Suprianto, relates to Tung Pao-chu what had happened to Abdul-Adl while they were on board *Ping-Chun 16*:

> *Abdul-Adl was very odd. He did not fish. He did not talk. Everyone's work was hard. The captain scolded him, beat him, demanded him to kill fish with a knife. He cried a lot…he didn't know how to. He was afraid of blood. He did many strange things. He couldn't finish his work. He stared into space and prayed. Just odd*. (Part 4, Chapter 18).

Being forced to work in an environment that he is unfit for and unable to communicate his feelings, Abdul-Adl soon starts to show signs of mental instability. He begins to imagine his deliverance and puts on a life jacket to ready himself for the imagined rescue. But Abdul Adl's confusing behaviour only incurs more inhumane punishments from his Taiwanese supervisors. Suprianto continues:

> *Abdul-Adl kept thinking that a boat was coming to pick him up. Once he went to wear a life jacket. The captain and the first mate were infuriated. They said, "Bad luck." Wearing life jacket. Bad luck. We didn't dare to wear it. But Abdul-Adl didn't know. No one told him that. The captain and the first mate hit him, kicked him. Then he cried. The captain got angry and pushed his head in a barrel of water. He had to look at the watch. He only let go after two minutes.*
>
> *Afterwards, every time he cried, they pushed his head in the barrel until he stopped crying. They took turns. Pushed him. Two minutes*. (Part 4, Chapter 18).

The vivid depiction of the abuses Abdul-Adl suffers on *Ping-Chun 16* provides an opportunity to theorise what an industrial fishing vessel – a constructed space designed to facilitate specific interhuman and human-ocean relations – might mean and feel like for someone as precarious and coerced as Abdul-Adl. In David Cashman's study of cruise ships (2013), he argued that many modern commercial ships constitute an antithesis to an aquapelago. For unlike islands – which are the natural constituents of an aquapelago because they enable varying degrees of human-ocean interaction – today's cruise ships are built to foreclose such interaction. They are built with an explicit intent to *not* encourage human coexistence with the ocean, but to allow land-dependent humans to unilaterally extract values from the ocean (material and symbolic) at a safe distance. Cashman's analysis is useful to understand the nature of industrial fishing vessels as well. For they, too, are constructed as floating platforms that enable humans to exploit marine resources from an anthropocentric vantage of safety and utility. However, cruise ships and industrial fishing vessels differ in a significant way. For voluntary pleasure seekers on cruise ships, the ocean, however unreachable, is a curious backdrop accentuating their freedom from the mundane. Whereas, for migrant fishers like Abdul-Adl who are involuntarily brought aboard, ill-treated, and hindered by linguistic and cultural miscommunications, the ship is akin to a prison and the ocean a constant reminder of unfreedom. It is in this way that the industrial fishing vessel becomes, phenomenologically, a hydrocolony.

Yet Abdul-Adl's ordeal is not only a phenomenological or existential matter. It makes a permanent mark on the body. When Tung Pao-chu asks about Abdul-Adl's missing index finger, Suprianto recounts the gruesome procedure performed on Abdul-Adl by a group of untrained sailors:

> *"What happened to his finger?" Tung Pao-chu asks.*
> *"It was cut by a fishing line. It had gone bad, infested. He had fever and couldn't get up from bed. He was going to die. The captain couldn't return to port. He could only cut it off with a knife and throw it into the sea."*
> *"Cut off with a knife?"*
> *"Cut off with a knife."*
> *"On the boat?"*
> *"On the table where we ate."* (Part 4, Chapter 18).

As the above dialogue shows, for fishers who sustain severe injuries on board a long-distance vessel, the choices they are left with are usually either crude amputation or death, because on the High Seas, it may be too costly or simply impractical to pull ashore for medical treatment, not to mention doing so for a low-ranking foreign fisher.

As the reader follows Tung Pao-chu's investigation to piece together what had happened on board *Ping-Chun 16*, it becomes increasingly clear that Abdul-Adl's crime is a direct result of long-term physical and mental abuses; and what appears at first as a callous familicide is in fact a symptom of the structural violence embedded in Taiwan's fishing industry. This is definitively indicated by Abdul-Adl's accidental killing of Captain Cheng's two-year-old daughter. While in the crime scene after killing both Cheng and his wife, Abdul-Adl hears the girl crying. Anxious, he submerges her in the bathtub to quiet her and deliberately times at *two minutes*, thinking that all humans would, like him, survive asphyxiation for exactly that long (Part 4, Chapter 18).

One might wonder why, in this novel as much as in reality, the governments of the host nations that employed migrant fishers have not done more to protect them and, as such, allowed a chain of violent events to happen. Investigative journalist Ian Urbina (2019) observed that for many international fishing companies, it is a common practice to register their vessels in what are known as "flag of convenience" (FOC) countries. There, the governments merely sell the right to fly their flags without fulfilling any obligation of oversight. They are either unwilling or practically ill-equipped to cooperate in international efforts to investigate and prosecute labour abuses (pp. 35-36; see also Armstrong Chap 6). Among these same fishing companies, moreover, it is a norm to outsource "the recruitment, logistics, and payroll of foreign crews," such that the companies can "centralize profit and decentralize liability" by exploiting the jurisdictional limits of nation-states (Urbina, 2019, p. 97).

In the case of the fictional *Ping-Chun 16*, though the vessel is owned by a Taiwanese company, it is registered in Vanuatu; and the temporary fishers, recruited by a Singaporean manning agency, are immediately dismissed and sent back to their countries of origin upon completion of contracts (Part 2, Chapter 1). In other words, Abdul-Adl's fate on board the vessel – and, by implication, that of other abused migrant fishers in real life – would likely remain forever unknown in the absence of trackable witnesses, if everything went according to the fishing companies' plan and their convoluted multinational channels to circumvent the law.

In a seminal essay, Hester Blum (2010) noted that sailors have in history formed a constitutive exteriority to the nation-state, for "the internationalism they embodied abstracted them from participatory citizenship, even if they were central to its functioning" (p. 672). Although transhistorical in intention, Blum's observation about sailors' plights and general vulnerability at sea still, sadly, rings true for today's migrant fishers who are either hired, scammed, or coerced to work on fishing vessels:

> *[T]hey were subjected to the near-absolute rule of captains; lived under threats of press gangs, piracy, and the slave trade; and toiled in an environment that prohibited common practices of wage labor.* (p. 672).

In Tang's representation, the remote and isolated fishing vessel becomes a hotbed of hydrocolonialism, where moral conventions and legal codes can be transgressed with relative impunity. The vessel's insular condition renders lower-ranking fishers and sailors practically defenceless in the face of violence and corporate interest. One may even say that Abdul-Adl and many migrant fishers like him are reduced to *bare life* stripped of rights and political significance (Agamben, 1998). For in their indeterminate state of existence – i.e., foreign workers on board a vessel that is by design made simultaneously a part and no part of multiple nation-states – life and death cease to have fixed legal and social meanings.

The Aquapelago and Global Fishing Capitalism

If *Port of Lies* succeeds in bringing into focus human sufferings that are usually out of sight and out of mind, it makes sure that the reader understands these sufferings not simply as the stories of particularly unfortunate individuals. The violent practices that mar much of today's industrial fishing, the novel shows, are not just isolated instances of individual humans' or governments' moral failing. Rather, they are the organic outcomes of a broader ecosystem under duress.

Indeed, industrial fishing is nothing if not an ecosystem, or more precisely, an *ecocultural* system. "Ecocultural" is a term Merlin Franco (2022) argued as a replacement for "biocultural" to denote the reciprocal relationship of natural and cultural entities within an adaptive socio-ecological system of coevolution. To understand industrial fishing as an ecocultural system, one need only consider a well-known fact: today industrial fishing's increasingly destructive practices of excess fishing in international waters and exacerbated exploitation of migrant fishers are direct results of overfishing in the previous decades that had led to a worldwide depletion of fish stocks in nearshore continental shelves (ILO, 2013). In other words, intensive exploitation leads to even more intensive exploitation. As an ecocultural system, industrial fishing places both human and nature in an increasingly worsening cycle of mutual destruction.

With this recognition, Hayward's concept of the aquapelago becomes extremely useful to further the interpretation of Tang's novel (instead of reading it as a mere moral critique of industrial fishing). For the idea of the aquapelago helps focus our attention on the dynamic interaction of the aquatic and terrestrial, ecology and economy as an integrated system.

According to Hayward (2012a), an aquapelagic society is:

> *a social unit existing in a location in which the aquatic spaces between and around a group of islands are utilised and navigated in a manner that is*

> *fundamentally interconnected with and essential to the social group's habitation of land and their senses of identity and belonging.* (p. 5).

An aquapelago thus presupposes a two-way interaction between human and aquatic nature which is shaped by and also shapes the social and cultural patterns of a given waterfront (littoral, coastal, riverine, or island) community. For this reason, as Hayward further suggested, the concept has the most obvious utility in research concerning the interrelationship of fisheries and societies (p. 9). Hayward himself had applied the concept in studies of fishing communities in Chile's Chiloé island (2011) and Indonesia's Ambon City (2012b). In a recent article (2023), he further explored the correlation between aquapelagic formation and capitalism. Using dory fishing in the Grand Banks – an early industrial fishing practice that took place from the 16th to early 20th century – as a case study, Hayward reaffirmed his early characterisation that aquapelagos are not "objective geo-physical entities" nor are they "necessarily safe or stable." Rather, they are impermanent "performed entities" subject to changing influences of non-human and human actants, including altering "climate patterns" and development of "human socio-economic organisations, technologies, and/or the resources and trade system they rely on" (p. 7, 10; 2012a, p.5). In analysing the aquapelagic formation along the Grand Banks via dory fishing, Hayward identified capitalism as an organising force that gave the aquapelago its recognisability, i.e., a recurring pattern of human and natural overexploitation spanning centuries. He suggested figuratively that capitalism "provided the stage, script and directions" for dory fishers to perform their dangerous roles in the process of capital accumulation, a process not always intelligible to the human actors (2023, p. 21).

While the concept of the aquapelago has received extensive discussion in the last decade since its coinage, it has rarely been 'tested' with regard to extractivist fisheries and in the wider context of global capitalism. There are, in my view, certain problems that can be further explored to enhance the concept's explanatory power within these specific theoretical parameters. Building on Hayward's Grand Banks analysis, we may pose these following questions: What are the ways that capitalist fisheries reshape social and natural environments to create an aquapelago with recognisable and durable attributes and patterns? How are these attributes and patterns fundamentally different from those necessitated by other livelihood activities? If capitalism is a 'script' directing how human fishers interact with their social and natural environments, how and where does it find a continuous stream of 'actors' to keep the show going? Beyond being a socio-ecological system, how might we understand an aquapelago as *also* an onto-epistemological and affective system of reproduction so as to better understand why generations of human actors 'perform' similar acts without being able or willing to seriously alter what is obviously an exploitative status quo?

Although literature typically does not give definitive answers to real-world problems, its plausible scenarios and free movement between scales (local and global, psychological and social) prompt the reader to perceive such problems on multiple axes and seek creative solutions. In my following reading of *Port of Lies*, I will argue that to ensure continued functioning and maximisation of profit at sea, capital-driven industrial fishing needs to utilise all necessary, if unethical, means at its disposal (legal, economic, political, or symbolic) to create and maintain an environment on land that is conducive to the reproduction of specific *subjectivity*, *social relation*, and *human-nature relation* amenable to its exploitation. Industrial fishing, in other words, is not simply a mode of production. It is also a way of organising social life and value systems, and of knowing and being with marine life and ecosystems.

Another theoretical difficulty that arises when applying aquapelagic thinking in the context of global capitalism is its awkward shifting between the local and global. This is observable as a terminological ambiguity in Hayward's Grand Banks study. In much of this study, Grand Banks with their location-specific climate patterns undoubtedly form the main aquapelago under consideration. Yet at one point the term aquapelago is also used to denote the network of European colonial fishing communities stretching from Newfoundland, New England to Western Europe and the Caribbean, with the Grand Banks being "the central area of the aquapelago" (p. 10). It seems that there needs to be some qualification to help distinguish these two types of aquapelago for the benefit of future research. I propose that we add to Hayward's original aquapelago a subset which we may term *deterritorialised aquapelago*, following Deleuze and Guattari.

In its original sense, an aquapelago is a cumulative and ongoing assemblage consisting in the dynamic exchange between natural forces and the technical, social, and cultural 'fixes' humans develop in adaptation to these forces for their livelihood in specific locations (e.g., Chiloé, Ambon, Grand Banks, and Haida Gwaii). However, as I will show with *Port of Lies*, in aquapelagos where capital-driven industrial fishing becomes dominant – that is, production for exchange value significantly overtakes production for use value, and fishing changes from a predominantly livelihood activity to organised wage labour – the rate of extraction of human and natural resources quickly becomes unsustainable (due to foreseeable factors such as depletion of fish stocks and shortage of cheap labour as discussed by the ILO). A strong outward pressure is thereby created. In order to maintain a viable rate of profit, the fishing industry in the original aquapelago has to then bring other coastal communities (not necessarily in proximity) into its system by outsourcing some of its functions and, in doing so, replicating its logic or 'script' of social relation and human-ocean relation onto other coastal communities. A new and expanded aquapelago is thus formed in service of a now deterritorialised fishing capital. This is then the difference between Grand Banks and the European colonial fishing communities dotting the Atlantic as two distinct but related types of aquapelago.

As we shall see in *Port of Lies*, industrial fishing not only shapes *a* fishing community in the coastal city of Keelung, Taiwan, where much of the story is set. It also brings into the same aquapelagic assemblage coastal communities that are hundreds of miles apart (Keelung, Singapore, and Tegal City) and social groups separated not just by race but epochal difference (the Amis in the past and Indonesian migrant workers in the present).

Fishing Communities as a Carceral Aquapelago

In Tang's novel, the violent acts frequently visited upon fishing workers and their families are not isolated events experienced by particular individuals. Rather, these acts are consciously and consistently represented as a calcified pattern of *social relation* undergirding the fishing aquapelago. Tang does this by having multiple Amis and Indonesian characters go through similar, if not the exact same, experiences. The novel's cyclical plotline and moments of déjà vu are, in other words, devices that serve to underscore the mechanical repetition of violence in the fishing industry.

When the novel opens in Keelung in 1982, we see a middle-aged fisherman of Amis return to his wife and young boy late at night after work. He is covered in blood and carrying a bloodstained watermelon knife in hand. The man is Tung Pao-chu's father, Tung Shou-

chung, or Looh in Amis. As if foreshadowing Abdul-Adl's killings forty years later, Looh had just critically stabbed several men in the fishing company that employs him. Luckily for Looh, his victims survive the attack and Looh eventually receives a prison sentence rather than a death sentence.

What had caused Looh to lose control and go on a killing spree, just like Abdul-Adl, is persistent mistreatment and exploitation on and off the fishing vessel. Right before committing the killings, Looh was heard lambasting the company over its unjust handling of his cousin's falling death at sea. Infuriated, in front of his friends, he accuses the company of not even providing insurance to his cousin and that, "after deducting the salary advances [used to pay for his cousin's funeral] plus interest, what was left in his cousin's meagre compensation was all gone" (Part 1, Chapter 2). Later, the reader learns that a similarly unjust event of workplace injury and the company's lack of response had happened to Looh himself as well. As Looh relates to his son Tung Pao-chu the story of how he had lost one of his fingers on a fishing trip (the *exact same* portion of the index finger that Abul-Adl had also lost):

> *No sooner had the great white shark opened its mouth than my finger was sliced off. I was lucky to have lost only half of it. Everyone said I was lucky. Fucking bastards. How dare they blame me for being careless. I had to tie up my wounded finger and work for another seven or eight hours before they were willing to return. Fucking bastards. I was not given insurance either.... And the interest of my salary advances began to compound quickly. In the end, I even fucking owed them an arm after all is said and done!* (Part 4, Chapter 5).

Looh, his cousin, Abdul-Adl, and Suprianto have gone through similar experiences of injustice: unsafe working conditions, uninsured employment, meagre salaries and compensations that were then taken away from them in times of need. In the case of Looh and Abdul-Adl, they even lost the same finger because they were both deprived of proper emergency treatment on board; and both are, to some degree, victims of their own rash revenge against the fishing companies' myriad exploitations. By having multiple characters of different nationalities and time periods go through similar experiences, as if they were caught in a fatalistic limbo of eternal return, the author highlights the nature of industrial fishing – at first in Taiwan and later internationally – as a highly coherent aquapelago. It is a system governed by an unchanging logic of profit maximisation that resorts to the same tactics of exploitation against the least protected and recognised social groups irrespective of spatial and temporal limitations. In this way, the industrial fishing aquapelago is both deterritorialised and detemporalised. Or more precisely, it has two temporalities: historical time and cyclical time. Though the exploited subjects change in history, the need for exploitation never disappears. It arises as every fishing season arrives and it stretches the aquapelago to new island frontiers in search of cheap labour as far as the ocean can take it.

The Reproduction of Amphibian Subjects

Indeed, what links the Amis and Indonesian characters in the novel is their shared position in Taiwanese society. In order to live on, the industrial fishing aquapelago needs an endless supply of what I would call *amphibian subjects* – i.e., people who are socially excluded and cannot find a home or sense of belonging in the landed society – to do the isolated and dangerous work of long-distance fishing that not many people are prepared to do. In other words, it thrives on a classist and racist society of inequality where situations of poverty and

racial exclusion can be systematically capitalised on. In an interview, Tang spoke of the social groups who work Taiwan's long-distance vessels in history: "In the past, it was the Indigenous people; now it's migrant workers [as second-class citizens], and in the future another ethnic group could replace them" (Yeh & Chung, 2023, Para. 5; brackets in the original). It does not matter who the exploited are now; as long as there are social and cultural forces and narratives that continue to sustain the epistemology of racial hierarchy which presents some groups as less welcome and less valuable than others, the exploitative aquapelago can live on.

In the novel, both the Amis and Indonesian characters are represented as amphibian subjects who cannot feel at home in Taiwanese society. In the Amis fishing village in Keelung where Tung Pao-chu grew up, poverty persists through generations because of the fishing companies' persistent exploitation. For many of Tung's friends and relatives who are members of the community's second generation, their only life chances are either working for the fishing companies or taking up other strenuous jobs such as construction work, truck driving, or trash picking (Part 1, Chapter 12).

Peng Cheng-min, or Lekal in Amis, is a typical example of such characters. Peng is Cheng Feng-chun's cousin and first mate on *Ping-Chun 16*. When he was younger, he worked in construction sites and had a good reputation of being the fastest and hardest worker. But because of constant discrimination by Han-Taiwanese contractors, Peng later developed serious anger issues causing debilitating headaches. Peng's condition, however, improves after working on board the fishing vessel because at sea "he doesn't have to talk or deal with people" and "the sound of the ocean overcomes everything, giving him peace" (Part 2, Chapter 8). In Peng's mind, "The ghosts on land cannot go to sea and the humans at sea only land every so often" ("陸地上的鬼，沒辦法出海。海上的人，也只能偶爾靠岸") (Part 5, Chapter 6). For Peng and many amphibian Amis like him, the ocean may not be their true home, but it offers them a safe haven from all the fraught memories ('ghosts') of poverty, hatred, and racial exclusion on land. The ocean's material non-fixity is for Peng a psychological escape from the cumulative weight attending landed and linear existence.

Speaking in the courtroom as Abdul-Adl's defense attorney, Tung Pao-chu, on the other hand, tells of how hard he had tried to escape the fishing companies' predatory recruitment to steer clear from his father and peers' depressing fate of working on the fishing vessels:

> *But there were many times that I was almost lured into boarding the vessel because I needed money. Going to college costed money. Staying alive costed money. Burying my mom also costed money. Still, I survived in all the humblest of ways. I would do anything but fishing, because, as my good-for-nothing father always said, in the fishing port, it's not always fish that get slaughtered. Those words were the only gift he left me.*
>
> *That was how I escaped the fate of sitting in the defendant's seat; escaping the fate of being overworked at sea, of malnutrition, of having my ID confiscated, of violent threats, of vicious punishments….* (Part 5, Chapter 27).

Both Tung and Peng's experiences indicate clearly how industrial fishing thrives on existing patterns of social inequality and racial exclusion. The fishing companies' active maintenance of generational poverty in waterfront Indigenous communities and utilisation of existing racism in society toward the Indigenous people as a whole create a steady stream of ready seagoers.

Having himself narrowly escaped the depressing cycle that captures his people, Tung Pao-chu knows full well the impossibility of choosing between crushing poverty on land and murderous exploitation at sea. This is why he begins to empathise with and defend another amphibian human, Abdul-Adl, who was uprooted from hundreds of miles away in the novel's present time.

As is well known, Indigenous rights began to receive increasing support within the government and society of Taiwan since the lifting of Martial Law in 1987. This radical social and political change means that fishing companies had to adjust their recruitment strategy to keep low the cost of manning vessels. Indigenous fishers in the 21st century, as exemplified by Cheng Fung-chun and Peng Chen-min, would either move up the ranks to occupy intermediary positions as deck officers or leave the industry altogether for other more lucrative and safer works. The vast shortage of on-deck fishing labour was then filled by migrant workers recruited mostly from Southeast Asian countries. A new racial hierarchy of exploitation in fishing was thus formed.

Compared to the Indigenous people, migrant workers face similar challenges in finding a sense of belonging in Taiwan. Not only do they tend to face the same, if more intense, financial precarity and racism. As foreign persons, they also have to confront daily formidable language and cultural barriers, legal restrictions on freedoms of movement and employment, and most crucially, the psychological loneliness of living by oneself in a foreign country. As the Indonesian character Leena, a care worker and Tung Pao-chu's part-time interpreter, expresses migrant workers' lightness of being poetically: "She feels like a dried bug getting blown to a faraway place and doesn't even make a slight sound when she lands on the ground" ("她覺得自己像乾掉的蟲子，被風吹到了很遠的地方，落地時沒有一點聲音") (Part 4, Chapter 17). But, as the novel progresses, the reader learns that migrant workers' quotidian difficulty to make themselves understood by the host society and their lack of communal and institutional support are nothing poetic. These difficulties can become immediately deadly in critical situations, such as the murder charge brought against Abdul-Adl.

Throughout Abdul-Adl's criminal investigation, the police report, his testimony, and his psychiatric assessment (which establishes that he was in normal mental health when he committed the murders despite his being tortured on board for months beforehand) were all completed with the intermediation of a court-certified interpreter. This interpreter, as it turns out, is contracted by Abdul-Adl's employer and cannot even understand the Eastern Javanese dialect Abdul-Adl speaks in. He is described as someone who "watches" ("監視") the company's "cargo" ("貨物") whenever a migrant worker gets in trouble with the law (Part 1, Chapter 19). His interest, therefore, is to quickly get the court case over with, lest it spilled over and prompted additional investigation into the company's other activities. Thus, in a Mandarin-centric judicial system infiltrated by the fishing industry's influence, Abdul-Adl is rendered completely voiceless.

When Tung Pao-chu and his assistants try to find a way to overturn Abdul-Adl's psychiatric assessment on the grounds of illegitimate translation, they find it impossible to prove otherwise. For Abdul-Adl is in effect a person without a history, who "has no one in Taiwan, unclear past whereabouts, no medical history, no personal story, no relations to interview" (Part 3, Chapter 15). A voiceless person without a history seems to be the perfect summary of Abdul-Adl's predicament as a foreign fisher in Taiwan. He is *the* ultimate amphibian human, a perfect subject to exploit for fishing companies. Like the Amis fishers in previous decades, he belongs neither at sea nor on land and is equally defenseless in both spaces. After Abdul-

Adl's execution in the end of the story, Tung Pao-chu sees clearly how industrial fishing assembles an aquapelago of violence that connects his and Abdul-Adl's people. He sings a song in protest of Abdul-Adl's tragic life: "His home country has a thousand islands. My home country is an island that kills people" ("他的老家有千座島，我的故鄉是殺人島") (Part 6, Chapter 24).

In Peng Chen-min, Abdul-Adl and, to a lesser extent, Tung Pao-chu, we see three amphibian subjects. They are amphibian in an ontological sense. Their experiences and consciousnesses on land and at sea seep into and transform each other, determining their life-choices and causing them to drift permanently between the two realms in search of belonging.

The Karma of Violence Between Human and Sea

Of course, humans are not the only species at the receiving end of violence in industrial fishing. Albeit only in passing, there is a provocative moment in the novel that depicts the excess of cruelty visited upon marine animals and the animals' determined revenge. After recounting how he had lost his finger, Looh continues to tell of the tragic ending of the mother shark that bit off his finger and the babies in the shark's belly:

> *After finning the shark, Ah-Chung ferociously kicked the shark's belly till it was deformed and then threw the shark back into the ocean. Do you think those pups in her belly could survive? Once I dreamed of a pup who had swallowed my finger and survived. She became a big white shark and came back for revenge. She remembered me. If I went back, she would most certainly kill me. The ocean never forgets….* (Part 4, Chapter 5).

In Hayward's theorisation, the presence and agency of non-human actants and their interaction with human actants play a key role in constituting an aquapelago. Here the mother shark biting a finger off and feeding it to her babies for a later revenge serves as an interesting allegorical reminder of aquatic lifeform's agency and their 'refusal' to be a mere commodity. Even more interestingly, this scene makes possible a reading of an aquapelago as an affective assemblage. The sharks here become consciousness-shaping agents to the human fishers. They enter and occupy human consciousness – becoming their 'ghosts' so to speak – and shape their behaviours. As the novel shows, when human violence against the ocean and marine life finally catches up on them, they might have no other way to cope with it than to pass it onto other humans: Abdul-Adl's killings of Cheng Feng-chun and his family; Looh's stabbing his coworkers and his negligence of his son growing up; Peng Cheng-min's violent raping of his wife (Part 5, Chapter 1). Anger, fear, hurt, revenge, and other negative emotions jump from one species to another and from one person to the next. An affective chain of multispecies violence is set in motion. The violence initially inflicted upon non-human marine life eventually becomes part of the social and cultural fabric that defines and reinforces the violent nature of a coastal community dominated by industrial fishing. The ocean never forgets. It bites back. And this is its ultimate revenge.

The character Ah-Chung, a Han-Taiwanese and the vessel owner's son, moreover, perfectly embodies the dominant epistemology of racial and species hierarchy sustaining industrial fishing. His presence proves the idea that those who have no qualms about abusing animals would have no qualms about abusing humans they perceive as inferior to themselves. In the industrial fishing aquapelago, marginalised humans (the Amis and Indonesians) are turned

into instruments of violence and forced into a destructive relationship with their own and other species. The exploited humans and the hunted animals are, ultimately, all victims in the same system. They are mere means to an end, someone else's end. The moment the shark eats off Looh's finger – much as the moment Abdul-Adl kills his Amis captain and family – they become part of each other, forever entangled in a violence they did not choose.

Decolonising Fishing Aquapelagos

The aquapelagos where land and sea meet, and where different cultures are brought together by marine economy, are not spaces where only stories of violence and exploitation are written. They are also spaces where people cultivate multicultural openness, understanding, and solidarity. In John R. Gillis's (2014) explication of "ecotone," ecotonal spaces – where aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems intersect – tend to foster societies and identities that are characterised by "adaptability, dynamism, and resilience" (p. 155). Though Tang's story about industrial fishing in Taiwan is written in a predominantly critical and even pessimistic tone, there are moments that indicate hope and suggest a way to positively transform the aquapelagic communities in Taiwan and South-East Asia.

Near the end of the novel, Tung Pao-chu breaks into the Ministry of Justice to stop Abdul-Adl's execution. Unsurprisingly, he is soon arrested and detained. However, during the interrogation, Tung deliberately answers all questions in Amis, making the Mandarin-speaking interrogator unable to proceed (Part 6, Chapter 25). Tung's refusal to use Mandarin – a moment of Gandhian noncooperation – effectively disrupts the workings of a judicial system that supports indirectly the exploitation of migrant workers. His purposeful act to confuse the interrogator with an unfamiliar tongue serves to remind the judicial system of its linguistic bias. It highlights the profound injustice of judging a person who cannot adequately express themself.

Another character that symbolises positive change in the linked aquapelago of Taiwan and Indonesia is Leena. During her time in Taiwan working as a live-in caregiver, Leena has remained in touch with her college classmate, Nur. Nur is a student-activist deeply involved in the protests for legal reform in Indonesia. It is Nur's impassioned activism for social justice that inspires Leena to join Tung Pao-chu's effort and lend her voice (by being an interpreter) to the helpless Abdul-Adl. Eventually, Leena's experience of fighting for a fellow migrant worker becomes her best education in Taiwan and makes her decide to pursue a degree in international law in her home country. A seed of positive change linking Taiwan and Indonesia is planted. For Leena, the ocean is what connects people of islands both physically and in consciousness. As she recalls what her father had told her on the day she left for Taiwan, "We are people of islands. Wherever you go, don't ever forget to look at the sea" ("我們是島的人，去到哪裡，都不要忘記，看海。") (Part 6, Chapter 28).

However, as mentioned above, where the novel falls short is its lack of serious ecocritical engagement with industrial fishing. If industrial fishing, as this essay suggests, constitutes a disruptive aquapelago that sustains and enlarges itself by objectifying not only interhuman relation but also human-nature relation in its plundering of the earth's marine resources, a literature that mainly advocates for a change of human behaviour toward each other is not enough. A posthumanist perspective, on the other hand, helps us re-envision human as part of – rather than above – the world's aquapelagos in which society, land, and ocean are interdependent and coevolving.

If, for instance, industrial fishing forms a destructive aquapelago, in which destructive fishing practice gives birth to destructive human behavioural pattern and communal identity as seen in Tang's novel. It follows then that a respectful and egalitarian fishing lifestyle *can* create and nourish a more harmonious human-ocean relation. Pei-yin Lin (2023) considered just such a possibility with the oceanic writings of Tao (Taiwanese Indigenous people of the Orchid Island) writer Syaman Rapongan and Han-Taiwanese writer Liao Hongji. Lin's insightful discussion proved that there are fruitful ideas inherent in Taiwanese literary traditions that can be used as raw materials to create a counter-hegemonic aquapelago vis-à-vis modern ways of fishing. These include the Buddhist-inspired belief of human-ocean unity as seen in Liao's writing, and the mutually benefitting human-ocean relation central to the oceanic Tao people's worldview and aquapelagic praxis.

Conclusion

Port of Lies is a rare – and in many ways pioneering – effort in Taiwanese literature to offer a focused response to and thoughtful reflection of the island country's role in the global economy of industrial fishing. Through its realistic depiction of Taiwan's fishing industry, the novel lays bare the complex network of political and corporate interests undergirding the industry. Similar to the cruise ships in Cashman's study but much more harmful to the human passengers, industrial fishing vessels are built with the overriding purpose to facilitate human's unilateral control and exploitation of the oceanic environments. They are thus veritable hydrocolonies, the polar opposites of sustainable aquapelagos like those maintained by the Tao and Haida people.

The concept of the aquapelago makes possible a reading of industrial fishing as an integrated human-land-ocean system. However, in recognising the concept's limitation in the context of global capitalism, I proposed a subset, deterritorialised aquapelago, to highlight the negative worlding power of multinational fishing capital and its deterritorial logic of endless profit accumulation at the cost of immense damages to both human and oceanic environments across times and spaces. The main contribution of this essay lies in its exposition of the aquapelago as a system of reproduction of specific subjectivity, social relation, and human-ocean relation at ontological, epistemological, and affective levels. In this way, it reveals that decolonising human-ocean relation requires more than responsible socio-economic and environmental policymaking; it also takes a holistic cultural change to reimagine our narratives and relations with other humans and the more-than-human worlds.

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