

## **The *Nomos* of the Sea and People in Small Boats**

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For millennia voyages upon the sea have provided the material for myths, legends, and narratives of ethical life. From Homer to Melville, Defoe to Coetzee, the sea has symbolized a realm of freedom, issued tales of human suffering and endurance, and marked the limits and possibilities of civil and political existence. As the means of access for global colonial expansion, the corridor for transporting slaves, labour, commodities, and extracted wealth, the oceans of the world are arguably as important as metropolitan centres and erstwhile colonies for understanding forms of imperial power and governmental practices. This paper examines the Indian Ocean as a space of colonial exchange and communication. These pelagic zones contain an archive of sovereign violence, a gruesome memory of the present.

The Indian Ocean is the heavily traversed space of people in small boats moving between archipelagos, islands, and continents. It is a zone of inexorable contact between peoples, a site of exponential cruelty and indifference to human life, and manifests the harsh remnants of sovereign power. From the Chagos Archipelago where the United States currently leases islands from the UK for its military base on Diego Garcia, to Christmas Island (and now the entire continent of Australia) excised from Australia's migration zone – the islands of the Indian Ocean offer us a glimpse into the workings of absolutist forms of sovereignty. The paper will interrogate these issues through an interrogation of legal regimes, cases, as well as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, JM Coetzee's *Foe* and *The Childhood of Jesus*.