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Introduction

Locating Malay Liverpool

When Dol arrived in Liverpool in the winter of 1950, among the ‘hundreds’ of Malays already in the city were men who had left the *alam Melayu* (Malay world) before the Second World War.¹ In terms of British imperial history and geography, the very presence of such men in Liverpool in the first half of the twentieth century is significant. Seafarers from British Malaya, and from neighbouring territories that were not tinted pink on maps of British Empire territory,² settled in imperial port cities – Cardiff, Glasgow and London as well as Liverpool – prior to the New Commonwealth immigration which is conventionally understood to mark the advent of multiethnic Britain. Over the past three decades, scholars have done much to illuminate earlier histories of Asian and black people in Britain, implying or even asserting that it has always been an ethno-racially diverse society (e.g. Fryer, 1984; Visram, 1986, 2002; Muhammad Mumtaz, 1996). In contrast, there are those who believe that the importance of small communities prior to the 1950s has been overstated. Given their lack of visibility and influence, as well as their statistical insignificance at the national scale, Ian Spencer (1997: 2) asserts that Britain really has ‘become a multi-racial society only very recently’. While this may be true at the national level, at smaller scales of analysis – at the level of cities or in particular dockside parts of cities – there are clearly places that have long been marked in profound ways by an Asian and/or black presence.³

From World City to the World in One City: Liverpool through Malay Lives,
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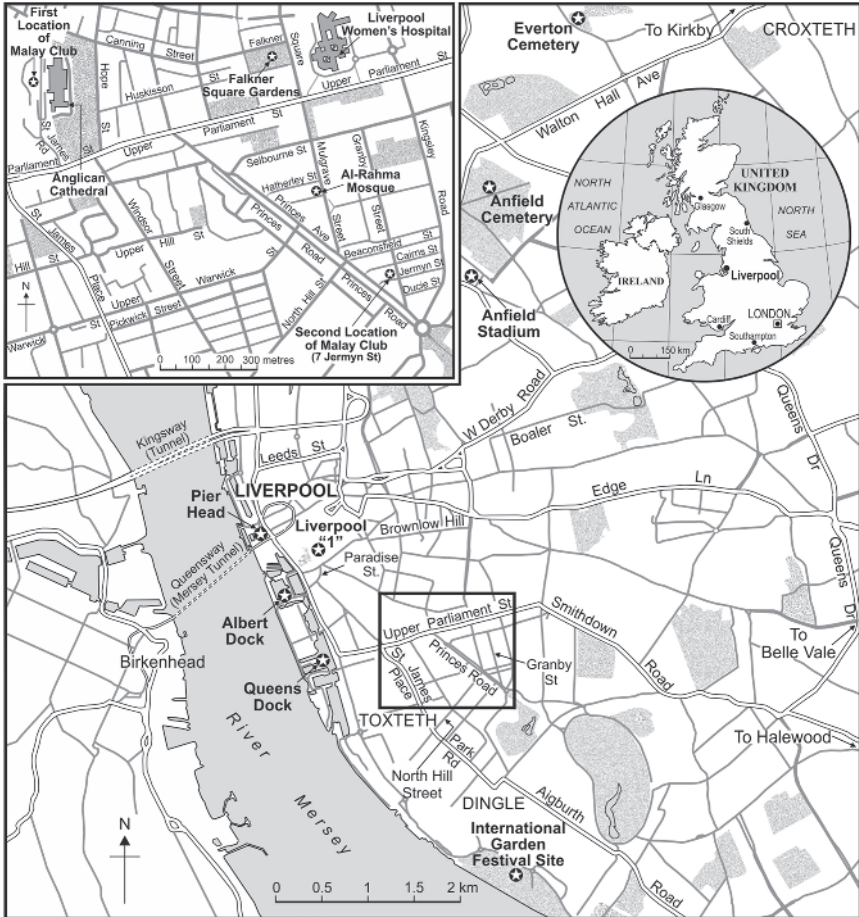


Figure 1.1 Liverpool and the two sites of the city's Malay Club. Produced by Lee Li Kheng.

Most Asian and black seamen arriving in Liverpool either side of the Second World War stayed and socialized in the south docks area of the city although, by the time Dol arrived, that had begun to change. Some of the prewar generation of Malays in Liverpool had formed families in and around the south docks, and several of their homes also provided lodging for visiting Malay seamen. Malay men met up in the basement of a house on St James Place (see Figure 1.1), which had a Yemeni-run cafe on the ground floor. Across Parliament Street from St James Place, towards the city centre, was where Liverpool's Malay Club was first

located. Established by a Malacca-born man named Johan Awang who had moved to Liverpool from New York City after the war, the club occupied the first floor of a house which faced the Anglican Cathedral. The building and indeed most of the street on which the Malay Club was initially sited (St James Road) is long gone, existing today only in the memories of a dwindling number of people who frequented the club in the 1950s. Even among these men and women memories often merge into, or are conflated with, those of another place. With demolition imminent in the streets below the Anglican Cathedral, in the early 1960s a group of men from Malaya and Singapore pooled their resources to buy a house on one of the streets that run perpendicular to Granby Street in what is today known locally as the Liverpool 8 area of the city.⁴ In line with a wider shift in population out of the south docks area, 7 Jermyn Street became the new home of the Malay Club from 1963.

The operation of the Malay Club in its successive locations spanned an era during which Liverpool experienced profound transformation, not only of its built environment and internal social geography, but also economically and in terms of external linkages. When the club was first established, the city still boasted a port of worldwide fame and importance. Back in the 1880s Liverpool had even been termed a 'world city'.⁵ Although, in hindsight, Liverpool was well past its commercial peak long before the Second World War, the city to which Johan Awang moved from across the Atlantic remained a key maritime centre for ships, goods and people from around the world, and especially from far-flung territories of the British Empire (Lawton, 1964). As waves of demolition continued to hit the south docks and adjacent city centre streets, the Granby Street vicinity of the Malay Club's second home in Liverpool 8 became the area of the city most visibly marked by the demographic effects of imperial maritime connections. Granby Street is remembered as having been a thriving commercial thoroughfare in the 1960s.⁶ However, the surrounding area subsequently became synonymous with 'inner-city' social and economic problems arising in part from Liverpool's diminished position in the national and international economy after empire. Number 7 is in the section of Jermyn Street that connects Granby Street to Princes Avenue, the site of infamous street disturbances in the early 1980s. Media coverage of these 'riots' popularized the toponym 'Toxteth' and marked it on national mental maps as the 'new Harlem of Liverpool' (Belchem, 2000: 29). The city of Liverpool more widely came to be seen as the epitome of British post-imperial and postindustrial urban decline (Lane, 1997). When I first visited in 2003, the Malay Club was one of only two buildings in the section of Jermyn Street between Princes Road and Granby Street that had not been abandoned and boarded up (see Figure 1.2).⁷



Figure 1.2 The section of Jermyn Street that includes the Malay Club (at number 7), December 2003. Photograph by the author.

The urban landscapes of the south docks and Liverpool 8 may be read as evidence of the changing commercial fortunes of the city in general, and in terms of even wider geoeconomic and geopolitical shifts. But the operation of the Malay Club across its two sites also allows – perhaps even demands – a more fine-grained, human-centred examination of urban and social change. From its inception, the club articulated social connections with other Atlantic maritime centres (particularly New York, which had a Malay Club of its own from 1954) and with British colonial territories, especially in the Malay world. There is no shortage of research which takes seriously the role of empire in shaping metropolitan spaces, but very little of that work has focused on the agency of colonial peoples in imperial cities.⁸ Important exceptions such as Antoinette Burton’s (1998) work on Indian visitors to late nineteenth-century London centre upon the experiences (and written records) of privileged colonial subjects. Tony Ballantyne’s work on the Sikh diaspora, in contrast, highlights one way of beginning to recuperate the agency of subaltern seafaring sojourners and settlers. He distinguishes ‘two interwoven, overlapping but occasionally independent sets of webs’

(Ballantyne, 2006: 81): on the one hand, those associated with formal imperial structures serving British merchants, missionaries and administrators; on the other, webs that were fashioned by Punjabis themselves. Following Ballantyne, it is possible to conceive of seafaring Malay social webs connecting imperial Liverpool to the *alam Melayu* in Southeast Asia and many other parts of the world within and beyond the British Empire. Extending beyond Ballantyne's conceptualization, my own interests also include urban places that both supported these webs and were transformed by them. Examination of the co-constitution of such urban places and Malay social webs (themselves intertwined with, yet exceeding, wider commercial linkages) allows for an historical analysis of world city Liverpool in relational and territorial terms (McCann and Ward, 2010).

In this book I trace some of Liverpool's shifting urban social geographies from the tail end of its time as an imperial maritime world city. The lives and long-distance social connections of young Malay men arriving as seafarers during that period extend across Liverpool's subsequent postimperial, postmaritime and post-world city transformations. Much has been written about how the city came to be dependent upon imperial trade and maritime-related commerce, as well as about the correspondingly devastating economic effects of postwar decolonization and the contraction of Liverpool's port functions (Lane, 1997; Wilks-Heeg, 2003; Murden, 2006). While Liverpool was labelled a world city in the late nineteenth century and remained an important metropolitan node in the colonial regime of accumulation in the mid-twentieth century, it has certainly not featured on the world city maps or rosters of late twentieth-century economic globalization (e.g. Friedmann, 1986; Beaverstock *et al.*, 1999). However, this should not be taken to mean that urban places and practices within the city ceased to be constituted through relations with far-flung 'elsewheres' (cf. Mbembe and Nuttall, 2004: 348).⁹ To date, efforts that have been put into documenting Liverpool's diminished position in the new international division of labour and the contemporary global(izing) economy have not been matched by documentation of the more-than-economic worlds of connection through which the city continues to be imagined, inhabited and (re)made.

Shifting constitutive relations with the Malay world in Southeast Asia are significant in part because that region has been remapped into narratives of miraculous economic 'rise' that contrast sharply with those of Liverpool's 'demise'. Liverpool and Southeast Asia have not only been repositioned in very different ways in imaginings of the wider structural economic order of things, but also in relation to each other. In maritime terms, during the 1970s, a growing proportion of the ships

coming to the city from territories of the former British Malaya flew the flags of the independent nation states of Malaysia or Singapore rather than the red ensign of British ships (shown in suitably frayed form but, unfortunately, also in black and white on the front cover), many of which had been registered in Liverpool during colonial times.¹⁰ More widely, ethnic Malay citizens of Malaysia and (to a much lesser extent) Singapore increasingly came to and through Liverpool as students, skilled professionals, journalists and tourists rather than as seafarers. These Malay women and men spun new social webs that neither simply replaced nor reinvigorated older ones, but refashioned them – and Malay Liverpool. Meanwhile, the geopolitical territorial fact of Malaysia and Singapore as independent nation states recast the nature of extant transoceanic and transcontinental connections. From the 1990s political elites in Malaysia in particular became increasingly concerned that Malays should extend their worlds and commercial operations beyond the national economic context. As a site of historical Malay diasporic connection, Liverpool thus came to be imagined as an Atlantic outpost of Kuala Lumpur-centred ‘worlding’ aspirations (Ong, 2011). At the same time, both Liverpool and cities in Southeast Asia form part of globe-spanning circuits of capital and urban development expertise. Liverpool, like Kuala Lumpur and the city-state of Singapore, has been reimaged through investment in material infrastructure and the marketing of ethnocultural diversity. In the year before my pilot visit to the Malay Club, Liverpool was officially branded and marketed as ‘the World in One City’. The worlds of connection that brought seamen such as Dol to this one-time imperial maritime centre, and the worlds that they in turn brought with them to the south docks and Liverpool 8 areas, have been drawn into efforts to reposition post-world city Liverpool in the global economy of the twenty-first century.

Worlds of Connection, Worlds in Cities

Examining Liverpool’s urban geographies through Malay lives, I advance three key sets of arguments in this book concerning the relational and territorial dimensions of cities, and historically sensitive ways of studying them.

The first concerns Liverpool’s long-distance social webs or networks, and the wider geographies of connection with which they have been intertwined. Malay social webs spun in late colonial times not only exceeded formal political economic linkages, but also *preceded* globalization and *outlived* imperial world city Liverpool. The former is significant because it is specifically late twentieth-century forms of long-distance

social relations that have given rise to the scholarly subfields of transnationalism and transnational urbanism. Some of the leading proponents of transnationalism have warned against its 'spurious extension' (Portes *et al.*, 1999: 219) to cover practices, processes and experiences that are already captured by prior concepts such as migration and assimilation.¹¹ Alejandro Portes and his colleagues emphasize the intensity, complexity and regularity of social contacts across national borders. While this would seem to delimit transnationalism to an era of globalization enabled by late twentieth-century technologies of transportation and communications, Portes *et al.* do also recognize important historical antecedents such as various trade diasporas and overseas commercial representatives. I contend that mid-twentieth-century maritime work made possible regular and sustained social connections between Liverpool and the Malay world that may be considered as one such example of transnationalism before the current era of globalization. What is more, this is an antecedent associated with colonial seafaring labour rather than with merchant diasporas or imperial administrative elites – what might thus be considered an historical form of 'transnationalism from below' (Smith and Guarnizo, 1998) or subaltern transnationalism (Featherstone, 2007).

Although the subsequent decline of the city's port undoubtedly meant that Liverpool became less relation-rich in commercial terms than during its time as a maritime world city, I show that economic and social connections to wider worlds have continued, albeit in often highly modified ways. With regard to social connections, this is partly due to advances in technologies of communication which, in addition to facilitating economic globalization and expanding possibilities for transnationalism in general, have made transnationalism from below much less dependent upon work-related mobilities. However, as I have already suggested, there is also evidence of post-world city forms of economic connectivity that have variously extended and transformed historical social webs. The diversity and historical variability of Liverpool's economic connections are important to urban and regional studies given that existing research on the city–economic globalization nexus has overwhelmingly focused on a very limited subset of economic activities, namely advanced producer services and associated 'world city' networks. Even as somewhere that is not a key node for advanced producer services (like most other cities around the world), Liverpool has continued to be remade through wider economic and associated social worlds of connection. Casting Liverpool more specifically as a 'post-world city', I show how interconnections associated with different historical periods and human mobilities overlap and entangle, such as when students from postcolonial Malaysia became active members of

the Malay Club that was initially established by and for colonial seamen. Examination of Liverpool in this way contributes to work that extends the city–economic globalization nexus beyond the existing preoccupation with contemporary ‘world cities’ or ‘global cities’. More significantly, I argue, my work serves to diversify the range of social as well as economic connections through which cities are understood to be co-constituted and worlded, drawing attention to ways in which multiple strands of transnational urban ‘connective tissue’ (McCann, 2010: 109) intertwine over time.

A second set of arguments follows on from this and has to do with the territorial grounding of transnational social webs or networks. I have noted that Ballantyne’s insights into colonial social ‘webs’ did not include explicit consideration of the sites or places from which those webs were suspended (and which they, in turn, remade). The tendency for transnational discourse to focus on cross-border sociospatial relations rather than on the sites from or to which nation-state borders are crossed has been identified and subjected to critical scrutiny by geographers (see Mitchell, 1997; Featherstone *et al.*, 2007). When transnationalized worlds have been conceptually territorialized at all, this has tended to concern the abstract ‘city’ rather than any grounded site of urban social interaction. Brenda Yeoh and colleagues (2000: 149) were among the first to point out that the city needs to be understood instead as a ‘space of transnational people flows anchored in and articulated with specific local urban geographies’. Michael Peter Smith’s influential work on transnational urbanism has developed similar ideas by locating transnational social relations in translocally connected places (Smith, 2001, 2005; see also Collins, 2012). I argue that Malay transnational urban networks in Liverpool were anchored or locally grounded in the successive sites of the city’s Malay Club, which were themselves located in particular areas of the city. The anchoring metaphor, of course, is particularly apt for the first location of the club in the south docks area as well as for the early years of its operation at 7 Jermyn Street – a period during which Liverpool remained a major seaport and when seafaring Malay mobilities connected the club to other maritime centres including in Southeast Asia and across the Atlantic to New York. Yet I show that 7 Jermyn Street continued to anchor Malay worlds of connection in postmaritime Liverpool, long after men such as Dol stopped working at sea.

Changes to the social composition of the Malay Club as the translocal place of Malay Liverpool reflected both wider political economic shifts and the life course trajectories of (ex-)seamen who had first arrived in the city at the tail end of its maritime pre-eminence. Liverpool-born descendants and family members of Malay seafarers became increasingly

prominent at the club. While their growing presence could be viewed as evidence of localization or unworlding, children of Malay seamen experienced the club as a place to 'be Malay' and as a site of connection to Malay worlds. In later life, it was also where they could share stories about trips to *the* Malay world region (*alam Melayu*), not only with each other and with ex-seafaring men but also with non-seafaring Malay students and professionals who had travelled in the opposite direction. For the latter group, the Malay Club became a home away from their (independent nation-state) homes in Southeast Asia and a conduit for cultural, religious and political ideas from Malaysia. For a Malay-dominated Malaysian state that looked with envy at the economic successes of ethnic Indian and especially Chinese transnational communities, 7 Jermyn Street located a Malay diaspora in Liverpool. In addition, as city authorities in Liverpool sought to capitalize on post-maritime demographic diversity, Malaysian sojourners were well placed to mark the Malay community – sited/sighted at 7 Jermyn Street – on the map of the World in One City. In all these ways, and others explored in this book, I argue that the Malay Club was the site of Malay-ness in Liverpool and also anchored (diverse and historically shifting) translocal connections, particularly to the Malay world in Southeast Asia.

The third and final set of arguments has to do with what the lives of people who met at sites such as 7 Jermyn Street in Liverpool reveal about the relational (re)making of cities. Life histories and geographies can tell us not only about connections to other worlds and the urban territorial anchoring of those worldly connections, but also about multiple *worlds in cities*. Much has been made in urban studies over the past decade of a need to expand and diversify the range of cities that are drawn upon in urban theorization (Robinson, 2006; Roy, 2009). I argue that it is also time to diversify the range of lives and experiences drawn into relational studies of cities and the ways in which they are worlded (Simone, 2001). The recent burgeoning of work on how cities are remade through the circulation and mutation of urban policies in an era of neoliberal globalization has included examination of the human mobilities of policy experts (such as consultants, planners, architects and local government officials) as well as flows of policy discourses, imagery and plans. There have also been important calls to expand the range of 'policy actors' beyond expert professionals to include activists and even city residents in consideration of how policies are variously formulated, mobilized and territorialized (McCann and Ward, 2010: 175). Examination of ordinary people's often extraordinary life geographies extends relational urban worlds beyond policy domains altogether, and beyond consideration of *contemporary* connections. While a range of existing work unsettles notions of the novelty of neoliberal

era policy mobilities, this is itself largely expert-centred, considering the worldly connections of municipal government figures, architects, planners, engineers and other professional actors (Saunier, 2002; King, 2004; Clarke, 2012). The memories and stories of ‘non-expert’ individuals, families and other social groupings constitute largely undocumented archives of everyday or subaltern forms of historical urban worlding. These are also *lived* archives of memory, not only yielding insights into connected geographies of a bygone era but also compelling consideration of how historical connections inhabit contemporary imaginings, practices and worlds in the city.

In a more explicitly methodological vein, I draw attention to the importance of insights into relational urban geographies that can be derived from *emplaced* lives, or from the lives of people in places. At first, this sounds counter-intuitive. One of the methodological mantras of recent relational urban scholarship, especially on policy mobilities, has been the importance of following things that (re)make cities across space. To the extent that this has mostly meant tracing ‘back stories’ of existing policy effects, the methodological next step appears to entail ethnographic presence in moments of relational urban remaking (Jacobs, 2012). Either way, there is a presumption that mobile and multi-sited methods are those most appropriate for, or equal to, the study of constitutively interconnected urban worlds. While I do not doubt the value of such methodological diversification, there is a danger that the current emphasis on mobile methods occludes continued possibilities for also examining ‘cities in relation’ (Söderström, 2014) from specific sites or places. In this book, the Malay Club forms an entry point to world-spanning historical urban interrelations and circulations. I demonstrate how examination of urban lives in and through places can open windows into unexpected constitutive connections across time as well as space. My grounded analysis exemplifies the historical openness of seemingly ordinary urban places to wider worlds (Massey, 1993), although 7 Jermyn Street, in turn, opened up worlds of multi-sited or at least ‘distended’ (Peck and Theodore, 2012) research possibility.

Sites and Routes of Fieldwork

I did not initially intend to focus my field research upon a particular urban locality. The original objective of the Malay Routes research project was to examine historically shifting connections between Liverpool and the *alam Melayu* through life histories and geographies of Malay ex-seamen. This was intended as a corrective to work in which imperial linkages are either evacuated of their human content

(as merely lines on maritime maps, for example) or else narrated through the experiences of more privileged officer classes. The plan was to make contact with the 20 or so remaining Liverpool-based Malay ex-seamen during the lunch meetings that I knew were held at the Malay Club at 7 Jermyn Street on Wednesdays, and then to follow up with in-depth life story interviews elsewhere – possibly at their homes or even in a café or pub. Things did not work out that way, partly for the simple reason that few of the men whom I got to know during fieldwork in 2004 were interested or willing to meet with me beyond the club. Most of the interviews and conversations that I had with ex-seamen in this initial period of field-based research were limited to 7 Jermyn Street, either on Wednesday lunchtimes or during special events. As fieldwork in 2004 and over the subsequent three years remained more firmly anchored at 7 Jermyn Street than I had anticipated, so it soon became apparent that the Malay Club had long functioned – and continued to function – as a node in social networks extending to the *alam Melayu*. Research at 7 Jermyn Street came to include not only efforts to tap memories of colonial maritime routes and to trace associated historical ‘lifepaths’ (see Daniels and Nash, 2004), but also examination of varied forms of (re)connection with the *alam Melayu* and participant observation of unfolding local community dynamics.

The fact that much of my fieldwork took place at 7 Jermyn Street during Wednesday lunchtimes has shaped this book in other important ways. The first and most straightforward concerned the fact that only a handful of the ex-seafarers in and around Liverpool actually made it to Wednesday lunches on a regular basis, and some never attended at all. In addition to issues of age and frailty, personal disagreements and enmities kept some men away, except during social gatherings that followed funerals.¹² Of those who did attend Wednesday lunches on a regular basis, some were much more energetic and articulate than others, and it was their voices that tended to dominate public storytelling. Another significant point is that the majority of people who attended the lunchtime gatherings between 2004 and 2007 were not ex-seafarers at all, but either their British descendants or student sojourners from Southeast Asia (particularly Malaysia). Some of these men and women became much more important to my research than I anticipated, both as sources of knowledge about ex-seamen and as translocal subjects in their own right. If during the maritime era the Malay Club had been a place of social interaction among locally based and visiting Malay seamen, by 2004 their non-seafaring descendants and Malaysian students interconnected Liverpool and Southeast Asia in a more diverse range of material and affective ways. Their very presence at the club also had implications for the stories told there by ex-seamen.

Given that most Malay seafarers who stayed in Liverpool married local women, and few children or grandchildren of Liverpool-based ex-seafarers are Malay-language speakers, public narration was often left to those men who were most comfortable conversing in English. Meanwhile, the presence of mostly ethnic Malay students – women as well as men – meant that lunchtime conversation tended to avoid topics sensitive to contemporary performances and expectations of Malay-ness in Malaysia.¹³

In the early stages of my research, I made a point of trying to interview ex-seamen at the club before or after lunchtime when fewer students and family members were present. For the most part, this meant joining or initiating conversations – either in English or in Malay, or a mixture of the two languages – rather than conducting more formal, one-to-one life history interviewing of the kind that I had originally envisaged. Nonetheless, these moments opened up a range of topics of conversation that would not have been aired in the less staunchly masculinist lunchtime setting. My gender positionality, as much as my knowledge of Southeast Asia and Britain, shaped the extent to which I was able to join conversations and to steer them towards preferred topics or specific details. Often, detailed questions were spurred by findings from archival or other documentary sources, while conversation at the Malay Club in turn prompted further archival forays in search of verification or elaboration.¹⁴ As my research progressed, however, I became less concerned with attempting to direct conversation and correspondingly more content to collect fragments of life histories and geographies that emerged from the regular flow of chatting and storytelling at the Malay Club. Of course, notes taken from conversations and observation of storytelling at the club raise important wider issues of privacy and confidentiality that would not have arisen had my methods been limited to formal interviews and archival research. Although everyone at the club knew why I was there, and I was never deliberately covert in taking notes or photographs, over time I blended in and, in the flow of conversation, it is entirely possible that people forgot about my documenting presence. In cases where there was any ambiguity about informed consent to use information concerning specific individuals in my work – whether that information was obtained from the club or elsewhere – I have referred to them only by their nicknames.¹⁵

The club featured in my research not only as a means of tapping into individual historical experience but also as a site in and through which: (1) memories and life stories were actively produced and reproduced; and (2) individual and collective memory intertwined. Memories are at once personal and social. Social collectivities such as the people

who gathered at the Malay Club variously structure, mediate, censor or silence memories (Chamberlain and Leydesdorff, 2004). Prevailing forms of social interaction thus shaped fragments of life stories narrated at the club. It is partly because 7 Jermyn Street was a social space in this way that the site can be understood as having played a constitutive role in (re)producing individual and collective memory. Not only did the presence of particular faces direct individual recollections to collective experiences ('remember that time when we ...'), but assembled audiences often played a more active part in variously disputing or elaborating others' stories. In one case, a Singapore-born man whose supposedly faulty recollection of his time at sea in the 1960s was publicly corrected in the club narrated a suitably updated 'memory' to me later the same day.¹⁶ In other cases, it was not voices or other human stimuli that appeared to be at work. Smells or aromas, especially from the kitchen, often prompted recollections, while artefacts and even the decor were enrolled into stories and conversation.¹⁷ In other words, through the co-presence of ex-seafarers with overlapping life geographies, the expectations of Malaysian students and family members who came to lunch, and even through the role of non-human stimuli – not to mention my own inquisitive presence – 7 Jermyn Street (re)shaped memories and gave rise to particular performances of self and collective identification. In the words of Dolores Hayden (1995: 43), 'places make memories cohere in complex ways.'

The Malay Club was a place that sustained a *community*, though some qualification is required concerning my use of that term in this book. What has emerged from my research at 7 Jermyn Street cannot in any straightforward sense be cast as the history of Liverpool's 'Malay community'. As I have already described, not all Malay ex-seamen living in or around Liverpool attended the club. In addition, I met a handful of people at the club – ex-seamen as well as people with no direct connection to seafaring – who did not include 'Malay' among their range of self-identifications. It is perhaps more accurate to conceptualize the Malay Club as a place which assembled people with various overlapping identity traits (most notably material and imagined ties to the *alam Melayu*) into a 'polythetic' (Clifford, 1997: 44) grouping¹⁸ than it is to envisage 7 Jermyn Street – as I initially did – as a way 'into' a pre-existing ethnic Malay community.¹⁹ Even among the ex-seafaring generation who met up at 7 Jermyn Street, what might conventionally be assumed to be ethnic (i.e. Malay) social networks may be examined more precisely in terms of spatial practices of friendship (Bunnell *et al.*, 2012).²⁰ Just as friendships sustained over many decades brought Malay men to the Malay Club, long-held animosities kept others away. Jermyn Street-centred friendship networks included 'mates' who would not ordinarily

identify as Malay, as well as *kawan* (lit. friends) who would. Even allowing for the historical porosity and mutability of the boundaries of Malayness,²¹ the ‘community’ assembled through 7 Jermyn Street was clearly more-than-Malay.

Particularly significant for my research was recognition that the Malay Club was bound up with the *ongoing* (re)making of a ‘community’, both as part of urban and social transformations in Liverpool and through transnational linkages. The pilot visit to 7 Jermyn Street during which I first met Dol coincided with a meeting concerning a community funding application that had been submitted to a local charitable organization. At the time, my interest in attending the meeting was primarily as an opportunity to talk with a Malay ex-seaman as well as to glean historical information about what was referred to as the ‘Malaysian and Singapore community’ from the funding application material. I soon came to see such material more critically, as active components of discursive processes of urban community making. The role of Malaysian students, in particular, in these processes gave them clear transnational and postcolonial dimensions. Students from Malaysia drew upon modes of presenting ethnocultural difference that are a taken-for-granted part of the sociopolitical landscape of Malaysia. In the context of contemporary Liverpool, however, it was also important that in applications for various forms of social funding – from local government agencies looking to work through community groups, as well as from charitable organizations – explicit mention was made of 7 Jermyn Street. This located the community in the neighbourhood of Granby Toxteth (as the surrounding electoral ward was officially known in 2003), conferring eligibility for forms of social funding, even though the residential addresses of its diverse members were much more spatially dispersed. In my research, the Malay Club was thus not only the *site* of social events that could be examined ethnographically, but also came to feature as somewhere that *sighted* and was *cited* as a locus of community – a visible spatial reference point that itself performed something in the discursive construction of a fundable, neighbourhood-based community.

Individual subjectivities were also much more ‘in-the-making’ than I initially appreciated. In part, this had to do with the kinds of performances of cultural identity that were necessary to secure and justify funding (the other side of which was marginalization from community events of ex-seamen who were unable or unwilling to realize themselves in such ways). More generally, however, subjectivities continue to be (re)made throughout the life course. One of the misjudgements that I made in the original planning of my research was to imagine elderly ex-seamen as occupying settled subject positions, offering fixed vantage points from which to look back upon and narrate their historical seafaring

lifepaths. Of course, as long as life goes on, one's own past appears and is remembered in shifting ways. Some of the men whom I met at the Malay Club were also more eager to talk about their most recent bus trips around the northwest of England or journeys 'back' to Malaysia or Singapore than they were to try to dredge up faded details of maritime routes and experiences from half a century ago.²² At first I treated this as part of a frustrating layer of conversation that had to be worked through in order to reach memories of world city Malay routes and historical connections. Yet this is an attitude that I came to see as incompatible with the spirit of my wider research intentions. In a project conceived to foreground the lives of Malay seafarers as part of Liverpool's constitutive connections, I was ignoring the ongoing life geographies of these men (and of other women as well as men who attended the club). Extension of the project beyond mid-twentieth-century maritime networks was thus bound up with restoration of ex-seamen's contemporary agency and my awareness of their ongoing subjectification as part of both transnational and highly localized urban social worlds.

My growing interest in the continuing lives of elderly ex-seamen in Liverpool and the development of strong social ties with a range of Malay Club attendees – Malaysian students and British descendants of Malay seafarers, as well as a handful of the ex-seamen – gave rise to ethnographic engagements 'back' in Southeast Asia as well as elsewhere in the city. Although multi-sited research can be expensive and time-consuming, for me, living and working Singapore, it was invariably easier and cheaper to meet with ex-seamen and their visiting family members in sites in Singapore or Malaysia, or even in Indonesia, than it was to conduct further fieldwork in Liverpool. I knew from interviews and conversations at the club that return trips to Southeast Asia had been highly transformative for Malay men who had lived or been based in Liverpool since the 1950s or 1960s.²³ Joining family reunions in Malacca (Melaka), Kuala Lumpur and Singapore gave me access to sites of subjectification and memory production that I had previously only been able to infer from a distance. Just as the Malay Club in Liverpool gave rise to certain individual and collective memories, so alternative surroundings, and the presence of different people, fomented other kinds of memories. In particular, as might be expected, I learned much more about pre-departure periods in the lives of ex-seamen. This enlivened my understanding of histories and geographies of Liverpool's maritime world city linkages with colonial Southeast Asia, which had previously been much more reliant upon secondary and (documentary) archival sources, and allowed me to read aspects of those archives in new ways. Meeting up with ex-seamen, their family members and even Malaysian (ex-)students in Malaysia

also allowed me to catch up on developments in Liverpool, especially on news about the position of the club and ‘community’ in urban regeneration processes.

Finally, the position of the Malay Club in my increasingly distended research also changed because of developments in Liverpool. During field research up to 2007 the club was the key site for me to join conversations about ex-seafarers’ forthcoming trips to Southeast Asia – sometimes planned with assistance and advice from Malaysian students who were familiar with the route from Liverpool to Kuala Lumpur or Singapore via Manchester airport – as well as about experiences of recently completed trips. I shuttled between diverse archival sources and 7 Jermyn Street, bringing documents and photographs as well as lots of questions to the club. However, a combination of dwindling numbers of first-generation ex-seafarers, uncertainty over the future of the housing stock in and around Jermyn Street, and the handover of leadership of the club to a Malaysian man with little time to devote to its day-to-day running, meant that 7 Jermyn Street opened less frequently from 2006. When I began six months of sabbatical leave in Liverpool in 2008 the club had closed down altogether. My research, which had previously been sited in 7 Jermyn Street but not explicitly about it thus inverted, having become substantively about Liverpool’s Malay Club (and the people who had met up there) but no longer conducted within its walls. By this time, I had a sufficiently wide network of friends and informants in the city to conduct further primary research beyond Jermyn Street, and other sites of research assumed prominence in my fieldwork.²⁴ Subsequent interviews and conversations with ex-seamen, their family members and (ex-)students included coverage of the club’s historically shifting sociospatial position in Liverpool and as part of social networks extending to the *alam Melayu*: from the late colonial maritime period that had brought Malay seamen to one-time world city Liverpool through to a twenty-first-century era of culture-led urban regeneration.

Organization of the Book

Just as the journey of my fieldwork involved unexpected sites and routes, this is not the book that I expected to emerge from the Malay Routes project. While I planned to conduct fieldwork in Liverpool in order to uncover the city’s historical maritime connections with Southeast Asia, my ethnographic research became at once more spatially confined (mostly to 7 Jermyn Street) and more geographically extensive (through meetings and participation in events in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia). Both the territorial and relational dimensions of the book

are, in turn, different from what was planned or anticipated. In territorial terms, while the city of Liverpool remains a significant frame of analysis, neighbourhood and, of course, place or site are also very important. Meanwhile, examination of Malay Liverpool over a period of more than half a century brings into play imperial, transatlantic, national and even supranational framings. In relational terms, the book is, above all, less maritime oriented than I had anticipated in my original research proposal. The past decade has seen a blossoming of work which contests the 'terracentricity' of academic history and geography, bringing into view alternative interoceanic paradigms and 'seascapes' (e.g. Bentley *et al.*, 2007; Anderson and Peters, 2014). Life geographies of Malay men in Liverpool who worked at sea and who inhabited worlds along sea lanes and highways clearly speak to this field. However, my coverage of maritime linkages is concerned more with the territorial urban geographies and club sites that anchored Malay social networks than it is with 'watery worlds' (Wigen, 2007: 1) *per se*. In addition, equally prominent in the book are the non-seaborne travels and connections of ex-seamen, their family members and Malaysian students.

The seven main chapters that follow are organized in broadly chronological terms, beginning from the tail end of the era during which Liverpool was a prominent imperial maritime and commercial centre – a world city. The next chapter traces the shipping routes that connected the *alam Melayu* to Liverpool, positioning the city and seafaring Malay men in world-spanning commercial and social webs. In Chapter 3 I focus down onto the social geography of Liverpool as 'home port' to men from the *alam Melayu* with varying degrees of attachment to the city. This is followed by three chapters set in the context of Liverpool's repositioning in the new international division of labour and in relation to the concomitant political economic development of independent nation states in Southeast Asia. Chapter 4 examines changes to the social composition and transnational connections of the Malay Club on Jermyn Street associated with the post-independence remaking of territories of the former British Malaya and Liverpool's interrelated post-maritime economic transformation. In Chapter 5 I consider Liverpool as a destination for students, tourists and diaspora seekers from nation states in Southeast Asia as they became more affluent and, especially in the case of Malaysia, increasingly concerned with transnational Malayness. 'Return' journeys of Liverpool-based ex-seafarers to emergent centres of urban modernity in Southeast Asia form the focus of Chapter 6. Attention then turns to recent and ongoing culture-led urban regeneration strategies in Liverpool, particularly its rebranding as 'the World in One City'. I analyse opportunities for Liverpool-based Malaysian students to make Malay(sian)s visible and fundable in the context of

community-led urban governance regimes (Chapter 7). Chapter 8 details local celebration of *Merdeka* (Malaysian independence) in two events intended to heighten community visibility in the lead up to Liverpool's year as European capital of culture.

I conclude the book by revisiting the main arguments and comparative contributions of the study. I also consider what Liverpool's status as the European capital of culture in 2008 implied for Malays based in the city and for the Liverpool 8 area in which the Malay Club was located. The year 2008 marks the end of a period of well over half a century across which I have sought to trace Liverpool's Malay worlds of connection. In that this period extends back to before the Second World War, the book may be said to contribute to work which unsettles conceptions of the war marking the beginning of multiethnic Britain. However, like official proponents of the world in one city, I am more concerned with Liverpool – or, in my case, particular parts of that city – and its constitutive connections than with national-scale imaginings or framings. It might even be suggested that this book contributes to the work of imag(in)ing Liverpool as 'the world in one city' by drawing attention to yet another of its ethnocultural groups and associated more-than-national connections. While I certainly hope that readers interested in the historical presence of Malays in Liverpool (and Britain more widely) will find informative material in the eight chapters that follow, 'the World in One City' is in fact among their objects of critical analysis. In Liverpool, as elsewhere, civic interest and investment in historical diasporic linkages have been skewed to what are perceived to be profitable pathways of (re)connection. In commercial terms, there is probably little to be gained from consideration of Liverpool's Malay world connections or of the sites that anchored them. But tracing them, as I do in this book, provides important insights into the often overlooked relational constitution of urban places and social lives.

Notes

- 1 Notes from conversation, 5 December 2003. It is impossible to establish precise numbers, not least because of the varying degrees of attachment of Malay men in Liverpool to the city or Britain more widely. When men such as Dol recall there having been 'hundreds' of Malay men in Liverpool in the 1950s, this certainly must have included men who were using the city as a seafaring base and men passing through the city on a regular basis (without necessarily ever subsequently settling in the city). The presence of many such men, of course, is unlikely to have been captured on electoral registers or census reports. The 1961 census for Lancashire records 63 males born in the Federation of Malaya and 66 born in Singapore, but these figures would have

- included children of 'white' British parents who were based in those colonial territories (as perhaps evidenced by the fact that 34 and 24 females are recorded as having been born in those respective territories). If the difference between male and female numbers is taken as an indicator of non-white male migrants, the total is 71; and this is for the whole of Lancashire (which at that time included the city of Manchester). In the postwar period during which Dol arrived, it may have felt as though there were 'hundreds' of Malays in the city – and at particular moments, depending upon the timing of when ships with Malay crews arrived, there may well have been. As the number of ships and Malay crew diminished from the 1960s, however, the number of men rooted to Liverpool through citizenship choices (i.e. becoming a citizen of the UK rather than of what became the independent nation states of Malaysia or Singapore) and/or family commitments never reached three figures.
- 2 Formal colonies, protectorates and dominions that were coloured pink on maps of the British Empire (see Harley, 1988). I follow Haggerty *et al.* (2008) in considering 'imperial' connections that extended beyond such territories of formal control to include wider commercial reach or influence.
 - 3 In work on Liverpool, Herson (2008: 68) notes, 'Liverpool's minority populations were highly visible in the localities they frequented, and their foreign compatriots who, as sailors, hit town in search of entertainment, drink and women accentuated their apparent presence'. However, 'in sheer numbers it was small in relation to the city as a whole'. As such, it is perhaps fair to suggest that experience of 'cosmopolitan' Liverpool was confined to specific parts of the city.
 - 4 Neither geographical delimitation nor naming of the 'area' that I am referring to is straightforward. As is noted below, the 'riots' that took place on some of the adjacent streets in 1981 were located in 'Toxteth' in national media coverage. However, this toponym does not appear to have been widely used by people living in the locality concerned and, for some, denoted other nearby, and distinctly 'white' neighbourhoods (see Frost and Phillips, 2011: 68). One scholar has used the term 'Granby Toxteth' (Uduku, 2003) and I considered employing this toponym to denote a more spatially delimited area around Granby Street. The problem here is that 'Granby Toxteth' was the official name of a short-lived electoral ward which no longer exists and, even more so than 'Toxteth', was never adopted as a place name by people who actually live(d) there. 'Liverpool 8', taken originally from postal code demarcations of space, is a more established term and has also been employed by local black and minority ethnic group activists. I have decided to use the term Liverpool 8 in this book. As in its everyday usage, this does not imply strict adherence to postal code mappings, however, not least because that would include Dingle, a 'white, Protestant, close-knit community with the reputation of being racist' (Hall, 2003: 205). Parts of the south docks also have an L8 postcode so the dockside areas that I am distinguishing from Liverpool 8 are contiguous and have no clear or fixed limits. 'Liverpool 8' is an area with blurred boundaries and of shifting territorial scope, but one historically centred upon Granby Street, the main commercial thoroughfare for black and minority ethnic Liverpool after the Second World War.

- 5 'Liverpool: port, docks and city', *Illustrated London News*, 15 May 1886.
- 6 Interview with Joan and Kevin Higgins, Liverpool, 12 September 2004. The house on Upper Huskisson Street where Joan's father Youp bin Baba (Ben Youp) lived functioned informally as a boarding house for Malay seafarers (see Chapter 3).
- 7 It should be noted, however, that the large proportion of boarded-up houses in the vicinity had at least as much to do with city council housing policy as it was a reflection of wider urban or regional economic 'decline' (see Chapter 8).
- 8 The light that Edward Said (1993) casts upon empire's 'overlapping territories' and 'intertwined histories' illuminates connections between metropolis and periphery in terms of cultural production rather than through examination of the lived presence and experiences of colonial peoples. Historical geography scholarship on imperial cities, meanwhile, gives more attention to urban landscapes, form and design than it does to the lives and agency of colonial people in the 'cross-mappings between empire and the modern European city' (Driver and Gilbert, 1999: 3). In Anthony D. King's work on the emergence of London as global city, he notes that 'there were relatively few if any members of the peripheral, colonial population in the city' (1990: 64). Although he does identify some exceptions, and even makes mention of Malays in the city, these figures are marginal to his analysis of a colonial mode of production and division of labour that 'kept colonial peoples and institutions distanced from the core' (p. 38). Subsequent postcolonial urban scholarship, which does give more attention to the place of former colonial people in the making and marketing of London (Jacobs, 1996), assumes that their presence at this urban 'edge of empire' began with postwar migration.
- 9 The focus of Mbembe and Nuttall's own work is on African cities' 'embeddedness in multiple elsewheres' (p. 348).
- 10 Lawton (1964) notes that by some estimates Liverpool accounted for one-seventh of the world's registered shipping in 1913.
- 11 As these authors quite reasonably point out, 'if all or most things that immigrants do are defined as "transnationalism", then none is because the term becomes synonymous with the total set of experiences of this population' (Portes *et al.*, 1999: 219).
- 12 Funerals brought people together as a community but, with the passing of each ex-seafarer, the first-generation community members also dwindled further (see Chapter 8).
- 13 This was particularly the case for alcohol consumption and other 'un-Islamic' practices.
- 14 Key archival and documentary sources are listed at the end of the book. Full citation details are provided in endnotes.
- 15 This makes them identifiable to others 'within' the group that assembled at 7 Jermyn Street and associated social networks, but not to a wider public. Dol is one example. I expected the brief set of questions that I asked him when we met in December 2003 to be a prelude to a more

detailed, formal and voice-recorded interview which never transpired. This also raises the issue of what constitutes an interview as opposed to a conversation or a chat. Clearly the boundary is blurred, especially in contexts where there are third (sometimes fourth and fifth) parties in attendance and where it is difficult to plan formal meetings in advance. I use the term 'interview' to refer to that subset of my conversations that were largely dyadic, face-to-face and voice-recorded. I was able to interview eight *alam Melayu*-born ex-seamen in Liverpool, some on multiple occasions (in one case, five separate times), mostly at 7 Jermyn Street. A list of the *alam Melayu*-born men who feature most prominently in (and, in some cases, across) subsequent chapters, and a brief summary of their lifepaths, is provided at the end of the book. The list includes one man who did not attend the club during the time that I was in Liverpool (although he had done so in previous decades) and four men whom I never met in person at all as they had died before I started my fieldwork. In the latter cases, I have constructed their life geographies from the recollections of family members, friends and acquaintances and archival sources.

- 16 Hashim, who boasted that his memory is 'like a computer', was the man who contested the memory of another ex-seafarer from Singapore (field-notes from conversation at 7 Jermyn Street, 14 October 2006).
- 17 As Delores Hayden (1995: 18) writes: 'If place does provide an overload of possible meanings for the researcher, it is place's very same assault on all ways of knowing (sight, sound, smell, touch and taste) that makes it powerful as a source of memory, as a weave where one strand ties in another'.
- 18 The individuals concerned had many shared and overlapping characteristics but no one of those characteristics was necessary or sufficient for group membership.
- 19 I was certainly guilty at the outset of my research of looking through the kind of 'ethnic lens' that scholars such as Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2009: 184) have cautioned against: 'migrants from a particular nation-state or region are assumed to constitute an ethnic group before their identity, actions, social relations and beliefs are studied'. The danger of employing a term such as 'quasi-community', of course, is that it suggests the existence of other, more internally coherent and unified ('real') communities. As such, I continue to use the term 'community' albeit often in scare quotes.
- 20 On dangers of the 'ethnic lens' more generally, see Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2009). Glick Schiller and Çağlar have highlighted a tendency for diaspora or transnational migration studies to presume internal coherence and commonality among co-ethnics, thereby obscuring transethnic social relations and underspecifying a diverse range of intraethnic social relations (see also Glick Schiller *et al.*, 2006; Glick Schiller and Çağlar, 2011).
- 21 Even within the *alam Melayu*, Malay-ness is recognized as a historically 'contested and wandering identity' (Barnard and Maier, 2004: ix). The geographically dispersed origins of the men in my study – mostly from what

are today Malaysia and Singapore but, in a smaller number of cases, from coastal parts of Indonesia – means that even before leaving the *alam Melayu* they may be expected to have had diverse understandings of, and relations to, ‘*Melayu*’ or ‘Malay’.

- 22 Fadzil Mohamed, for example, said that he used to travel the world on ships, but had come to travel the world on buses, with his bus pass (notes from conversation, Liverpool, 25 July 2009). The use of scare quotes around ‘back’ (to Malaysia) is in acknowledgement of the geopolitical changes that took place during the period when men such as Fadzil were based in Liverpool. They could go ‘back’ to territories that had become the nation state of Malaysia, but that political entity did not exist when they ‘left’.
- 23 Those who returned to what had become the nation state of Malaysia in particular were often immersed in Islamized contemporary expectations of what it means to be a ‘good Malay’ (Chapter 6) – expectations that were also in line with the Malay subject articulated by Malaysian students in Liverpool in their community-making discourse (Chapter 8).
- 24 Two such sites are worthy of note. First, 182 Boaler Street, home to the Malaysian graduate student Sharidah Sharif and her family, had become a hub for Malaysian visitors to Liverpool as well as for Malaysian students based in the city. A second, shifting set of sites were cafés in Liverpool city centre where Fadzil Mohamed met with members of his family for breakfast on Saturday mornings. Two of Fadzil’s children, Farida and Paul, were as eager to learn about their father’s life as I was. There emerged a collaborative process of assembling fragments of Fadzil’s life stories, tapping our very different knowledge to draw out different strands of Fadzil’s memory and experience.