Significant geographies

In lieu of world literature[1]

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Abstract

One of the problems with current theorisations of world literature is that the term "world" is insufficiently probed and theorized. "World" as a category is too generic and suggests a continuity and seamlessness that are both deceptive and self-fulfilling. Easy invocations of "world" and "global" (novel, literary marketplace) replicate the blindspots that Sanjay Krishnan identified when he called the global an instituted perspective and not an empirical process, with macro-theories drawing too easily on theories of globalization elaborated in the social sciences. Instead, in our comparative project Multilingual Locals and Significant Geographies, we argue that to theorize world literature in a way that is cognizant of the complexities, layers and multiplicity of "literatures in the world" (as S. Shankar prefers to call it), we need to think much harder at the "world" in "world literature" and we need a richer spatial imagination. We propose the notion of "significant geographies" as the conceptual, imaginative, and real geographies that texts, authors, and language

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communities inhabit, produce, and reach out to, and flesh it out with examples from our ongoing project.

1. The problem with "one world"

In *The Myth of Continents*, Martin Lewis and Kärin Wigen caution against the unreflexive use of meta-geographical categories and note that it is "precisely the highest level of our geographical taxonomy that is the most problematic" (1).[2] Yet this casual invocation of the macro-category of the "world" is what is at work in current theorizations of world literature. While appearing to nod towards an existing reality "out there", despite their matter-of-fact, when not celebratory, tone, usually with Goethe and Marx acting as *auctoritates*, these invocations are no neutral move. As Sanjay Krishnan reminds us, "world", like "global", is not an empirical process but an *instituted perspective*, "a way of bringing into view the world as a single, unified entity, articulated in space and developing over (common) time" (1).[3]

So the recent volume *Combined and Uneven Development* by the Warwick research collective affirms that, "the effectivity of the world-system will necessarily be discernible in any modern literary work, since the world-system exists unforegoably as the matrix within which all modern literature takes shape and comes into being" (20). Note the adverbs: necessarily, unforegoably. Such perspectives are underpinned by a desire to produce a "scientific" and "systemic" account of world literature, "de-linking it from the idea of the 'west' and yoking it to that of the capitalist world-system" (16, see also Moretti "Evolution"). They see a strong correspondence between the unification of the global economic space under capitalism and the unification of

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[2] Continents, for example, are most often simply irrelevant for mapping physical or global patterns and "can be positively pernicious when applied to human geography. Pigeonholing historical and cultural data into a continental framework fundamentally distorts basic spatial patterns, leading to misapprehensions of cultural and social differentiation" (Lewis and Wigen 35).

[3] See also Mufti for "varieties of one-world thinking" (5).

the world literary space.[4] This "instituted perspective" follows Fredric Jameson's conceptualisation of singular modernity that *in theory* accommodates plurality and the contradictory "amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms" (432). In practice, however, the complexity of different overlapping systems of cultural production, ideas of literature, literary practices and tastes, social positions and networks of literati and audiences; of mediating technologies as different as oral performance, small-scale, commercial and activist publishing, radio and now the new technologies; of the role of state and non-state institutions, the proximate and distant networks of circulation of texts, people, and ideas—in other words, all the complex ways in which the "material" connects to the "imaginary" in literature and the world, to use Remo Ceserani and Lidia de Federicis' formula, get reduced to one dominant explanatory grid: "we propose… to define 'world literature' as the *literature of the world-system*—of the modern capitalist world-system that is", i.e. literature that "'registers' the (modern capitalist) world-system" (Warwick 20). Take it or leave it.

Such globalizing models emphasise structure at the expense of agency. Of course, just like other social actors, writers and orators operate in contexts where individual creativity and agency are limited by existing socio-economic structures.[5] But deterministic models like the Warwick Research Collective's or Moretti's use frameworks derived from the social sciences like world system theory to explain

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[4] Pascale Casanova begins by arguing that world is literature is "another world, whose divisions and frontiers are relatively independent of political and linguistic borders. And with its own laws, its own history, its specific revolts and revolutions; a market where non-market values are traded, within a non-economic economy; and measured, as we shall see, by an aesthetic scale of time" (75), yet her harnessing of the progress of literary fields to the historical narrative of state formation, first in Europe and then as part of empire and decolonization, means that the otherness of literary space from the binary of national-international gets lost.

[5] We acknowledge that infrastructures, class formation, social spaces and the whole apparatus (the term Brecht used, whereas Foucault used "dispositif"; see Agamben) profoundly shape cultural production. As part of our framework we do study the expansion of capitalist networks of cultural production, the role of media (the press, the radio, the internet) and institutions (theatres, universities, etc.), and the links between media and state interests or the interests of private individuals and groups. But within this framework, political-economic structure does not, alone, determine literature or literary geographies.

literary phenomena, including stylistic choices, in a way that becomes flat and reductionist. And when these analyses extend to literary production, circulation and reception across the world beyond Europe, the complexity of the literary world gets reduced to economic or political frames such as the "global capitalist system" or "empire" that inevitably encourage models of "diffusion" and "assimilation" of non-Western literatures into Western categories (Mufti) and direct attention to some literary forms (the novel, principally, or the travelogue) and away from others which, however worldly they may be, become "not-world."[6]

2. Significant geographies

Instead, we have found the late Doreen Massey's definition of space, "from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny", as the "multiplicity of stories and trajectories so far" (9) much more enabling and productive.[7]

> If space is genuinely the sphere of multiplicity, if it is a realm of multiple trajectories, then there will be multiplicities too of imaginations, theorisations, understandings, meanings. Any 'simultaneity' of stories-so-far will be *a distinct simultaneity from a particular vantage point.* (89, emphasis added)

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[6] This is partly an effect of the Anglophone turn in world literature: earlier understandings built upon the recognition of the irreducible multilingualism of the world assumed that literature in, say, Vietnamese or Hausa would also be "world", whereas in the single global perspective can Vietnamese or Hausa literature be "world"?

[7] Her take on Jameson is also relevant for us: ""My argument is that this narrative of globalisation is not spatialised. I do not mean simply that the picture is more geographically complex than usually claimed: that there is significant spatial variability, or that 'the local' consistently in one way or another reasserts itself… The argument is that criticising the historicism of that version of the story of globalisation (its unilinearity, its teleology, etc.) precisely also entails reframing its spatiality. The reconceptualization could (should) be of temporality and spatiality together" (Massey 89).

This is crucial for any understanding of the world and world literature, which systemic models instead tend to present as objective, without a vantage point.[8]

Refreshing in Massey is also the move away from a spatial understanding as primarily cartographic, which once again yokes geocriticism to linear historical narratives of modernity (and postmodernity) and scientific-cartographic advancements (Tally, Westphal, Ramachandran).

How do we untangle, and relate, these simultaneous stories, these multiple trajectories of "literature in the world and the world in literature", to paraphrase Moretti (*Atlas*)? We propose the notion of "significant geographies" as a companion to that of "multilingual locals" (Orsini "The multilingual local"). Together they allow us to theorise the multilingual complexity, the connections but also disconnect between literary phenomena, in a word the *texture* of literature in the world in a way that is not Eurocentric and does not simplify or flatten agency and categories of space and time.

By significant (as in "significant others") we mean trajectories and imaginaires that are *recurrent* and/or that that *matter* to actors and texts.[9] By "significant geographies" we mean the *conceptual*, *imaginative*, and *real* geographies that texts, authors, and language communities inhabit, produce, and reach, which typically extend outwards without (ever?) having a truly global reach. In any society

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[8] David Damrosch acknowledges vantage point, but this does not seem to pluralise/question the notion of "world literature". See our forthcoming special issue for *JWL* on "The Locations of World Literature".

[9] Recurrent aligns us with Mostern's discussion of "determination" and "articulation" in relation to identity. While retaining the concept of articulation as the ever-unfinished and in-progress production of identity, he argues that it "supplements but certainly does not displace structural determination in thinking race, class, and gender; … the rhetoric of "perhaps" and "never complete" in the discussion of the real processes of identity production serves to obscure the *persistence of specific identity positions*, which, while of course not "complete" (whatever that would mean) nevertheless could not become other than they are without a generalized rewiring of the identity-production machinery" (8, emphasis added).

and literary culture these geographies are plural—along axes of education and class, socio-textual community, religious and cultural affiliation, language, historical experience, and so on. Some are shared, and different actors accent and reaccent (Bakhtin) shared words, concepts and imaginaires, and some are specific to a group or a tradition. This plurality gets multiplied and further complicated in multilingual contexts—though our contention is that if we scratch the surface every society and literary culture *is* and has been multilingual.

"Significant geographies" underlines how "the world" is not a given but is produced by different, embodied, and located actors.[10] Unlike the neo-positivist methods of several current world theorists, the term "significant geographies" foregrounds subjectivity and positionality. It introduces a certain relativism, but it is a relativism that issues not from the macro- or meta-categories chosen by the critic/scholar but from the texts and authors; it is a point-of-view relativism based on historically concrete literary actors. What geographies are significant to *them*? Unlike the current critical language that talks about "models" and "systems" or even "laws", "significant geographies" zooms in on the "subject" of world literature. It forces to ask the question "for whom?" that puts "people" back into the "world", unsettling the static idea of the world as a disembodied abstraction.[11]

The examples we bring mostly come from our transregional and comparative project on multilingual North India, the Horn of Africa and the Maghreb, all areas that in the "world-system" model would simply qualify as peripheries or semi-peripheries in a relationship of dependence and subordination from the putative

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[10] Sartori and Moyn in their preface to *Global Intellectual History* suggest an approach that "treats the global as a native or actor's category—a concept that belongs to the archive and is itself the object of investigation, rather than as a meta-analytical category belonging to the investigator" (17)

[11] In this respect, our approach partly aligns with Laura Doyle's, who combines transnational studies with dialectical existentialism and whose focus on phenomenology provides an example of an account of the "person-in-the-world"; in "Towards a Philosophy of Transnationalism", she argues that transnational studies "opens the way to a fresh consideration of the human or existential subject of history". Her philosophical referents (Merleau-Ponty, Fanon, Althusser) stand in opposition to the positivism of rigid Marxist approaches.

metropolitan centres. But if we instead think in terms of their "significant geographies", very different, and plural, configurations appear.

For instance, the Christian highland regions of present-day Ethiopia and Eritrea, whose literary culture revolved around the religious language of Geez (related to Amharic and Tigrinya), was for centuries integrated to Eastern Christian networks of Egypt, Georgia, Armenia, the Levantine Arab countries and Greece, while the predominantly Muslim lowland regions stretching to the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean had Arabic as the language of learning and were connected with the wider Islamic world. In Morocco, the North of the country maintained strong links with the Iberian peninsula due to its proximity to Spain and the shared history of Andalus and the historical traffic of languages, ideas, people and practices. The circulation of the Arabic language was therefore linked to Spanish, Judeo-Arabic and Judeo-Spanish. In more recent times, the Spanish colonial presence in the North and South of the country from 1912 to 1956 also left a strong Hispanophile literary and popular culture, whereas the presence of the French colonial power in the Middle of Morocco encouraged literary sensibilities that were heavily influenced by French literary trends and markets but also Mashreqi (Arabic Middle Eastern) cultural practices and tastes, which have been crucial since the Nahda in the nineteenth century, a point we return to below.

The advantage of thinking of significant geographies in the plural over "world" in the singular, we suggest, is that it makes us think about *local* and *distant* geographies—imaginative or real, networks, horizons—and their interrelationship in ways that: (a) *foreground the literary,* in its multiple understandings. (b) Make us think about *actual trajectories* of texts, forms, and agents and *specific uses of spatial concepts/images,* in other words geographies that are *significant* to the actors rather than generic meta-categories such as "world" or "global". Rather, "world" becomes *one* of these *locally* produced concepts. (c) Highlight *multiplicity, openness, and disjuncture,* and discourage easy "technologies of recognition" and complacent "distant gazes" (Shih).

Significant geographies allows us to avoid the binary of local vs global but also the Chinese boxes view of local-regional-national-global, the traditional comparative literature view that takes the nation (and national language) as foundational, and any idea of area as culturally autonomous.[12] It also allows us to trace the trajectories, loops, and *imaginaires* within both cosmopolitan and vernacular languages without thinking that the world belongs primarily to the former.

2.1 Conceptual geographies

Conceptual geographies include the geographical concepts and grids that people work with. Grids such as the "seven climes" or the "nine islands" of Hindu cosmography persist through long expanses of time and often over wide stretches of space, and remain "encrusted" even when new conceptions are grasped. Against the implicit equivalence of modernity with the cartographic and scientific imagination of the world taking over and replacing other grids (Ramachandran), it seems more appropriate to see how competing cosmographies (which are often cosmogonies) coexist in people's minds and surface in texts, and what specific *meanings* plurality takes. Two examples can clarify this point. In the first example from Abu'l Fazl 16c Mughal compendium *Ā'īn-e Akbarī*, plurality signifies the acknowledgement but also command of the local-and-cosmopolitan Indian Persophone intellectual at the centre of the Mughal imperial project over the knowledge of "Indian philosophers":

> For example, Indian philosophers conclude that the whole globe (*kurra-yi zamīn*) comprises seven islands and seven seas, the whole area measuring 7,857,750 *yojana*s. 1. *Jambu dwipa* is an island surrounded by the ocean, and is where

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[12] Though this is a view of Area Studies that nobody working in Area Studies subscribes to.

humans and most animals live. […] The learned have divided the inhabited earth (*ma'mūra*) in seven parts and called each of them *iqlīm*. Some think it begins from the Equator, as Ptolemy showed… An *iqlīm* is a line on the surface of the earth between two halves parallel to each other and to the equator…

(Khan 338)

In a late 18c Indian version of the Persian global geographical genre of the *Seven Climes* or *Haft iqlīm*, plurality signifies the desire to insert oneself in a hallowed cosmopolitan tradition *while* showing that one's knowledge is up to date. Murtaza Husain Bilgrami follows the traditional scheme of the seven climes while populating the Indian clime, and his particular part of India, disproportionately with respect to the others parts. He then adds knowledge about the "new" continents:

Now I will write about the conditions of the seven climes, and after that according to the new scholars, in particular [Kobarkuyash?], the scholar who has divided the world into four parts and has named every part, i.e. Europe, which is a foreign expression, and the other parts—Asia and Africa are known from the Seven Climes and previous scholars did establish them. The fourth part is called America, which is an expression from the new world. Now the foreigners *[ahl-i firang]* have enquired into it with great effort and have reached there and chosen to live there. For this reason I will write about it at length after I the description of the old seven climes in a chapter that comes from Captain Jonathan Scott… (Bilgrami 4)

Even when the cosmography of the globe and the continents became the "legitimate knowledge" in the Indian classroom, its contours remain uneven, with some areas and people strongly in evidence and others left out completely. In this article on

"The Story of the Globe" (1917) for a Hindi girls' periodical, by Prempyari Devi glosses over colonialism to emphasise the common "Aryan" racial dissent (and, to keep to the her ethnological language, leaves out any "Semitic" race).

> Come, let's look at a map of the world. We can see several large pieces of land. One piece is called the continent of Africa, the second the Australian continent, the third the American continent, and the fourth is comprised of Asia and Europe. Our country, Hindustan, which is also called the country of Bharat, the region of Bharat, or merely Bharat, is in the southern part of Asia. Asia houses many people—not only from Asia but also from Europe. These people belong to the Aryan race… (Nijhavan 113)

In fact Asia, which became an important conceptual geographical marker for Indian intellectuals from the mid-nineteen century onwards, maintained very uneven contours: sometimes it meant China, sometimes Japan, with little in-between (Saaler and Szpilman).

Conceptual geographies are useful to keep in mind for their role in the socio-political imaginaire and because they do crop up in literary texts. In the next example, from the Pakistani Urdu novel *Basti* (1979) by Intizar Husain, cosmological plurality arguably conveys nostalgia for a plural society and cultural imaginaire left behind. In the almost mythical small town of Rupnagar, the young protagonist hears two stories explaining earthquakes. The local renunciant Bhagatji narrates that the earth is standing on the hood of the mythical snake Shesh, who is supported by a snake. Every time the tortoise moves and Shesh quivers, the earth shakes. The second story is the one he overhears from his grandfather, a Muslim scholar, according to which the earth stands on Mont Qaf, which is surrounded by seven earths, which are surrounded by a snake surrounded by another snake. Underneath

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the earths is a cow and they are supported on two of its four thousand horns. Every time a mosquito bothers the cow and it moves, there is an earthquake. While Abba-jan's Islamic cosmology sounds more authoritative and Islamic, it is not that different or less fantastic than Bhagat-ji's in the mind of the child.

To give another example, the non-linear geographical and intellectual connectivity offered by pan-Arabism across the Arab East and North Africa since the Nahda in late nineteenth century has been crucial in forming the diverse intellectual history of this Arabic-speaking region. Based on the idea of a common language and a shared cosmopolitan culture and heritage, the conceptual significant geography of pan-Arabism has allowed generations of Arabic-speaking people to express cultural and political solidarity and a strong sense of community that transcends national, communal and religious boundaries. A well-known song written in the 1930s by the Syrian poet Fakhri al-Baroudi (1887-1966) expresses this real and imagined geography of Arabism:

Arabs' homeland is my country

From al-Sham [Greater Syria] to Baghdad

From Najd [Saudi Arabia's central desert] to Yemen

From Egypt to Tetouan [in Morocco]

No one can separate us

Religion would not divide us

The tongue of dha [Arabic uniquely contains the letter dha] brings us together since Ghassan and Adnan [ancient fathers of the Arabs]

We had a civilisation and we are going to revive it

Even if the devils of man and genes stood against us

Come on my people

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Climb the glory by acquiring knowledge

And sing my people "Arabs' homeland is my country"

Arabs' homeland is my country

From al-Sham to Baghdad.[13]

This conceptual geography of imagined and real pan-Arabism differs from and in fact critiques the ideology of pan-Arabism imposed from above by the postcolonial Arab States seeking political and popular legitimacy in the 1950s and 60s, an ideology that turned out to be authoritarian and oppressive. This resilient cultural imaginary of pan-Arabism has lived on even after the end of its State-imposed equivalent in the 1970s thanks to its power to link Arabic-speaking people through cultural expression and social and political solidarity. As al-Baroudi's poem shows, it is embodied in a shared cosmopolitan heritage that is linked to language and that transcends enclosed national communities to embody wider geographies of influence and cultural circulation.

But this pan-Arabism also provided a conceptual space to escape the control of repressive Arab States through cultural solidarity: pan-Arab literary journals such as *Al Adab* (*Literature*), founded in 1952 by the Lebanese writer Suhail Idriss; *Al Shi'r* (*Poetry*) founded in 1958 by the Syrian/Lebanese poet Yusuf Al-Khal; *Mawakif* (*Positions*) founded in 1968 by the Syrian poet Adonis; *Gallery 68*, founded by the Egyptian writer Edward Al Kharrat in 1968, and the bilingual (French/Arabic) literary Journal *Souffles/Anfas,* founded by the Moroccan novelist and poet Abdellatif Laabi in 1966, all promoted avant-garde and experimental literary, critical and cultural debates across the Arabic speaking region. The Moroccan critic and novelist

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[13] "The Language of pan-Arabism" in Al-Jazeera, 28 January 2008. https://www.aljazeera.com/focus/arabunity/2008/01/20085251855193820.html (accessed 15 December 2017).

Mohamed Berrada shows how this conceptual pan-Arabist significant geography worked for him in his memoir *Mithla Saifin lan Yatakarrar* (*Like a Summer Never to be Repeated*, 2001) about his five-year stint in Cairo as a student of Arabic literature in the early 1950s. These years, which were also the last years of colonialism in Morocco, were pivotal in his intellectual formation. Cairo was then the hub of new literary movements in the Arab world, and there Berrada met most of the pioneering Arab writers, poets and novelists, such as Naguib Mahfouz, Mikael Nuaima, Mahmoud Al Masaadi, Yousef Idriss, Suhail Idriss, Ahmed Abas, and Salah Jahin, among others. There, too, a wealth of Arabic literary journals (see above) connected Cairo with Beirut, Damascus, Baghdad, Paris and London in a way that suggested a new Nahda or awakening in Arabic critical and literary production at the time. In his memoir, Berrada embeds his personal journey in Cairo within the larger history of cultural pan-Arabism; he dwells at length on how the stifling co-optation of intellectuals by Nasser's socialism in the 1960s made Cairo no longer the centre of cultural pan-Arabism, which shifted in the next four decades to other Arab capitals such as Beirut, Damascus, Baghdad, Tunis and Rabat.

2.2 Imaginative Geographies

While conceptual geographies are important to literature, imaginative geographies are the spaces that literary texts (and we take "text" here in the widest possible sense) give access to. Most tales in early modern Hindi drew upon a generic pool of what we may call "epic-puranic" characters and toponyms (the Mahabharata heroes, capital cities like Ujjain, Indraprastha, regions like Gaur/Bengal or islands like Lanka/Singhaldip, Indra's heaven, the netherworld, etc.) or they sent their heroes and listeners to imaginary "otherplaces" with symbolic overtones, like Kanchanpur "the City of Gold" or Chitbisarau "Forgetfulness of Mind". The distinction between

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distant toponyms (Lanka, Kashi/Banaras, Gaur/Bengal for the Rajasthani tale of Bhartrihari) and imaginary "otherplaces" is in many ways a faint one since both are fabled and remote, and real places become "storied" when e.g. they bear the marks of the epic-puranic-folktale heroes' passing (Gold). Again the emphasis on plurality is useful. In her forthcoming book on Lanka and the exilic imagination, Ronit Ricci draws out the different, overlapping meanings of Sri Lanka for Malays—it was the island where Ravan had kidnapped Sita in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the place where Adam had first set foot on earth in Quranic tradition, and also the location where the British exiled Malay princes, leading to the coining of a verb, "to be ceyloned" (*diselongaké*), to mean to be exiled (Ricci forthcoming). For the 16c North Indian Sufi poet Malik Muhammad Jayasi, who was also clearly aware of the Ramayana story, Lanka was the birthplace of his heroine Padmavati.

2.3 Real Geographies

Finally, by "real" geographies we understand those places and trajectories that carry special meaning for individuals and groups. These may include (a) places of origin or of residence of other members of one's extended clan—memorialized in family histories or in one's name (*nisba*), kept alive through correspondence, memory, or marriage (Ho); (b) itineraries of travel, pilgrimage, migration, or trade; (c) and the actual reach and circulation of texts, languages, tastes (e.g. de Bruijn and Busch). This has two implications. First, that instead of valuing only certain kinds of circulation and reception as "world", we argue that, to take once more the case of North India, the multiple trajectories of devotional groups, literate elites in the Mughal empire, and later within and across the British empire and Princely States—but also of Indian traders in Central Asia, the coolie diaspora in the Indian Ocean/West Indies, and the labour migration within India—are all "significant" and cannot and should not be

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easily subsumed into a generic meta-category "world." Second and connected to this, to privilege the translation of a text into English or French as marking entry into "world literature" is problematic, since it may not have been so "significant" after all, or may be actively invisibilized.

3. Questions of method

How can we work with "significant geographies"? This section identifies seven approaches or levels of analysis while the next shows an example of how to combine spatiality and temporality. In line with the "strong programme of cultural sociology", we start from the "thick description" of texts and move then to other levels of analysis. We suggest that in order to "do world literature", in other words to think seriously about the worldliness of texts and the life of literature in the world, we need to acknowledge that all these levels come into play even when we practically pursue only one or two. As is clear, the model here is not one of Chinese boxes, in which the largest box ("the world") includes all the others, but rather a question of angle, level, and scale.

The first level is *within the text*: it includes geographies within the text, both objective (for lack of a better term) geographies (setting, narrator's descriptions, characters moving in space), subjective geographies (character's worldviews), and the implicit geographies (terms, "traces" of other locals in the narration, for example traces of other languages, hints to different traditions, e.g. Abu'l Fazl and Husain above). This perspective mostly uses literary theory: stylistics, textual criticism, narratology, prosody, lexical choices, and so on.

The second level engages with *more than one text* in what we may call a static approach and involves tracing how objective, subjective and implicit geographies change from one text to the next in the *oeuvre* of a single author (e.g. Marzagora). Here

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we can work with the concept of "mental map", which suggests that an individual's conceptualization of space is not based on the physical geography she inhabits but on the individual's own locally- and historically-constructed understanding of her own life world in terms of intangible constructs such as culture, religion, civilisation, and modernity (Jameson "Cognitive mapping", Henrikson). Or, expanding the focus, how geographies change in texts produced in the same period and place (Moretti *Atlas*), or perhaps published by the same publisher (e.g. Caneda, Mani). This is a "classic" comparative literature approach: it considers more than one text and compares their internal characteristics.

The third level follows the *movement of literary texts in space and time*, what we may call a dynamic approach: translations, for example, or what happens to an African play adapted for a London audience as opposed to an audience in Accra. The focus is still on the text but more specifically on how its identity changes as it moves in time, space, and across languages, as in Isabel Hofmeyr's excellent *The Portable Bunyan*.

The fourth level expands this point by looking at one or more literary texts or genres *in the context of either print culture, oral cultures, or their interrelation*. Here on will analyse the relationship between texts created with aesthetic purposes (texts that constitute "genres" coded as different from normal speech) and texts that aren't. This approach forces us to ask questions about the anthropology of genres and the specific meanings of literature, highlighting cross cultural variations in definition and understanding (Barber, Newell *Literary Culture*).

The fifth level engages with the *author's biography or the author as a historical figure*: did they travel? Did they know more than one language? Which other writers and traditions were they influenced by? Did they develop relationships with other writers or writers' associations? How did the period's "significant geographies" shape their lives and oeuvre? How did their background (race, gender, age, class, religion)

inform their "worldscapes"? Here the approach becomes more historical and draws from intellectual history (e.g. Thornber).

From here on we can draw from semiotic theories and consider a text within the social and cultural context and the whole communication circuit. Thus the sixth approach focuses on the production of *geographies at the level of reception*. How are significant geographies formed at the level of the reception and are new meanings and categories created in the process, particularly in multilingual contexts? What kind of influence do literary audiences exercise on the circulation of texts? To take multilingual Morocco as an example, what determines the language choice for bi-lingual writers? The historian, critic, and novelist Abdellah Laroui, who writes his critical texts in French and his novels in Arabic, recognises that his critical and philosophical texts are likely to be ignored in the Arab-speaking Mashreq, or Middle East, but will be appreciated by Europeans. In fact, it is the European interest in his critical texts, he notes, that always triggers interest from the Mashreq in his ideas—as was the case of his seminal book *L'Idéologie Arabe Contemporaine* (1967, translated into Arabic in 1970 see Kilito 42). Here, the power of European academe and literary markets, as well as colonial legacies in the Arab-speaking Maghreb and Mashreq, are crucial in mediating cultural circulation and reception.

The seventh level involves the analysis of the *apparatus of cultural production* and literary institutions at each location. This is where cultural sociology becomes particularly relevant (e.g. Sapiro, Casanova, Lovell, Brouillette). Here we ask: what are the networks of production, sale and commodification that sustain literary products? In what ways are these systems unequal? What is the economy of literary prizes? How are literature and multilingualism taught in schools? Which institutions act as "gatekeepers", and how are canons formed?

For an example of how the different levels of analysis can be fruitfully combined, let us take the recent novel *Taaribat al Abdi Al mashhour beweld al hamriya* (*The Journey of ʾAbdi, known as the Son of Hamriya,* 2013), by Moroccan novelist

Abdelrahim Lahbibi, which intriguingly resurrects a less told significant geography of Morocco predating the modern nation state. In the novel, sub-Saharan Africa is presented as a fundamental component of the country's culture and history. His meta-fictional narrative follows a young scholar who, in a flea market in the "peripheral" city of Asafi, stumbles upon an anonymous 19c manuscript or travelogue (*makhtut*) by a non-elite Moroccan religious scholar who travels to "seek knowledge" and understand the reasons for the decay of the Islamic Umma. The literary cartography of the novel re-imagines sub-Saharan Africa as a "significant geography" for Morocco and its position as part of the wider Islamic Umma. It also opens temporally to wider literary affiliations and geographies, particularly by drawing heavily on classical Arabic poets such as al-Mutanabbi (d.965 CE), once again reinstating the strong cultural bonds between Morocco, Africa and the Arabo-Islamic world. This new novelistic revisiting of Africa arguably comes at a time when the Moroccan regime led by King Mohamed VI has been heavily investing in the last decade in renewing economic, historical and cultural ties with Africa after leaving the African Union in 1984 in a row over the status of Western Sahara. This rapprochement is not only a diplomatic and economic move to secure the position of Morocco within the African Union and promote pan-African economic expansion, but is also a cultural move that claims Africa to be the "home" of Morocco and hence promotes close cultural ties and collaborations.[14] Therefore, one can read Lahbibi's novel within this discourse of rediscovering Morocco's cultural and historical ties with Africa.

4. "Always historicize"

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[14] In his Speech to the African union after re-joining the African Union on the 31st of January 2017, King Mohamed VI stated that "It is so good to be back home, after having been away for too long! It is a good day when you can show your affection for your beloved home! Africa is my continent, and my home." https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2017/01/207060/full-speech-king-mohammed-vi-28th-african-union-summit/

Heeding Massey's call that "reconceptualization could (should) be of temporality and spatiality together" (89), let us finally consider the coexisting trajectories in multilingual north India between the late 18c and the early 20c. Did colonialism and the arrival of "global capital" entail the transformation of (north) India into a semi-periphery of imperial London and a position of "stable subordination" in literary terms (Moretti "Evolution", Casanova)? Did Orientalism under colonialism effect the "assimilation of heterogeneous and dispersed bodies of writing onto the plane of equivalence and evaluability that is literature" (Mufti)? Is this period best read through the "impact of Western literature (and specifically of the novel) and Indian response" (Das, Moretti)? If we look at colonialism from a located and multilingual pro, 18c perspective rather than from the global gaze of the imperial meridian, what comes into view that is normally occluded?[15]

First of all, in the writings of Indo-Persian and increasingly Urdu intellectuals, we see an eastward shift. The Mughal capital Delhi remains important (and as Katherine Schofield has argued, Delhi is wherever the emperor is, i.e. for much of the 18c physically in Allahabad), but they move increasingly towards Bengal and Calcutta, or loop through Calcutta to return into north India under increasingly East India Company (EIC) control. Paradoxically, we can speak of the Persian memorialiation of Banaras under the aegis of the EIC at the turn of the 19c.

Second, literary histories tend to view the writing and printing of textbooks at the EIC Fort William College as the beginning of literary modernity in north Indian languages, but apart from the technologies of print and prose, if we look at the kind of texts printed, these were in fact older genres and tales. As a result, while we tend to think of colonial Calcutta and Lucknow under the Nawabs as belonging to different

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[15] These examples are discussed in greater detail in Orsini's essays "Whose Amnesia", "Between Qasbas and Cities", and "Present Absence".

historical and literary epochs and struggle to think of them as coeval, there was a healthy textual traffic back and forth between the two, and a decided *continuity* between "older" Persian and "modern" Urdu literary tastes.

While Persian publishing from Calcutta and then Lucknow (the famed Newal Kishore Press) reached out to Iran, Calcutta also became a centre of Arabic scholarship and publishing (Das *Sahibs*). As Simon Leese is showing, the 19c literary networks of scholars and texts between Calcutta, Lucknow, Bhopal, Cairo, and Istanbul overlay and expanded older networks between the Hejaz, Yemen, and the Deccan (see also Alavi). Later in the 19c, the partial cultural reorientation from Persian towards Arabic and modern Turkey by Indian Muslim reformers, who rejected Persian poetry as decadent and corrupting, became very important for historical poems and novels, which expressed nostalgia for al Andalus and sent their heroes to fight along the Ottomans in the Russo-Turkish war.

As Aamir Mufti has powerfully argued, Orientalist scholarship and translations, particularly by the Asiatic Society of Bengal coming out of Calcutta and read avidly in London and Europe in the late 18c, rendered the whole idea of "world literature" possible in the first place. But whereas he argues, as we saw, that the orientalist "reorganization of language, literature, and culture … effected the assimilation of heterogeneous and dispersed bodies of writing onto the plane of equivalence and evaluability that is literature" (57), we are more interested in the exclusions and erasures that were effected rather than in the assimilation. So if the import of staggering numbers of books in Sanskrit and in other Indian languages into Europe in the 1860s-70s, enabled by the Orientalist fever, the boom in the comparative study of languages, and the imperial-capitalist improvements in transcontinental transport, seemed to turn the *idea* of world literature into a *reality*, at the same time the whole Perso-Urdu literary tradition and the booming modern literature in Indian languages *became invisible* in this traffic. Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Marathi books arrived in Europe, but they were not "seen", acknowledged, and read as *literature*, and

certainly not as the modern Indian contribution to world literature (Orsini "Present Absence"). "Indian literature" remained *only* Sanskrit (and occasionally Pali) literature. We must conclude that the "assimilation" was very partial indeed and there was a great "production of ignorance" at the same time.

Interestingly, whereas "world literature" at the time seemed to give space to Asian literature as ancient classics, Eastern literature appears to have been a much more flexible and capacious category, if also unstable and harbouring pseudo-translations of non-existing texts. The Istanbul-Parisian Adolphe Thalasso's 1907 *Anthologie de l'Amour Asiatique* included translations from Afghan, Altai, Anatolia, Annamese, Armenian, Baluchi, Birmanian, Cambodian, Chinese, "Circassian", Daghestani, Georgian, Hindustani (Urdu), Japanese, Kafiri, Kazakh, Kurdish, Kirgiz, Korean, Manchurian, Mongolian Nepali, Persian, Siamese, Syrian and Tatar poems (!). E. Powys Mathers' 12-volume anthology *Eastern Love* (1928-30) drew heavily on Thalasso but also included the Maghreb in the "East" while leaving out Central Asia, the Caucasus, Persian and Hindustani. Interestingly, it was Powys Mathers' early 20c translations that travelled back to India and allowed the Urdu poet Miraji to imagine and bring world poetry to his Urdu readers as "Poems from the East and West" (Orsini "From Eastern Love").

These significant geographies can multiply further. Work on the Indian Ocean and the coolie diaspora has highlighted the circulation of musical and textual forms that Indian coolies brought with them and recreated in their new environments (Servan-Schreiber). Finally, we must mention the great success of Indian commercial Parsi theatre in the Malay world (Hansen), from British Penang and Singapore to independent Sultanate of Johor and Sumatra and Borneo in the Dutch East Indies. "Almost everywhere Parsi troupes went, it seems, the theatre exerted a powerful attraction" (Cohen 318), and new commercial musical theatres emerged in imitation of the successful "Parsi theatre formula", adding local instruments and stories. This circulation built on familiarity created by the older traffic of Persianate texts into

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Malay (Braginsky and Suvorova) yet greatly exceeded it. It belongs more precisely to what Stephanie Newell has called the "paracolonial" (para as "*beside* and also *beyond*"), a useful neologism "if one wishes simultaneously to acknowledge the effects of colonialism and also to displace the Eurocentric and deterministic periodization of culture and history in the colonies as being precolonial, colonial and postcolonial" (Newell "Paracolonial" 350)

Conclusions

Not all these geographies and trajectories were significant for everyone—they were clearly differentiated by language, community, cultural memory, class and caste, habitus and personal history. They were clearly also not static but changed with changing historical circumstances and experiences, yet it would be difficult to fit them all within a single explanatory paradigm, be it empire or global capitalism, though of course empire and capitalism are crucial to many of them. So while this is for Moretti the "second *Weltliteratur*", unified by global capital, and it "shows a growing, and at times stunning amount of sameness and its main mechanism of change is convergence" (Moretti "Evolution" 115), what we see is an overlay of older significant geographies and tastes with new ones created by, but also exceeding, empire. We see European notions of "natural language", "national language" and "useful" and "natural literature", and of course the lyric and the novel, having a profound impact, but also producing a substantial *gap* between ideas one the one side and practices and tastes on the other. We also see the production of new genres that are best called "paracolonial", like commercial Parsi theatre. While older traditions, popular tastes and multilingualism itself become problematic in the eyes of reformers and nationalists, they stubbornly refuse to go away.

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If we think through "significant geographies" and Massey's notion of space as "the simultaneity of stories and trajectories", instead of the cartographic activities of *slotting, fitting, flattening* and *simplifying*, we attend to the tensions, the exclusions and erasures, the multiplicity of trajectories, the irreducibly partial nature of each gaze and the exploratory and unfinished nature of our mapping.

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