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The multilingual local in world literature

Francesca Orsini (SOAS University of London)

Abstract

This essay questions the geographical categories used to underpin current theoretical and methodological approaches to “world literature,” which end up making nine tenths of the world, and of literature produced in the world, drop off the world map or appear “peripheral.” Focusing on the multilingual north Indian region of Awadh in the early modern period, it argues that an approach to literature and space that takes multilingualism within society and literary culture as a structuring and generative principle and holds *both* local *and* cosmopolitan perspectives in view is more productive for world literature than approaches based only on cosmopolitan perspectives of circulation and recognition.

Keywords

world literature, mapping, multilingual, multilingual literary culture, north India, Hindi, Indo-Persian.

This essay stems from a discomfort with the geographical categories used to underpin current theoretical and methodological approaches to “world literature,” and with their implications.¹ “World literature,” a famously slippery, apparently expansive yet surprisingly narrow category, has been much theorized and re-theorized in recent years as comparative literature for the global age, with one foot in the US university curriculum and the other in theories of globalization. Yet as it moves out of the Euro-American “core” of earlier comparative literature to the Asian-African-Latin American “peripheries,” its theoretical approaches based on world space, system-theory, diffusion, and circulation produce pictures of literary culture in global “peripheries” that are unrecognizable, and impossibly limited when not distorted, to those of us who specialize in those regions (e.g. d’Haen). “World literature” excitingly spurs all of us to look out of our areas and consider wider trajectories of production, circulation, and recognition, but why does it so often get the rest of the world so wrong?² Why does it feel like it imprisons non-Western literatures in categories, timelines, and explanations that do not fit, rather than genuinely interrogating them?

Precisely because geography is so crucial to world literature it is imperative that we think carefully about the geographical categories that we use. And if the problem with current approaches to world literature for people like me rooted in the literature of a non-western region is that they end up making nine tenths of the world, and of literature produced in the world, drop off the map entirely or appear hopelessly “peripheral,” then my impulse is to think that it is the categories that are being used that are at fault. But what imagination of space will work better for and stimulate us to think more productively and imaginatively about literature in the world? Are mapping and circulation beyond the original language/literary culture the only way?³ Do local forms really tell us *nothing* about world literature?⁴

In this essay I first review the categories of space within current models of world literature before work through an understanding that I have found much more stimulating and productive for this purpose, geographer Doreen Massey’s argument in For Space (2005). I focus on one particular case, the multilingual north Indian region of Awadh in the early modern period, to argue that an approach to literature and space that takes multilingualism within society and literary culture as a structuring and generative principle and holds both local and cosmopolitan perspectives in view is more likely to produce “modest and accurate accounts” of world literature than approaches based only on

cosmopolitan perspectives of circulation and recognition.⁵ While approaches based on single-language archives often tend to reproduce the literary and social biases of each archive, a multilingual approach is inherently comparative and relativizing; it highlights authors' and archives' strategies of distinction, affiliation and/or exclusion and makes us look for what other stories and actors existed; and it shows which particular geographies—real and imaginary—were significant for each set of authors, genres in each languages (I suggest the term “significant geographies”) instead of positing a generic “world” or “global” elsewhere to which only very few had access. While multilingual literary cultures are rarely (if ever) so fully interconnected as to be literary systems, their codes and trajectories help us think about local and “global” in more complex and yet accurate ways.

For example, we will see how learning and connections enabled literati (adibs in Persian, kavis and pandits in Sanskrit and Hindi) to claim membership in an ideal republic of letters that could be actualized through travel, patronage, friendships, and meetings. Thus one could be a local cosmopolitan or a world-travelled one. Tracing variations in textual inscription will reveal the difference between local and distant gazes, how location matters, and how cosmopolitan genres could be used to score local points. Further, a multilingual approach to narrative spaces allows us to follow the circulation and transcodification of

motifs, imaginaries, and forms across languages and literary domains, from oral folk to literary Hindavi, Persian, Sanskrit, and viceversa, and the work that non-mimetic descriptions of places performed.⁶ For all these reasons, the multiplicity and richness of multilingual literary work, and the very unwieldiness of the multilingual literary archive, offer both a challenge and an opportunity—to think about the relationship between local and wider geographies, to posit plurality without necessarily pluralism, to discern general trends without by-passing the need to figure out each individual instantiation, to observe hierarchies without necessarily following them.

Though I present a particular case, literary cultures have indeed been multilingual in most parts of the world since the second millennium, with repertoires of genres in each language that did or did not overlap and circulated along partly shared but often divergent geographies (see below).⁷ Literacy, manuscript and oral technologies of production, circulation and performance, and the relative status and access to languages were all important factors in the life of these literary cultures, for which orature offers a more encompassing term (Ngugi, Barber). Colonialism brought in new languages, literary forms, and hierarchies of taste and new “significant geographies,” but to think that Asia and Africa became literary peripheries of Europe is to grossly oversimplify the matter. Even in regions under direct colonial domination, the culture of colonial

modernity was more eclectic, unruly, and unpredictable than narratives of colonial influence would have us believe. In the case of India, a few Indian intellectuals may have been “crushed by English poetry” (Chandra), but all around them theatre cultures, print culture and commercial publishing, poetic and musical tastes, even actual novel writing and reading, tell a very different story. What is at stake in this essay, then, is not some utopian vision of the world of letters but “a more modest, and honest” account of literature in the world.

Mapping world literature: world-system, Greenwich meridian, scale

What is problematic about the way in which space is currently considered in world literature?⁸ Let’s review the three most influential approaches—by Pascale Casanova, Franco Moretti (2000, 2003, 2006), and David Damrosch (2003 and 2006). Both Casanova and Moretti work on the assumption that there exists, in fact, one single and integrated world literary space, visualized as a single world literary map with clear centres and peripheries on which difference is marked both spatially and temporally. Moretti draws on Immanuel Wallerstein’s “world-system” theory to argue that the onset of capitalism and European empires reduced the many independent local/regional spaces of literature to just three positions—core, periphery and semi-periphery—in hierarchical relationship to

each other. While initially Moretti's ideas on world literature were shaped by his theory of the diffusion of the European novel in the world (2003), more recently he has suggested that the "object" of world literature is best theorized through a combination of (a) evolutionary theory to explain the proliferation and diffusion of forms before the integrated world-system, and (b) world-system theory.

Drawing on Wallerstein, he posits:

Two distinct world literatures: one that precedes the eighteenth century — and one that follows it. The 'first' Weltliteratur is a mosaic of separate, 'local' cultures; it is characterized by strong internal diversity; it produces new forms mostly by divergence; and is best explained by (some version of) evolutionary theory. The 'second' Weltliteratur (which I would prefer to call world literary system) is unified by the international literary market; it shows a growing, and at times stunning amount of sameness; its main mechanism of change is convergence; and is best explained by (some version) of world-system analysis. (Moretti 2006, 120, emphasis added)

In a footnote Moretti acknowledges that:

Speaking of 'local' cultures does not exclude the existence of large regional systems (Indo-European, East Asian, Mediterranean, Meso-American, Scandinavian...), which may even overlap with each other, like the eight thirteen-century circuits of Janet Abu-Lughod's Before European Hegemony. But these geographical units are not yet stably subordinated to single center like the one that emerged in eighteenth-century France and Britain. (Moretti 2006, 120)

The crucial phrase in his formulation is "not yet," which read in conjunction with the "stunning amount of sameness" implies not just chronology but creeping teleology. To paraphrase, "local" or "regional" literary cultures existed before the eighteenth-century and the most extensive reach of European colonialism but since then European economic and political economic domination has entailed the cultural hegemony and "stable subordination" in literary terms of the rest of the world. Since then, "local" or "regional" literary cultures can be understood in terms of variations on the same pattern. But which sameness? And who is producing it here? Have at least three decades of rethinking the nature of modernity and its relation to globalization, of "provincializing Europe" and its narrative of modernity really left no trace?

This eurocentric historical narrative underpins also Casanova's ambitious and impressive book, still the only attempt to systematically connect and account for world literature on a world scale and as such holding great authority in this growing field. Casanova systematically applies Pierre Bourdieu's agonistic notion of "field" and his teleological model of the evolution of the French literary field towards autonomy to every other literary field, and to relations between national fields within the agon of world literature.⁹ In this model, "cultural accumulation" first allowed the literary vernacular to establish itself over the old cosmopolitan language (I will return to this competitive model of vernacularization below), and gradually accrued to the vernacular literary field as inherited "literary capital." Literary capital then makes a literature more and more "autonomous" and dominant vis-à-vis other literatures, so that "peripheral" and "newer" literatures both draw upon the older and more established literary literatures, seek recognition from their "centres," and rebel against them in a strategy of self-assertion.¹⁰

In this vision of literary fields, space is defined as "a set of interconnected positions, which must be thought and described in relational terms" both nationally and internationally: "each writer is situated according to the position he or she occupies in a national space, then once again according to the place he or she occupies within the world space" (Casanova, 73). But these are presented

as fixed positions on a single surface or map. Casanova draws explicitly on a cartographic imagination when she speaks of a “Greenwich-meridian of world literature” (75), a single space-time axis on the world literary map that determines how close or far each literary work and field is to the supposed centre of world literature, which is also the now. As in Fredric Jameson’s memorable statement that “we” perceive “Third-World authors” to “still write like Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson” (Jameson, 65), difference is translated into delay.¹¹

Moreover, positing the existence of a single, inter-connected world literary space allows Casanova to claim that there is one Great Game in which all writers participate and a single universal currency of literary value. Her premiss that every literary field tends towards autonomy and the use of neutral terms like “literary resources” produce a significant slippage: suddenly what is a perfectly reasonable argument about international/world recognition turns into a dubious one about global literary value, though couched in sympathetic terms of a struggle between “dominated” and “dominant.”¹²

Mapping is Moretti’s favourite spatialising gesture, too:

[G]eography is not an inert container, is not a box where cultural history “happens,” but an active force, that pervades the literary field and shapes

it in depth. Making the connection between geography and literature explicit, then—mapping it: because a map is precisely that, a connection made visible... (Moretti 1998, 3, emphasis added)

Indeed cartography seems more generally to be the first technology literary scholars reach out to when they seek to spatialise literature. But whereas exercises in specific mapping – like Moretti’s own Atlas of the European Novel (1998) – are self-conscious and careful about the terms and categories they use, when it comes to world maps such self-consciousness evaporates. The healthy skepticism of cartographers and geographers (Monmonier 1995 and 2005, Krampton and Krygier) and their alertness to the geo-political and economic underpinnings of map-making are nowhere in sight. On these seemingly transparent world maps it becomes indeed very easy to mark centers and peripheries, and even to draw a Greenwich meridian of literary time-space.¹³ So while Moretti thinks of a map not as an inert container, inert space is what this kind of world mapping produces, with significant implications for the way we understand space, time, and history. Other places, people, cultures appear simply as phenomena ‘on’ this surface, awaiting discovery. As Massey puts it, “Immobilised, they... lie there, on space, in place, without their own trajectories. Such a space makes it more difficult to see in our mind’s eye the histories [they]

too have been living and producing” (4).¹⁴ Drawing a single map and setting a single timeline (what Christopher Prendergast has called the “Eurochronology” problem) are no neutral moves, as historians of cartography have pointed out. To give but one example, the bird’s eye view that the Mercator map posits is really no one’s view and yet actively obscures, through its supposed neutrality, the location of the knowledge that produced it.¹⁵

David Damrosch has championed an alternative and dynamic approach to world literature that focuses on circulation. One of his definitions of world literature is “any work that has ever reached beyond its home base,” and he continues “A work has effective life in world literature whenever, and wherever, it is actively present within another literary system beyond that of its original culture” (2006, 212).¹⁶ That the circulation (and transculturation) of texts across languages, literatures, and areas should be a major area of research for world literature is beyond doubt. What to me is problematic in this formulation is the implication that what does not circulate, or is not translated, is not part of world literature. “Literature” is an archive as well as a current state of play.¹⁷ In the context of literary history and of the current world publishing market (on which more in a moment), this formulation also places too great a burden, and too high a hope, on the ability of translation to make a work circulate. If the work does *not*

circulate even after it gets translated—the implication is—it must be because it does not stand on its own in the eyes of “world readers” (on whom more below). Again by implication, if the world system is indeed one, then what is not translated, or what does not travel even after it gets translated, must be somewhat deficient, speak only to local or provincial tastes, be distant in space-time from the here-now.

The idea of a global circulation of literature, like globalization, has an intuitive quality to it—it is all around us in the many world book fairs and mushrooming of literary festivals with international guests, the Nobel prize and other high-resonance literary prizes, increasingly transnational publishing conglomerates (e.g. Penguin-Random House), the crucial importance of endorsements by well-placed critics, writers, or TV personalities (“gatekeepers,” Casanova rightly calls them), and of course of translation into English or, less so now, French, the sense that there is a charmed circle of writers who have “got in,” while the others stand outside, fretting and pining. Indeed, if the idea of a world literary system works it’s in terms of world recognition—the Nobel prize, the Man Booker prize, etc. But thanks to another slippage of momentous consequence, what circulates in the so-called global market of letters becomes what world literature *is*. These are precisely what Shu-Mei Shih has identified as specific “technologies of recognition,” “mechanisms in the discursive

(un)conscious... that produce “the West” as the agent of recognition and “the rest” as the object of recognition, in representation” (260). As she points out, it is through these technologies that the literary market and the academic discourse of world literature “selectively and often arbitrarily confer world membership on literatures.”¹⁸

Take the supposed integration of the world literary market. On closer inspection it reveals all its patchiness. Though market integration is growing, the book market is still very fragmented and unpredictable (Kaczanowska). When the circuit works, it’s millions of copies and readers, but to a very large extent the business of literary publishing, particularly for translations, is still run by small, local publishers and imprints who work persistently with small margins and long-term sales. While translation is supposed to be the golden vehicle for the circulation of world literature, publishers will tell you that the market for translations is, apart from a few exceptions like Orhan Pamuk or Haruki Murakami (or currently Nordic crime fiction), a niche one.¹⁹ Like other global media events, literary festivals and book fairs with global ambition may appear part of a global continuum, but in fact construct their own complex, uneven and contested articulation of the world.²⁰ On such occasions, Bishnupriya Ghosh has shown, some “minor writers” able to transact this “new entanglement with the global” punch much above their weight, while others who appear to occupy

similar positions do not even qualify.²¹ Finally, it is difficult to read about Casanova's "world readers," those crucial "gate-keepers" of world recognition such as Valéry Larbaud, Paul Valéry and Jean-Paul Sartre without thinking that their very belief that they had "transcended" the limits of their space and time and become "universal" and thus embodied universal taste made them no less conditioned than the rest of us but only less conscious of being so, and comforted them in their beliefs and selective inattention in a way typical of cosmopolitan readers.²²

What is crucially absent from the aerial picture of global flows and circulation, is the local. Or else the local is overwhelmingly presented as produced by the global. Yet for some time now in many disciplines critics of this de-territorialized understanding of globalisation the local have theorized the local as a productive space that co-constitutes the global, whether it's Appadurai's idea of the "glocal", Dirlik's "place-based imagination" (1998 and 2001), or Gibson-Graham's deconstruction of the global/local hierarchy of discourse. Why then do world literature approaches persist in viewing any local that is not a "centre" as derivative, peripheral, unimportant? Even in pragmatic terms, it turns out that from a local perspective what circulates globally is often quite different from what is significant in the local or regional literary field:

world literature often does not incorporate local/regional or national literature but rubs shoulders with them.²³

The “map” of world literature as one world, unequal, or as constituted by the global publishing market and the reading practices that ride on it, therefore offers a very impoverished picture, and a seriously misleading one. Here my contention—following Doreen Massey—is that to critique the linearity, singularity, and inevitability of the stories of modernity and of contemporary globalization in which world literature participates entails reframing the spatiality inherent in those stories, and this is true for literature as it is for politics or economics.

Multilingual, relational, located: a different spatial imagination

Rather than ambitious or expansive models that seek to cover—and contain—the whole space of the world, approaches that explore the pluralities of space and time, hold together local and wider perspectives, work multilingually, and take in hierarchies of language and literary value but are not blinded by them seem to me the most productive and appropriate to the work of world literature. I am thinking here not only of the magisterial 3-volume Literary Cultures of Latin America edited by Mario Valdés and Djelal Kadir, but also of Luigi Margarotto

and Harsha Ram's work on the Georgian-Russian contact zone, Lital Levy's on Arab-speaking and bilingual Jewish writers and intellectuals in the Middle East, Isabel Hofmayr's on South Africa and the Indian Ocean or Karla Mallette's on Sicily and the Mediterranean, or Karen Thornber's monograph on the East Asian "literary contact nebula" that usefully deals with "readerly contact," "writerly contact" and "textual contact" between China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, and Manchuria before and during the Japanese empire. In other words, these are approaches that exemplify what I've called "significant geographies" rather than unexamined meta-geographical categories. What I offer here is another approach that complements and builds on this important body of work.

Research on literary contact zones has been stimulated by the work on colonial encounters and imperial "contact zones," though usefully directing attention beyond the usual trajectories of East-West encounter.²⁴ Yet arguably the idea of "contact zone" works precisely for cultures coming into contact—however prolonged that contact might have been. But, as contact linguists show, in many multilingual situations the different languages were both "there" and part of literary culture for centuries—think of medieval Iberia, the wider Persianate world (which included India and Georgia), the Maghreb, East Asia, the Russian empire, and the Ottoman empire with its diglossia between demotic Turkish and Ottoman (Perso-Arabic) Turkish, its vast Arabic-speaking territories,

and many other kinds of multilingual situations.²⁵ When we move from the study of languages to that of literature and culture, in many of these cases— certainly in the Indian one that I am most familiar with, to insist on terming the bilingual situation an “encounter” or a “contact zone” risks reproducing a historical consciousness that, perniciously in the case of India, views Persian and Sanskrit and Hindavi (and their speakers) as belonging to “different cultures,” only to be surprised by the amount of “contact.” For this reason, here I prefer the framework of a “multilingual local” in relation to its wider significant geographies.

Doreen Massey’s conceptualisation of space as dynamic and relational has been the most productive to think with. Her three initial propositions in *For Space* are:

First, that we recognize space as the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny... Second, that we understand space as the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity. Without space, no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space. If space is indeed the product of

interrelations, then it must be predicated upon the existence of plurality. Multiplicity and space as co-constitutive. Third, that we recognize space as always under construction... Perhaps we could imagine space as the simultaneity of stories so far. (Massey, 9, emphasis added)²⁶

One of the implications of this view is that we can understand the mutual implication and co-constitution of the local and the global only from specific vantage-points, rooted in a place but looking outward, concerned with the local and the empirical but not necessarily a-theoretically.²⁷

This is I will try to do in the rest of the essay by focusing on literary culture in early modern Awadh (now eastern Uttar Pradesh [map]): I will see its space as relational, as a plurality of stories, and as a vantage point to explore the dynamic relationship between local and cosmopolitan tastes, authors, genres and practices in vernacular and cosmopolitan languages (specifically Hindavi and Persian). Like other regions of India, Awadh was a case of “multiple diglossia” (Gallego-Garcia): with several High languages (Persian, Sanskrit, and Arabic) and a general spoken vernacular (what I call here Hindavi) written in either Persian, Kaithi, or Devanagari scripts.²⁸ Sanskrit textuality in the early modern period included ritual texts and narratives—the latter most accompanied by vernacular exposition--, a continuing production in large range of “knowledge

systems" (Pollock 2002), and courtly production of histories and poems for courtly patrons, from small rajas to Sultans and Mughal emperors (Kapadia, Trushke). In the case of Sanskrit, "low textuality" and Sanskrit-vernacular written and oral bilingualism still await systematic research, particularly for north India. Persian textual production included courtly histories, treatises and poetic genres (Persian classics were the staple of education), but also a more diffuse production and circulation of texts by local Sufis that included spiritual textbooks, biographical dictionaries, and collections of sayings, often in simple Persian that was just a step away from the vernacular (Orsini 2014). A simplified form of Persian also seems to have been one of the spoken *lingue franche*, while individuals and groups also maintained their own spoken languages (e.g. "Turki" or Pashtun) for generations.²⁹ Vernacular orature and textuality included songs and tales, often drawing upon or reworking epic-puranic materials or folk stories and motifs, until the great boom in courtly poetry and poetics (in Brajhasha) that reworked Sanskrit models that continued until the early twentieth century (Busch). When Urdu poetry developed as the vernacular reworking of Persian poetic idioms and forms (mostly *ghazal* and *masnavi*), it swept north India in the eighteenth century, and we see both Persian and Brajhasha poets trying their hands at it. Urdu developed into a fully-fledged literary culture in this period, with schools, norms, biographical dictionaries and

anthologies, poetic séances and debates (Pritchett). As heir to Persian textuality, Urdu was the main print vernacular of colonial north India, with a whole range of genres from “useful knowledge” to religion, from sophisticated poetry to popular theatre.

The genres I draw upon to explore narratives of space in Awadh at hand are (1) a *tazkira*, i.e. a biographical dictionary-cum-anthology that gives the social profiles, careers, and literary tastes of poets, Sufis, and notable men (the categories partly overlap), written in Persian though it reveals multilingual poetic practices. (2) Geographical-historical-biographical compendia (in Persian). Both genres aspired to be encyclopedic and comprehensive while of course being individually selective. And both are useful for our purpose because they explicitly relate the local to the wider world—simply by being mentioned within these encyclopedic texts in a cosmopolitan language alongside cosmopolitan individuals, local places and people become part of the wider, cosmopolitan geography, a strategy of inscription that local authors understood very well.³⁰ (3) Tales and narrative poems in Hindavi and Persian, particularly for their descriptions and introductions when they set the scene or introduce author and patron, and for the way they open to imaginary geographies; (4) Local histories (in Persian and later in Urdu).³¹ Though none of these genres that deal directly or indirectly with literature and space in Awadh can be called “mimetic,” or in fact

because they do not seek to represent mimetically places or spaces “out there,” they force us to think about the relationship between genre and space, the cultural imaginaries and discourses that are called into play, and how these get articulated in the different languages and genres and according to the location of each author and in relation to other literary taste, stories, trajectories. Particularly in such a multicultural and multilingual environment, the question of whether authors chose to mix imaginaries (or not, and why) calls for attention.

A word about Awadh. A region of “early Islamic conquest” in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Wink, vol. 2), the site of ancient empires yet still densely wooded and sparsely populated, crossed by great rivers (Ganges, Yamuna) and long-distance trade routes, Awadh had many small towns (qasbas) but no imperial capital.³² During the period of the Delhi and North Indian Sutanates (1206-1526), these towns were garrisons (lashkargah) and trade marts along the trade routes that led from Bengal to Delhi and all the way north to Afghanistan, or to Agra and south towards Gujarat; horses, precious stones, slaves, perfumes, and fine cloth were among the commodities traded (Digby). The towns were also administrative centres where Muslim elites and, increasingly, Hindu service groups cultivated Persian as the language of culture and opportunity.

But the qasbas stood isolated in a countryside largely controlled by armed chieftains in their mud forts—Hindu as well as Afghan and Turk—who provided military labour to the imperial and later East India Company armies (until the great Rebellion of 1857), competed and clashed with each other and resisted imperial extraction and subordination whenever they could (Kolff). Sufis who were given land grants in order to populate, develop, and control the territory often found themselves at the receiving end of the chieftains' raids (Alam). Unlike the Rajputs of North-Western India, these rural Hindu chieftains of Awadh were not co-opted as military/administrative officials into the Mughal empire though they occasionally did serve in the Mughal armies, and did not cultivate Persian as far as I have been able to ascertain. In the general increase of wealth in the Mughal seventeenth century they were able to garner strength and set up their own local courts, for which they began to employ poets of courtly Hindi alongside bards-cum-genealogists. Muslim "Rajas" were an ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous lot (Turkic, Afghan, Indian). Thus power in Awadh remained contested and was never completely centralised, and Persian never became completely hegemonic.³³ Paradoxically from the point of view of modern literary histories, it was Sufis who first composed literary texts in Hindavi, and it was Sultans, their local notables and later Mughal princes who first patronised courtly Hindi poets.

Hindavi and Persian (and Sanskrit and Arabic), and Awadh and Delhi (or Iran) thus allow for a multiplicity of stories, genres, and viewpoints. But I realize that by speaking of cosmopolitan and vernacular (languages) and cosmopolitan and local (orientation and/or location) I am likely to arouse confusion, so before I turn to my examples let me briefly explain how and why I use these terms in the way I do.

Cosmopolitan and vernacular, cosmopolitan and local

The boldest, and in the case of South Asia most influential, macro-historical comparative argument about cosmopolitan and vernacular—in terms of languages and polities, literary practices and socio-textual communities—has been Sheldon Pollock's. In his view:

cosmopolitan and vernacular can be taken as modes of literary (and intellectual, and political) communication directed toward two different audiences, whom lay actors know full well to be different. The one is unbounded and potentially infinite in extension; the other is practically finite and bounded by other finite audiences, with whom, through the very dynamic of vernacularization, relations of ever-increasing

incommunication come into being. We can think of this most readily as a distinction in communicative capacity and concerns between a language that travels far and one that travels little.

(2000, 593-594)³⁴

Pollock's distinction between cosmopolitan and vernacular maps onto the classic distinction between High and low languages (diglossia), according to which High languages (Sanskrit and Latin in his comparison) are markers of high culture and vehicles of higher forms of knowledge, are formally taught and accompanied by vast apparatus, and historically have been the preserve of specialist individuals and groups, while low languages are/have been used in informal, primarily spoken domains.³⁵ Pollock extends this scheme in three significant ways. First, he spatialises cosmopolitan and vernacular (though in abstract terms): the former is potentially universal while the latter travels little. Second, he links them to polities and the agency of rulers and their courts, so that empires and polities with wide ambitions choose cosmopolitan languages while vernaculars mark the emergence of regional, more bounded polities. Third, he narrates the relationship between cosmopolitan and vernacular in terms of historical supersedence, as a story of vernacularization: sometime around the end of the first millennium in central India and in western Europe "lay actors" at

more bounded courts (the Rashtrakutas' and Chaulukyas' in India, King Alfred's in England) began to employ cosmopolitan literary forms in the vernaculars.

Gradually, in a zero-sum-game, the vernaculars took over more and more of the functions of the cosmopolitan languages, a process which he now sees as faltering: "a long period of cosmopolitan literary production was followed by a vernacularity whose subsequent millennium-long ascendancy now everywhere shows signs of collapse" (2000, 595).

But when we start looking closer several elements disturb this story of cosmopolitan conquest/expansion and vernacularization. For one thing, the simple diglossia of Latin and Sanskrit vs vernaculars was complicated both in Europe and in southern Asia by the presence of multiple High languages—Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic in Europe, Persian and Arabic in southern Asia. Latin was considered "one of God's holy languages, the companion of Hebrew and Greek" since at least St. Augustine's time, but its authority was challenged not just by vernaculars but "through direct competition with Arabic, which came to be a dominant language of learning and cultural prestige across the Mediterranean after the ninth century" (Szpiech, 64).³⁶ Persian and Arabic were undoubtedly comparably, if not more, influential cosmopolitan languages in southern Asia and beyond.³⁷ Second, just as it is difficult to account for the life of late Roman and medieval Latin without mentioning Christianity, it is difficult to

do so for Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian without speaking of religious texts broadly conceived, nor can lay literary forms and actors be separated from religious ones, given e.g. the medieval passion for saints' lives and epics at European courts—indeed some of the oldest vernacular texts in France and Spain as well in southern Asia are religious texts.³⁸ Much as Pollock has aimed to correct a once widespread view that saw literary vernaculars as exclusively the product of religious actors and movements, this historical evidence cannot be ignored. Further, while the distinction between High and low languages works in broad terms and in theory, in practice we know that cosmopolitan languages were not always used for their “universal reach” —they were also used to obscure communication and as coterie languages (e.g Irish Latin), for local practices or to score local points, and in local polities (Kapadia). Conversely, literary vernaculars seem to have been cosmopolitan from the start and to have circulated across separate polities over wide geographical areas.³⁹ Indeed, the programmatic statements prefacing medieval vernacular translations speak of dissemination, not localization (Watson). Rather than a story of vernacularization, sharp diglossia, and supersedence, in both Europe and southern Asia it seems more accurate and productive to study history of literary culture through a multilingual lens, attentive to the specific dynamics of

cosmopolitan and vernacular languages in terms of producers, patrons, audiences, and literary forms.

Partly in order to avoid reifying cosmopolitan and vernacular and tying them to specific cultural and political orientations that in many cases would be anachronistic, I reserve these terms for languages, mindful of the range of registers within each of them, of their oral dimension and reach (which in many cases exceeded their written), and trying to work out in each case what their intended and actual audience was.⁴⁰ I then also use cosmopolitan and local as locations and orientations (no neutral maps or aerial views here). For individuals, as hinted at the beginning, learning in a High language and connections gave one access to the ideal Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit and Hindi republics of letters and made you a cosmopolitan adib, kavi or pandit; travel, authorship, and lofty patronage and/or position increased your eminence.⁴¹ Though distant origins were claimed and treasured by most elite groups in North India (Brahmins, Sayyids, Kayasths), “world-travelled” (jahangasht) individuals who moved in the top circles, like Amin Khan Razi below, represent the most cosmopolitan perspective, whose view of the provinces was, as we shall see, selective and accidental—but without the modern political connotations of “citizen of the world” rather than “son of the soil.” For genres instead I have tended to use the term “universal” (as in geographical compendia), and the term

“metropolitan,” for early modern cities like Delhi, Agra, or Lahore and the Mughal travelling camp-capitals that were cosmopolitan in that they attracted and valued traders and scholars from other parts of the world. The local for me is an arena, a space constituted by social relations and a “multiplicity of stories” (Massey); it is a standpoint from which to view “the world,” and what does or does not travel. Necessarily plural—and even more so when there are multiple languages—and opening out to wider networks and different “significant geographies,” the local shows up dynamics and idioms of inclusion, exclusion, distinction, and hierarchy, but also—Massey reminds us—the unexpected.

Finally, I am aware that much of the “everyday cosmopolitanism” of port cities and labour migration that contemporary scholarship has pointed towards could be found in early modern cities—or in the itinerant multi-ethnic and multilingual armies about which the Hindavi poet Jayasi said in the sixteenth century, “All differed in speech—where did God open such a trove!”⁴²

A multilingual encounter in the archive

So if we think of literature in Awadh from a relational, plural and multilingual perspective that holds together local and cosmopolitan, what points emerge? Let

me begin with an encounter that will get us thinking about the archive and poetic practices.

Around 1680 in Jajmau, a very small town in central Awadh, the district administrator Sayyid Diwan Rahmatullah from Bilgram was acting as deputy for his grandfather. Rahmatullah was, we are told, a connoisseur of Hindi courtly poetry. On one occasion when a disciple of a famous Hindi poet, Chintamani Tripathi, recited a couplet of his master, Rahmatullah pointed out an error in the use of a figure of speech. The disciple reported the correction to the poet, who was impressed and wished to meet that Hindi-knowing administrator:

Chintamani betook himself with his family in Jajmau with the intention of bathing in the river Ganges, which flows above Jajmau, and informed the Diwan. The Diwan did all that is necessary in terms of hospitality.

Chintamani remained with the Diwan for a while, and they conversed on the appropriateness of [poetic] themes. And he composed a poem (kabitta) in the jhulna metre in praise of the bravery and chivalry of Sayyid

Rahmatullah. Here is the poem:

Garaba gahi singha jyūn sabala gala gāja, mana prabala gaja-bāja-dala sāja
dhāyau.

Bajata ika camaka ghana ghamaka dundubhina kī taraṅga khara/ghira
dhamaka bhūtala hilāyau.

Bīra tihi kahata hīya kampi dara jo risana sain kau sūra cahūn aura
chāyau.

Kahū cala pāi taja nāha sanāha? iha Rahamatullā saranāha āyau.

Proud like a lion, strong, roaring, with forceful mind he laid out his
elephants and army

Lightning strikes, blows fall fast, drums strike hard – the earth shook

Their hearts tremble at his anger and call him a hero, a champion who
masters all directions

Where can I go, leaving my lord's armour? I seek refuge with
Rahmatullah.

[Afterwards] The Diwan sent some gold coins and a heavy golden robe to
the house of Chintamani as a gift for the poem, but he [Chintamani]
expressed the wish to appear in the exalted presence [of the Diwan] so as
to be properly invested with the robe. The Diwan recused that the robe
was not really worthy of him and he should accept it in secret [a polite
expression]. In the end Cintamani came in the presence of the Diwan, and
in front of the assembly he recited the kabitta, put on the robe and

accepted the reward. This poem is recorded in [his collection] Kabitta Bicāra after the one in praise of Sultan Zayn al-Din Muhammad, son of Shah Shuja' [i.e. grandson of the previous emperor].

(A. Bilgrami, 366)

We can read this episode as an ordinary ritual of incorporation between poet and patron, in which connoisseurship and poetic skill are the currency of the transaction, sealed by the cleverly alliterative but fairly standard poem that praises the courage and military strength of a patron before whose deafening drums enemies and the earth itself tremble. (As Allison Busch has shown, such poems were multi-purpose, and poets could easily recycle them by inserting the name of a different patron (forthcoming)). But this is actually an extraordinary textual event. It occurs in a tazkira of Persian poets devoted in large part to poets from the author's own town of Bilgram (Ghulam 'Ali Azad Bilgrami's The Free-standing Cypress or The Cypress of Azad/Sarw-i Āzād, 1752/1166H), written about seven decades after the event. This particular tazkira has a separate chapter on the Bilgram Persian "connoisseurs of Hindi" and quotes their Hindi verses at length, to my knowledge the only Persian tazkira ever to do so.⁴³ Why? Partly because the author wanted to display his own and his fellow Bilgramis' multilingual knowledge of poetry and poetics in Persian, Arabic, and Hindi, and

partly because this knowledge of Hindi poetry and poetics was in fact something that made Bilgram Indo-Persian literati stand out from the mass of Persian-literate scribes (their ability to compose chronograms in Arabic, Persian, and Hindi impressed potential patrons).⁴⁴ Hence the investment in the “local” of Bilgram by a highly cosmopolitan intellectual who prided himself on his knowledge of Arabic as well as Persian poetry and poetics and who by this point had lived about a thousand miles away in central India for three decades. And while the intended meaning of the episode lies in the ability of the Indo-Persian administrator to trump the famous Hindi and Brahmin professional poet, there are other elements to be drawn out from this encounter.

First, the Indo-Persian administrator and the Hindi poet appear as part of a shared world of Mughal employment (naukri), courtly etiquette, and poetic practice and pedagogy. The kabitta was one of chief types of Hindi courtly poetry to gain currency and popularity in Mughal and provincial circles from the second half of the sixteenth century (Busch). Poets like Chintamani doubled as poetry teachers, and the treatises they wrote acted both as instruments for teaching poetic ornaments and sentiments and as proofs of their mastery, since they wrote the definitions as well as the examples. And the assemblies mentioned here and elsewhere in tazkiras show that the ability to quote, compose but also discuss the finer points of poetics in Persian but also in Hindi

was much appreciated and a sign of distinction in this social world. Earlier in the text, again exceptionally for an Indo-Persian tazkira, Chintamani was properly introduced in terms of residence, family, authored books and employment with a Mughal prince. Thus he was also part of the personal-bureaucratic Mughal administrative network just like Rahmatullah.

Second, Rahmatulla and Chintamani also shared the larger geography of Mughal travel and connections, which both of them entered from their small towns in Awadh. Jajmau is thus “local” but not unconnected to the cosmopolitan world of the Mughal polity, and the encounter features in an encyclopaedic work written thousands of miles south in the Deccan (Burhanpur) in the cosmopolitan language of Persian. Third, both individuals are multilingual, though in different ways: Rahmatullah studied Arabic and Persian, worked in Persian, and practised poetry in Persian and Hindi; Chintamani was educated in Sanskrit and among the first to adapt Sanskrit “literary science” to courtly Hindi poetry and poetic treatises (Busch, 107, 153, 193-194).

Yet this a rarely textualised example: Chintamani is one of only three Hindus, and the only Hindu Hindi poet, mentioned in this dictionary-anthology of poets—no Hindu poets of Persian from Bilgram or elsewhere are mentioned and no Hindu is given a separate entry. And while Azad Bilgrami’s inclusion of Hindi is part of his programmatic comparison of Arabic, Persian, and “Indian”

poetics (Azad, Sharma, Ernst), placing the three traditions side by side in theory does not amount in practice to upsetting the linguistic hierarchy and social imaginary of this Indo-Persian intellectual.⁴⁵

While the text presents the encounter in a particular way, it reveals the multiple trajectories of Indo-Persian poet-administrators (for whom courtly Hindi was an additional feather in the cap) and of Sanskrit-Hindi poet-scholars looking for patronage. By its unique presence in the text the encounter makes us notice how exclusive the protocols of the Persian tazkira genre are: whereas only three Hindu poets of Hindi make it into this text, modern Hindi literary histories list at least fifteen other poets with similar profiles up to this point. As a result, we wonder about the other poets who did not “make it.” Silence is not absence. Spaces that look empty are in fact teeming with other people and their own tastes, stories, and trajectories. We just need to look elsewhere.

Cosmopolitan gaze and local inscription

Persian encyclopaedic geographical texts continued the older Arabic tradition of combining personal travel or travellers’ accounts, information drawn from earlier books, theoretical ideas of geography, history, wonders, accounts of remarkable men, and so on. But rather than considering them cumulatively as

sources of updated geographical “information,” here we can interrogate them for how they articulate the space of Awadh, with respect to the authors’ relative positions. For while Persian encyclopaedic geographical texts were self-consciously universal texts, cosmopolitan and local authors used them for different purposes. The Seven climes (Haft iqlīm, 1601/1010H?), in Sunil Sharma’s words “a compendium of literary biography and history... viewed through a geographical matrix” by the Iranian émigré Amin Ahmad Razi who arrived at Mughal emperor Akbar’s court, uses the old Iranian idea of the world’s “seven climes” and slots the entire world that mattered, from China to Russia to Istanbul, to Gog and Magog into them.⁴⁶ In this scheme, the first clime is the one closest to the equator, the seventh the most distant, the fourth the best since it represents “moderation in all things.” This is where most of Iran lies, while India lies in the second and third climes (not a bad position, if a bit hot). But while the Introduction lays out the scheme of the seven climes, the actual descriptions of places read like a travel guide: cities are located and distances are measured in terms of the time it takes to cover them.⁴⁷

1. Yemen, Region of Zanj, Nubia,

Chin

2. Mecca, Madina, Samanah,

Hurmuz, **Deccan, Ahmadnagar,**

Patan, Dawlatabad, Junir,

Telangana, Ahmadabad,

Khambayat, Surat, Somnath,

Nagaur, Bengal, Orissa, Kuch

[Cooch Bihar]

3.(Iranian) Iraq, Baghdad, Kufah,

Najaf, Basra, Yazd, Fars, Kerman,

Sistan, Farah, Qandahar, Ij, Istakhr,

Kazerun, Ghaznayn, **Lahore,**

Nagarkot, Sirhind, Hansi, Thanesar,

Panipat, Dehli, Agra, Lucknow,

Awadh, Kalpi, Sham, Misr/Egypt ...

4. Khurasan, Balkh, Harat, Jam,

Mashhad, Nishapur, Sabzavar,

Esfahan, Kashan, Qum, Savah,

Hamadan, Ray and Tehran,

Damavand, Astarabad, Tabaristan,

Mazandaran, Gilan, Qazvin,

Azarbayjan, Tabriz, Ardabil,

Maraghah

5. Sharvan, Ganjah, Khwarazm,

Transoxania, Bukhara, Samarqand,

Farghana

6. Turkistan, Farab, Yarkand, Rus,

Constantinople, Rum

7. Bulgaria, Saghlab [Slavs], Yajuj &

Majuj (Gog & Magog) (Sharma

unpublished, 6)

It is unusual—and significant—that an Iranian “world-travelled” author (as he calls himself) should include so many Indian cities (in **bold** in the list above)—probably a tribute to his Indian patrons. His detailed notice of Punjab towns on the route from Kabul to Delhi (Lahore, Thanesar, Sirhind, Panipat) suggest that Razi actually visited them on his way to Delhi. Further to the east, Awadh instead is for Razi ... quite an empty place, both of towns and of notable people.⁴⁸ All he can rustle up is a short notice on the towns of Lucknow and Ayodhya, and generic entries on only three notable men:

Lucknow is a small town and has a good climate. They make good bows.

Among its people is

Sayyid Shahi who is affable and has an upright mind. And he is able to present with great eloquence poetry in a very short time. This is one of his verses:

Istighfār-i Allāh az dīl-i bīchāshnī-yi dard,

Paikān ba-sīna ki dīl-i murda dar baghal.

Asking for God’s forgiveness with a heart that has not tasted pain,

A spear to one's breast or a dead heart in one's chest.

They report that Sayyid Shahi had a brother who used to work and fall in love...

(Razi, vol. 2, 499)

We are then told in prose interspersed with verse the story of how his brother fell in love with a Hindu woman he saw on the street. When she saw the strength of his love she also fell for him and for a while they were lovers, until the secret came out and her father segregated her. Sayyid Shahi's brother suffered the pain of separation until he died. Then the woman managed with an excuse to leave her house and, mixed with the mourners, went to see him. When she raised his head into her lap she suddenly died, too—the real city is an excuse to enter the domain of literary imaginaries.

Awadh [here the city of Ayodhya] Situated on the banks of the Sarju, it is a famous city. One of the men who have come to my attention from it is **Shaykh Nasir al-Din**, who was the second khalifa of Nizam Awliya and was called Chiragh-i Dihli. One of his sayings is: "The carnal soul of a man is like a tree that takes root in his being thanks to Satan's breath, and

becomes strong. If by the power of prayer a man shakes this tree every day, its root weakens and is extirpated. Then there is **Amir Sayyid 'Ala al-Din**, who was an uncoverer of secrets and a follower of the way of contemplation. Occasionally he would compose verses. This is one of them:

Nadānam īn gul-i khwud-rū chi rang o bū dārad

Ki murgh-i har chamanī guft-o-gū-yī ū dārad.

What is special about the scent and colour of that native flower?

It is the talk of the birds of every meadow! (Razi, vol. 2, 504)

From the cosmopolitan point of view of a universal Persian text by an author who never travelled there, Awadh thus registers as unimportant and empty, and for its readers it would register as empty, hence unimportant.

A hundred and seventy years later, Murtaza Husain Bilgrami (1719-ca.1795), a secretary-administrator also from the town of Bilgram in Awadh who had ended up as secretary to an East India Company official, wrote an updated version of The Seven Climes called The Seven Gardens (Hadīqa al-Aqālīm, 1778-1782). This is more of a gazetteer: gone are the poets and in their place we get information about produce, precise distances, significant constructions, local religion, and updated history. Murtaza Husain quotes from books, but much of

his information seems to come from personal experience. Two points are worth noting. First, that despite the “new knowledge” about the continents like America, Murtaza Husain does not abandon the “seven climes” scheme—like other Mughal intellectuals, Murtaza Husain acknowledges the plurality of epistemic schemes, makes comparative gestures, but is not anxious about incongruence.⁴⁹

The second point is that, while overall the range of Indian places is actually smaller than in the Seven Climes, the description of Awadh—the author’s own region—is much more detailed, with many small towns that Murtaza Husain in all likelihood visited or lived in while on duty. These include Awadh/Ayodhya, Gorakhpur, Bahraich, Nimkhar, Khairabad, Gopamau, Pihani, Lucknow, and of course Bilgram. About Gorakhpur, for example, he tells his readers that,

Gorakhpur is a middling city of Awadh on the river Ghaghra to the north, pleasant. Rice, yellow oil, chicken and chāj are cheap here, and you can get male and female slaves (ghulām o kanīzak) cheaply and easily. (M. Bilgrami, 152)

Nimkhar also called **Misrik**, a fort on the banks of the Gomti, and near it there is a tank called Sarbab [Sartab?] The water boils so much that if a man goes in, he floats and gets thrown up. (M. Bilgrami, 153-154)

He mentions both Hindu and Muslim sacred geographies (and times). About Ayodhya for example he says,

Awadh [Ayodhya], large town on the banks of the Ghaghra, also called Sarju, and in the books of the Hindus it is called Ajodhya. In the Satjug [Satya yuga]⁵⁰ it was the capital of Raja Ramchandra alias Ram, and his building a bridge and crossing over to Lanka is written [in another section]. And after Ram, in the Kaljug [Kali yuga] the city was built by Kishan son of Purab son of Hind son of Jam son of Noah. In the environs of the city people sifted sand for gold. At the distance of two miles east of the city is the tomb of Seth son of Adam and Job the prophet, and it is a place of pilgrimage for commoners and nobles alike. Their tombs in this place are not [what you will find] in history books. (M. Bilgrami, 151)⁵¹

We will come back to the unusual sequence of Krishna rebuilding Ayodhya in the Kali age and the genealogy that links him back to Noah, an Islamic/biblical

history. We certainly want to note the “tombs of Seth and Job” that both inscribe the environs of Ayodhya into Islamic sacred time-space, and inscribe Islam into the local time-space.⁵²

As for his “beloved home town” of Bilgram, the entry is entirely devoted to establishing the claim of the author’s own ancestor as the first judge (qazi) of Bilgram at the time of the very first Muslim campaign of conquest, rebutting the claim put forward by another Bilgram author.⁵³

In other words, Murtaza Husain explicitly uses an established universal scheme in a cosmopolitan language text and displays his updated encyclopaedic knowledge; but he inscribes it with a thickly traversed and inhabited local world (no empty space for the insider) and uses it to establish his own family’s claim and story on the *local* place of Bilgram—against other local claimants. His local space is exclusive, too— in relation to Bilgram no one who is not a (Muslim) Shaykh or a judge gets a mention, whereas in those families even women are named the closer he comes to the present, a mark of familial proximity but also of recognition.

It may be self-evident that a local will have a stake in putting his (and in this context it is “his”) place and family onto a cosmopolitan map, but as we have seen often in “top down” approaches, from the distant cosmopolitan gaze, the “empty spaces” of the local become by definition unimportant. Therefore a

comparison—holding together both outsider and insider perspectives—in this universal genre gives us both the local’s desire to carve a space onto the cosmopolitan map, and the outsider’s more accidental and selective inclusion of the local that is not his own. Again, emptiness prompts us to ask, what is being left out, what stories and trajectories can we also find, and where can we find them?

Narrative spaces

One way in which we can see the interrelation between local and wider networks in multilingual early modern Awadh is by paying attention to the spaces of narratives. These are largely imaginary spaces—echoing Haun Saussy’s point that one thing “literature says, repetitively and obsessively, about itself under all skies and climates: namely, that literary experience negates determinate space and time” (291). But the repertoires of motifs, characters, and stories that authors and storytellers drew upon, their instantiation in different Hindavi and Persian genres, and their circulation in manuscripts and oral performances anchor them in space and time.

We can begin by noticing that tales seem to have travelled either through the vector of folk/oral to literary Hindavi to literary Persian—like the story of

Lorik and Chanda, which still exists as an oral epic, reworked by Maulana Da'ud in the garrison fort of Dalmau in 1379, and rewritten in Persian by 'Abd al-Quddus Gangohi in the fifteenth century – or from Sanskrit to Hindavi to Persian, like the tale of the Brahmin musician Madhavanal and the courtesan Kamakandala, which existed in several Sanskrit versions, was rewritten by Alam in Hindavi in 1582, and versified in Persian by Haqiri Kashani in 1680.⁵⁴ In all these cases, transcodification meant that Persian poetic tropes of love, lovers, beauty, and so on were used, though inventively inflected with Indian references.⁵⁵ But poets did not just rewrite or retell stories, they also reworked motifs and combined narratives and imaginary spaces. Thus we find the old Ramayana motif of the seductive multi-coloured deer that tricked Rama and Sita reappear as a multi-hued doe-woman in the story of king Dangvai (1493) and in Qutban's Mirigāvatī (The Magic Doe, 1545).⁵⁶ In his most famous tale, Malik Muhammad Jayasi combined the quest narrative of earlier Sufi romances with a historical second plot involving Sultan 'Alauddin Khilji's siege and destruction of Chittaur; this reworked elements of emerging Rajput narratives including anxieties over subordination to an overlord, preservation of honour, and the symbolic value of one's harem (Sreenivasan, Behl).

Unlike the later Punjabi romances for which precise local geography mattered (Mir), apart from the local toponyms of Daud's Candāyan most

Hindavi were either set in more distant locations (like Chitaur or Lanka in Jayasi's Padmāvat, 1540) or sent their heroes and listeners to imaginary "otherplaces" with symbolic overtones, like Kanchanpur "the City of Gold" or Chitbisarau "Forgetfulness of Mind." The intertextuality in Qutban's Mirigāvati (1505) of the hero's journeys with Arabic sea-farer's tales points shows how local authors and audiences could partake of these much more distant geographies through the literary experience (Behl, ch. 4).

Finally, we should note the formal aspects of this traffic across languages and generic codes. The ubiquitous form for Hindavi tales, with swift-paced series of four half-line units (chaupai) rounded up with a couplet (doha or sortha) and occasional longer verses at emphatic moments corresponded in Persian to either prose tales (qissa, dastan) or verse narratives (masnavi). Masnavis carried their own opening paratextual elements such as the praise of God, the Prophet and his companions, the wordly ruler, and sometimes a discussion of love (Scott Meisami), and we find them replicated in Hindavi Sufi tales in chaupai-doha (whereas the 1604 Persian prose version of Qutban's Mirigāvati called Rāj Kunwar carried none). But while in her work on Punjabi tales, Farina Mir has noted how often it is the opening section, with its invocations, that reveals the religious inflection of a particular version of a story, in the case of non-Sufi Hindavi tales I have noticed that paratextual elements related to the religious

merits of telling and listening to stories were not tied to religious narratives but pointed rather to a generic pool of what I have called “epic-puranic” tales.⁵⁷

In brief, while the circulation of stories and motifs points to the creation of shared repertoires that became familiar to listeners and readers across languages and scripts, we need to view each text as the result of specific choices and strategies, to which we should imaginatively add the performance and interpretative work of its storyteller and audience.

The work of description

As we have seen, the genres that speak of the spaces of Awadh do not seek to represent them mimetically, in Auerbach’s sense of the term.⁵⁸ Beyond gazetteer-like notices of rivers, roads, and buildings they do not attempt to capture the outline or particular character of a town. How is Jais different from Bilgram, Gopamau from Gorakhpur? Their “descriptions” do not attempt to bring out that. So what is the work that description does in these various genres, and what is the relationship between generic and particular? Authors explicitly use the term “description” (wasf in Persian, varṇana in Sanskrit and Hindi), but what they mean is not mimetic representation. Rather, just as Greek tragedies sought to “elevate” and bring their audience to a higher level than the ordinary one, so

descriptions seek to elevate places, following established conventions. Does it mean then descriptions are completely generic, simply slotting the particular local place in an already existing paradigm?

Yes and no. When ‘Abd al-Jalil Bilgrami in his youth wrote a Persian narrative poem on home town, his “description” cast the local space into the literary idiom of Persian poetry, but he consciously chose the model set up by the most influential Indian Persian poet and praised every season, the rains—even the hot summer is pleasant in Bilgram!⁵⁹ And when the cosmopolitan, well-travelled and well-connected Persian poet Fani Kashmiri poetically described and praised Allahabad, where he had lived for two years, he chose particular elements as if on a tour of the town—Akbar’s fort at the conjunction of the two rivers, the gardens along the river, the imperial tombs, and produced a series of striking images of whales, whale-like floods, rivers of knowledge and action, river-like hearts, and so on.⁶⁰ In Hindavi, when the devotional poet Lal Das of Ayodhya praised the town in his (partial) retelling of the Rama story, he did so through the theological idea of the “two bodies” of the city—the “gross” body of the visible city and the “subtle” one of the eternal Delight of Ayodhya (also the title of his book Avadhavilāsa, 1675), where Ram eternally rules and “sports” with his wife Sita.⁶¹ Pilgrimage to “this” Ayodhya is a “key” to “that” Ayodhya, but so is listening to his poem (Laldas, 8). This is the work his description does,

first by setting Ayodhya centrally within the space-time of creation (in two separate versions), and then dazzling his readers with a “city-description” (nagara-shobha or varnana) even more filled with Brahmins, musicians and aesthetic pastimes than usual. If this is this Ayodhya, the poet says, imagine what “that” Ayodhya is like, where Ram and Sita sit in their celestial palace!

In other words, tracing the self-conscious selection of, or departure from, specific cultural, religious, and literary repertoires, descriptions of places shows us the work descriptions do, even though that work is not mimesis as we know it.

Local time-spaces

One of Doreen Massey’s arguments is that we should not juxtapose (static) space with (dynamic) time but always consider them together as time-space, for they are always implicated in each other and thinking about one always has repercussions for how we think about the other (55; cf. Lefébvre). Once again, we can see that multiple languages, conceptions of time, and particular positions created a plurality that at times did and at others did not acknowledge itself as such.

For example, on a macrolevel the discrepancy between the Islamic chronology of creation and the Hindu chronology of aeons/yugas and “Brahma-time” challenged Mughal intellectuals.⁶² Partly because their time-scale was more capacious and could easily include Adam and Noah and the Prophet Muhammad, Hindu texts did not register the problem in the same terms. Puranic texts could backdate prophecies of future events and “predict” (and incorporate) the coming of Islam or of the British—a strategy that the Awadh Sufi ‘Abd al-Rahman Chishti himself adopted in his Persian “version” of the Bhaviṣya Purāṇa or Purana of the Future.⁶³

Local time-space was, inevitably, more contested, given that different actors and groups lay forth competing claims to local territory. Narratives of time-space hinge on three pivots: the four ages, entry into the area; and control over local territory. We will notice subtle choices—was coming narrated as conquest or settlement? Was control over territory articulated as displacement or as the clearing and settling of new land and the enhancement of trade? Language and genre are significant discrimina here.

Malik Muhammad Jayasi, the Muslim author of one of the most spectacular Sufi Hindavi tales from Awadh that travelled far and wide (Padmāvat, 1540), praised his own town of Jais as a “religious centre” since the Golden Age (Satjug). In his Hindavi version of the story of Krishna—which he

tells us was “directed to all,” i.e. sought to be inclusive—he expanded on this the idea using the four-age time frame. He praises Jais as a religious place since the Golden Age, an abode of ascetics in the third Age. They abandoned it in the fourth Age of Kaliyuga, when it was resettled by “Turks,” who partake of Indian pleasures and have turned the place into a paradise (Kailasa):

I’ll tell you about my great town, the ever-beautiful Jais.

In the Satyayuga it was a holy place, then it was called the “Town of Gardens.”

Then the Treta went, and when the Dvapara came, there was a great rishi called Bhunjaraja.

88,000 rishis lived here then, and dense ...? and eighty-four ponds.

They baked bricks to make solid ghats, and dug eight-four wells.

Here and there they built handsome forts, like stars in the night sky.

And many orchards, with temples on top.

They sat there doing penance, all those human avatars.

They crossed this world by performing sacrifices and repeating mantras night and day. [8]

Then Kaliyuga came, the ascetics left this world and disappeared.

This place became a bamboo thicket again, the forest called Jaykarana.

When it was in this condition, it was resettled by Turks.

They are good lords worthy of praise, they enjoy the taste of flowers and betel-nut and the nine kinds of offerings.

Rich men and poor men live in tall houses, and a rich scent of incense and sandalwood wafts through.

It is full of scents of meru, kumkum and kasturi.

When you see this beautiful town, with the scent of flowers,

The closer you get, you feel you're climbing the Kailasa. [9]

(Jayasi, 136-137, emphasis added)

The author of the Seven Gardens spoke of a similar sequence in his entry on Ayodhya: in the Golden Age it was the capital of Ram, but three aeons later the city had to be rebuilt by Krishna, whom Murtaza Bilgrami connected to Adam and Noah... But in the historical narrative of his own town of Bilgram, conquest (and control) were paramount. In that context, the mention of Bilgram's pre-Muslim name (Srinagar) only buttressed the claim that his own ancestor had been there right from the start. Conversely, accounts of the space-time of

Ayodhya in texts like the Avadhavilāsa above bypass any history beyond the four ages: partaking of them means entering a higher plane of reality.

Claims over land were paramount in their production of the local histories of Awadh qasbas that were written in Persian and Urdu between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The East India Company wanted documentary evidence of land possession, and local histories were written to provide that evidence (actual grants from former rulers were often included), couched within a historical narrative (cf. Chatterjee). So unlike Jayasi's Hindavi tale, the Persian history of Jais written in 1868 does not take the longue-durée of the four ages but covers in some detail the vicissitudes of conquest, and in even greater detail the settling of Turks and Afghans in the area, who 'received land grants (ma'āf) and became local elites also in the other towns around Jais'; as evidence he lists to the various neighbourhoods named after them—Sayyidana, Shaykhana, Khwajana, Ansari Muhalla, Ghuryana, Pathani Tola, Ganjana, etc. (Husain, 8). The big upheaval for the author came in the 18c at the time of the semi-independent Nawabi rule, when local Hindu landlords, with the help of the "evil officials," seized the land documents and grants. This forced the children of Jais' notables to leave in search of education and employment, and they were dispersed.

Finally, we should also view the colonial reports that went into the making of the massive district gazetteers as participating in, and in many ways shaping, local time-space. W. C. Bennett's 1870 Report on the Family History of the Chief Clans of the Roy Bareilly District gives us the story of the Hindu rajas as told by their own genealogists. Just as James Tod had glorified Rajputs in Rajasthan and underwritten their claims to ancient lineages, Bennett's aim is to prop them up as the authentic and legitimate local rulers with lofty lineages. His call to consider the "unwritten annals" of the rajas' genealogists to compile the history of the region is well taken, though couched in extreme terms.⁶⁴ Though he acknowledges that Hindu clans were just as much "outsiders," since they had come into the region in the wake of the Sutas' armies and wrestled control from the shadowy Bhars, they quickly become "authentic" and local in ways Muslims never can be in his eyes. So notice the dichotomy he sets up between original-Hindu-rightful (and gallant) inhabitant vs foreign-later-Muslim- (and lustful) interloper in this story about how Abhaichand and the Bais clan acquired a foothold in the region:

two gallant youths... found themselves and their followers at a bathing place on the Ganges when an affray arose between some soldiers of the Gotam Rája of Argul and the forces of the Subehdar. The Hindús were

defending the honor of their Queen and her daughter from the lust of the Mussalmans, and no Rajput could turn a deaf-ear to the agonized appeals for help that issued from the lady's bullock cart. So the Bais joined the losing side of their country-men, rallied the fugitives and beat off the Muhammadans, but left one of their princes dead on the field. The survivor Abhai Chand escorted the rescued Queen back to Argul. It was only natural that the young princess should fall in love with the soldier who had been wounded in her defence... (Bennett, 8-9)

His view of history as one of "Muhammadan tyranny" and "Hindú sovereignty" is of a piece of much of British colonial, and Hindu nationalist, historiography:

One of the great fact forces itself on the attention, namely, that for the last four hundred years there have been two governments, the imperial Muhammadan and the local Hindú [no local Muslims here], of which the latter was the most elastic, the most intimately connected with the people, and historically by far the most important, and it is out of the collision between these two governments that the present state of society was produced. Throughout, my chief aim has been to throw this fact in the strongest relief; and this must be my apology for using here and there

such questionable expressions, as the independent sovereignty of Hindú chiefs, expressions which after all I think are rather technically rather than practically wrong. (Bennett, 68)

and part of an unrealized vision of an “Hindu monarchy” supported by a loyal aristocracy that would control and improve the land.⁶⁵ Arguably it was this colonial historical consciousness that found favour within much of nationalist historiography, particularly in its most popular forms in textbooks and poems, and that has tended to overshadow the other narratives of local time-spaces. Indeed, one work that the multilingual local can do is to recover the plurality of attachments to land and the narrative forms they took.

To conclude

Let me end with another episode that speaks to local space as a realm of unexpected encounters and multiple trajectories. It's the 1920s, in a village of Unnao district in Awadh, where the Hindi poet Nirala is spending some time between jobs. One of the Pande soldiers who had served “abroad” in armies for generations, his father had settled to work for a small princely state in Bengal but retained a little land in the ancestral village. Nirala's upbringing had thus been in

a mixture of Bengali, Hindi, and Sanskrit, and as a young man he had moved to cosmopolitan Calcutta, where a sizeable Hindi community and publishing world offered employment possibilities and a literary community. Nirala felt himself to be the (yet unacknowledged) equal of Rabindranath Tagore, whom he admired and envied in the same high degree. In the Hindi world of the 1920s Nirala (and his fellow Chhayavadi/"Shadowist" poets) were trailblazers, though viewed critically by the more conservative sections of the literary establishment. Nirala was the most radical of the four, and the story in which this encounter takes place, Chaturi the Cobbler (Caturī Camār, 1934), hints at his radicalism as a meat-eating Brahmin living alone who befriends the untouchable cobbler, teaches his son, and consorts with other low caste men. Chaturi is an "old inhabitant" (qadīmī bāshindā) of the village, whose ancestral house has stood for generations behind Nirala's, at some distance. Though older in age, in village caste kinship terms Chaturi is Nirala's nephew. Nirala has heard that in matters of the poetry of the Sants, the devotional poet-saints, "Chaturi was a greater connoisseur than the various Chaturvedis [i.e. high caste Brahmins] etc., only he knows not how to write letters/alphabet." One day Nirala asks Chaturi to sing for him the poetry of the Sants, which typically addresses not a personal God but an impersonal supreme being immanent in all people, and in the evening Chaturi arrives with a full complement of accompanists for a night of devotional

songs (bhajans) by “Kabirdas, Surdas, Tulsidas, Paltudas and several well-known and unknown Sants.” Chaturi’s singing is a revelation:

Earlier I only used to think of Nirgun as a word and used to laugh when people praised the music and called them “Nirgun songs (pad).” Now I get serious—understanding grows with the deluge of age. Sitting on a stool, I began to listen to the bhajans. With a magisterial voice, Chaturi would remind the others of songs forgotten. I realised that Chaturi was an expert of Kabir’s poetic corpus. He said to me, “Kaka (Uncle), those great scholars do not understand these Nirgun songs.” Then he said, perhaps he placed me in the same category as those scholars, “The meaning of this song poem is...” I stopped him with a deadpan voice, “Chaturi, today just sing, you can come tomorrow morning to explain the meaning.

Explanations now would still the thirst for the songs. (Nirala, 380)

Chaturi complies, but the manner in which he and his companions sing is enough for Nirala to understand that “they understood the meaning of those songs of such high quality... many songs had literary ornamentation, and they understood that, too” (380). The next morning Chaturi comes to show Nirala how he explains the songs—he belongs to the Kabir panth and their tradition of

singing and commentary—: he sings a line and then draws out the meanings of words and images. The commentary is so sophisticated that it would put to shame those of Hindi literary or religious magazines, Nirala observes and does not even try to reproduce it. Nirala’s presumption—as a local cosmopolitan—of literary superiority and greater understanding is trumped by the deep local tradition that, while singing Kabir and other Sants for their spiritual and philosophical messages, is nonetheless fully cognizant of their literary aspects. The cosmopolitan and high caste poet cannot fail to assert his authority (“just sing, no commentary, don’t think *I* cannot understand”), but to open himself to the unexpected, non-canonical oral poetic knowledge embodied in the low-caste singers in the local, familiar space of the village is a humbling and enriching experience.

The largely oral tradition of Sant poets (“Kabirdas, Surdas, Tulsidas, Paltudas and several well-known and unknown Sants”) embodied in Chaturi the cobbler and revealed to the high-caste Hindi poet through this local encounter points to the further multiplicity of stories and trajectories in Awadh beyond those sketched in this essay.⁶⁶ The encounter I started with, of Diwan Rahmatullah and the poet Chintamani, pointed to the difficulty of putting together a multilingual archive when poets and works have been slotted in separate traditions and their works in the “other” language have not been

preserved. Doing multilingual literary history involves detective work, looking for occasional traces, clues that reveal practices that were current but not fully recorded.⁶⁷ Clues include textual traces such as choice of register or theme (Busch 2011), material traces of script, handwriting, format, illustration, and diffusion of manuscripts; and contextual traces about patronage, authors' travels and contacts, and so on. Maps are very useful for this purpose, and can reveal proximity between texts and authors usually viewed as belonging to separate histories, but they become a problem when we use them to fix the positions of writers and places on a single surface.

Yet the "multilingual local," we have seen, does not entail osmosis or full mutual recognition.⁶⁸ Nor does plurality necessarily entail pluralism.⁶⁹ The multilingual local produced practices of "distinction" and exclusion, or else of cultivation and appreciation. For many Bilgramis, the local cultivation of Hindavi alongside Persian and Arabic became what distinguished them as cosmopolitans in wider Mughal circles from other provincial Indo-Persian service groups. And it seems ironic that Azad Bilgrami wrote eloquently about "love for one's homeland" (watan) and celebrated his hometown several decades after he had left it and several thousand miles away in central India. But for him, as for many other cosmopolitan Persian and Hindi Mughal poets, success necessarily involved exile (ghurbat) (Kia), or at least distance and travel.

Thinking of space as “the pluralities of stories and trajectories so far” helps us conceive of world literature as situated, plural, necessarily multilingual, always-in-the-making. It helps us hold together local and cosmopolitan perspectives, trust that local texts and genres and cosmopolitan ones both tell us about “world literature,” and strive for a “more modest, honest, and accurate geographical depiction.” If there is one utopian wish, it is that it may help produce world readers who are not confident in their own tastes as “universal” but know them to be as conditioned and “provincial” as those of readers elsewhere, and are ready to be surprised by the unexpected.

Francesca Orsini

Professor of Hindi and South Asian Literature,

SOAS, University of London, UK

email: fo@soas.ac.uk

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² E.g. according to Casanova, "with decolonization, countries in Africa, the Indian subcontinent, and Asia demanded access to literary recognition *and existence* as well" (2004 [1999]: 11, emphasis added).

³ "Literatures in the world" is the term that S. Shankar (2012) proposes instead of "world literature," whose canonizing instinct he finds inescapable.

⁴ As in Eileen Julien: "Obviously, comparative study of autochthonous genres that seem to have experience little, if any, contact with other literary traditions will reveal much less of the global dynamic than that of a travelling form" (123).

⁵ Following Martin Lewis and Karin Wigen's dictum that "An increasingly integrated world demands a more modest, honest, and accurate geographical depiction" (10).

⁶ I use the term "Hindavi" in place of Hindi/Urdu; see fn 28 below.

⁷ See below and fn 22 for examples of multilingual literary cultures; and for bi- and multi-lingualism in the ancient Mediterranean world, see J.N. Adams's magisterial Bilingualism and the Latin Language, and Adams, Janse and Swain.

⁸ In The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Meta-Geography, Lewis and Widgren offer a wide-ranging critique of inappropriate uses of meta-geographical categories such as continents, East-West, First, Second and Third World, North and South. They point out that it is “precisely the highest level of our geographical taxonomy that is the most problematic” (1). 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” (35).

⁹ “At stake are not the modalities of analysing literature on a world scale, but the conceptual means for thinking literature *as* a world” (Casanova, 72-73); but her reliance on the historical narrative of European expansion and on the world map with literary fields that are synonymous with nation states means that the contested, plural and dynamic quality of space as a set of relations gets lost.

¹⁰ Colonial and postcolonial literary fields are naturally “the most deprived of literary resources, confronting obstacles that writers and critics at the centre cannot even imagine” (Casanova, 90).

¹¹ Despite Aijaz Ahmad's stringent critique the term "Third World Literature" has not gone away and was a rubric in the World Literature Institute meeting in Beijing in July 2011.

¹² "Literary capital is both what everyone seeks to acquire and what is universally recognized as the necessary and sufficient condition of taking part in literary competition. This fact makes it possible to measure literary practices against a standard that is universally recognized as legitimate" (Casanova, 17, emphasis added). There is sufficient leeway in this formulation to move from stating that all writers recognize that literariness is a value to claiming that there is one universal standard of literariness, which is a very different proposition. For a brilliant reflection on critiques of global domination that end up reinforcing it, see J.K. Gibson-Graham.

¹³ Even Tanoukhi, though critical of the "cartographic commitment" and "poetics of distance" of comparative literature, in her conceptualization of scale suggests a flattened surface.

¹⁴ With real political consequences: "This convening of contemporaneous geographical differences into temporal sequence, this turning it into a story of 'catching up', occludes present-day relations and practices and their relentless production, within current rounds of capitalist globalisation, of increasing

inequality" (Massey, 82, emphases in the original); for a similar critique see Ha-Joon Chang.

¹⁵ In José Rabasa's critique, the Mercator map is "a series of erasures and overwritings that have transformed the world" (1). See also Emily Apter's Against World Literature; though I share her critique, it will be clear that the path I follow is quite different from her "untranslatables."

¹⁶ "Seen in this way, world literature is not an infinite, ungraspable canon of works but rather a mode of circulation and of reading, a mode that is applicable to individual works as to larger bodies of material, experienced by established and new discoveries alike" (Damrosch 2006, 215).

¹⁷ I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for this formulation.

¹⁸ For Shu-Mei Shih these technologies include the return of the systematic (as in Moretti and Casanova), the time lag of allegory (as in Jameson above), the cultural stereotyping of global multiculturalism, the granting of universality to the exceptional particular, and the diluting of difference in post-difference ethics (Shih).

¹⁹ In the case of India, the overwhelming majority of translations into English are published within India and do not travel further. This does not make them less significant, of course.

²⁰ For a recent contestation at the Jaipur Literature Festival, see Flood.

²¹ Ghosh, unpublished paper presented at the conference “Towards Global Literature,” IULM Milan, October 2012; the examples she analyses are Hari Kunzru and Taslima Nasreen (I am grateful to her for sharing the paper with me).

²² Shu-Mei Shih is even blunter, “To make an obvious and often displaced statement: what precedes recognition, and is more devastating than the politics of recognition, is sheer negligence or feigned ignorance. Negligence and ignorance of the other(s) are fundamental to the neocolonial production of knowledge and the global division of intellectual labour,” between scholars working in non-Western and minority literatures and those “whose engagement—despite “good” intentions—falls short of the level they would exercise with their “own” area of expertise. Their generosity is circumscribed by an uneven attention, a compulsion to apply less rigorous critical judgement to non-Western and minority materials than to canonical materials” (260).

²³ See my rough sketch of regional, national, and global literary production, circulation, and recognition in India in “India in the Mirror of World Fiction” (Orsini 2007, 83, not my title). Intriguingly, the journal editor switched the order of the columns so that visually the “world” came first, on the left column.

²⁴ In Mary Louis Pratt’s definition, a contact zone is “the space of imperial encounters, the space in which people geographically separated come into

contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict... the term “contact” [from contact linguistics] foregrounds the interactive, improvisational dimensions of imperial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed” (8). As Thornber points out, “scholarship that posits imperial encounters, let alone power imbalances, as necessarily occurring between the West and the Rest risks becoming ensnared in some of the biases it deconstructs” (3).

²⁵ E.g. Winford; for medieval Iberia, see Gallego-Garcia; for the scope of the Persianate world Fragner and Spooner and Hanaway; for East Asia Kornicki and Thornber; for a survey of multilingualism in the (late) Ottoman world Strauss.

²⁶ Her third proposition, “that we recognize space as always under-construction” and thus not “belonging” to any one group is also very important but more relevant to contemporary struggles over space. Though the idea that space is always “under construction” helps us not think of it as an already closed system in which all interconnections have been mapped out (11).

²⁷ Unlike Moretti’s formulation, “the many spaces of literary history — provinces, nation, continent, planet... — the hierarchy that binds them together” (1988, 113, emphasis added), in which the global overrides the local.

²⁸ Persian writers called “Hindi” the vernacular (and occasionally Sanskrit), while others in North India called it simply “language,” bhakha. Since language, script

and community were not as tightly linked as in modern times, I have avoided using the terms Hindi and Urdu with their modern connotations and have used Hindavi, and “courtly Hindi” for the cosmopolitan literary vernacular called Braj Bhasha or the language of Braj; for a fuller survey see Orsini (2012), and also Guha. Other regional multilingual literary fields include Telugu-Tamil-Sanskrit, or Malayalam-Tamil-Sanskrit; Kannada-Marathi, etc.

²⁹ As writers on “low Latin” and non-elite bilingualism point out, the low language, i.e. a vernacular, was not always used for “minor” functions and texts or in an inferior relationship to the High language (Giovanardi). For this reason, I use “diglossia” only when the relationship between two languages is clearly a hierarchical one and perceived as such, otherwise I prefer the terms bilingualism and multilingualism.

³⁰ This seems to be the reason why Azad Bilgrami’s tazkira focusing explicitly on Persian poets from his hometown of Bilgram (Sarw-i Āzād, see below) begins with and includes many cosmopolitan Persian poets: the Bilgramis would not become cosmopolitan without being set in their midst. Two recent important studies of Indo-Persian tazkiras are Pellò (2012) and Kia. As Kia helpfully reminds us, texts that may appear to be “defying genre through their mixture of biography, autobiography, and history are in fact writing within the same tradition, which we can broadly understand as commemorative” (50).

³¹ I am aware that I am not discussing any Sanskrit text or genre here, though one could include Puranic accounts of places, like the Ayodhyā mähātmya and Kāśī mähātmya sections of the Skanda Purāna (discussed by Bakker and Eck), and the account of local saints and local folk heroes like Alha and Udal in the “Purana of the future” (Bhaviyapurāna, see Hildebeitel, 124 ff.).

³² Barring Jaunpur for a century (1380-1480) under the Sharqi Sultans.

³³ This is even truer for Rajput courts in North-Western and central India, which sponsored hundreds of works in Sanskrit and courtly Hindi in the same period and almost never sponsored Persian, even if they cultivated it for official correspondence; I am grateful to one of the anonymous readers for pushing me to clarify this point.

³⁴ Pollock has developed his argument over a series of articles and in his monograph The Language of the Gods in the World of Men.

³⁵ He uses the term “hyperglossia” to define the “relation of extreme superimposition” and compartmentalization between Sanskrit and the vernaculars (Pollock 2006, 50), though in fact Fishman’s extended model includes diglossia between distinct languages and not just between different registers of the same language.

³⁶ Burman similarly argues that medieval Latin “sought to establish itself in the Mediterranean basin as a language of learning and sophistication alongside the

more prestigious Greek and Arabic languages” (87). He also points out that “the Latin world faced a problem shared only partly by Byzantium and not at all by the Arab-Islamic world: its holy book in its entirety was a collection of translations” (88). In her now classic monograph, María Rosa Menocal showed that the considerable role Arabic played in medieval French and Occitan literature was recognized by the mid-nineteenth century but, in Paden’s words, “came to seem intolerable to many scholars precisely at the time when French colonialism established a relationship of superiority to subject people” (144-145). But see the substantial entries devoted to Arabic in Hexter and Townsend (e.g. 263).

³⁷ Though in most if not all cases either Persian or Arabic exerted greater influence; I am grateful to Rebecca Gould for this observation.

³⁸ See Watson, 131; Wright, Paden (2005); I am grateful to Mary Franklin-Brown, my fellow Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute, for pointing out these references and for discussing Pollock’s “Cosmopolitan and Vernacular” from the perspective of current studies on medieval Europe.

³⁹ E.g. Old French in the Ile de France, Normandy, Lorraine, Burgundy, Anjou, and of course England (Paden 2006, 151).

⁴⁰ This is why, though in agreement with Shankar’s argument (2004, now in Shankar 2012) that there can be cosmopolitan and vernacular (I would say local)

literary orientations in either cosmopolitan or vernacular language texts—he gives examples from English and Tamil—I prefer to refrain from using terms like “vernacular sensibility” that risk reifying it in unhelpful ways.

⁴¹ All Bilgramis deemed worthy of inclusion in Azad’s tazkira were either local teachers and judges who did not travel, or poet-administrators and -soldiers who did (A. Bilgrami).

⁴² Agraval (527) 499.7; all translations are mine, unless stated otherwise. I have been also reminded that as a consequence of village practices of exogamous marriage every bride is, and remains, an outsider, marked by speech as well as origin outside the village—so even village and home are inherently cosmopolitan (I thank Sarah Pinto for this point). In many tales having wives from several countries is one of the marks of a cosmopolitan king.

⁴³ I.e. earlier tazkiras would mention that a poet or Sufi composed in Hindavi as well, but never quoted their verses or give details.

⁴⁴ Azad Bilgrami’s grandfather, Mir ‘Abd al-Jalil earned his official pardon and the admiration of the powerful Amir al-Umara when he produced a chronogram for the birth of his son in Persian, Arabic and Hindavi (Gladwin, 200-2013, 206-209, text and tr.); I am grateful to Abhishek Kaicker for showing me these letters.

⁴⁵ In the introduction to the Hindi section he writes, “I am as acquainted with the Arabic, Persian, and Hindi languages. And I drink of all three cups as much as I

can. For Arabic and Persian I trained in poetry (*sukhan*) for a long time and nourished in the bosom of thought the tender shoots of meaning [or of 9 *rasas*: *naurasān-i ma'ānī*]. Though I did not have the opportunity to train in Hindi poetry and the time to conquer the green pastures of this dominion, there is ample pleasure in listening to the melodies of the nightingales of India and ample chance to savour the sugar-sellers of this land of flowers. The creators of meaning in Arabic and Persian have distilled the blood from the veins of thought and taken the art of subtle thinking to the highest levels. The magicians of India, too, are no less firmly established in this valley, in fact in the art of *nāyikā bheda* [types of heroines] they are treading ahead in their magic-making" (A. Azad, 351).

⁴⁶ Sunil Sharma, "Literary Geographies of Mughal Biographical Dictionaries," 6. 'Itimad al-Dawla, empress Nur Jahan's father, was his first cousin (Storey, 1069).

⁴⁷ See Shahbazi; the location of cities within the climes changes from text to text.

⁴⁸ Awadh was how the name given in Persian texts to the city of Ayodhya, and by extension to the whole province; in the modern usage I follow here it more or less corresponds to the semi-independent kingdom of the Nawabs of Awadh, who in the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries took over the Mughal provinces of Allahabad and Awadh [Ayodhya]; in contemporary terms it is the area of eastern Uttar Pradesh.

⁴⁹ Knowledge of America and the other new continents, drawn from a Captain Scott, is presented in an appendix (M. Bilgrami, 4). Already Abu'l Fazl in the 1590s had mentioned that the "Franks" had discovered a new island which they called the "new world" (*'ālam-i naw*); in his "Account of India" in the fourth book of the *Akbarnāma* he included both Hindu cosmologies and cosmogonies ("more than 18 opinions"), the description and measurements of the globe, the seven climes, and as precise geographical information (including longitude and latitude) as was available, often comparing Arabic, Greek, and Indian calculations (Abu'l Fazl, 26 ff.).

⁵⁰ The spellings *satjug* and *kaljug* for *satya yuga* (the "age of truth" and first of the four ages) and *Kali yuga* (the age of Kali and fourth and most debased age) reflect vernacular phonology.

⁵¹ A slightly earlier compendium by an Awadh civil servant, Chahār Gulshan (Four Gardens) by Rai Chaturman[i] Kaith (d. 1759) gives almost the same information and significantly includes Bilgram as the only other *qasba* in the province of Awadh beside Ayodhya, Lucknow, and Bahraich—the Bilgramis' exaltation of their native place paid off!

⁵² Many legends circulated concerning the burial sites of Seth in India and elsewhere; see Wheeler, ch. 4 "Tombs of Giant Prophets"; I thank Rebecca Gould for this reference.

⁵³ It was his ancestor who “planted the flag of Islam and the rule of shari’a” in Bilgram, and not the person that Azad Bilgrami mentions in his book Ma’sir al Kirām! (M. Bilgrami, 156).

⁵⁴ For this version, see Prashant Keshavmurti’s online article in Indo-Persica, <http://perso-indica.net/work.faces?idsec=16&idw=122>.

⁵⁵ Pellò (2014) speaks of a “Persian prism” in his analysis of Hindu references in Persian texts by Hindu authors.

⁵⁶ For Bhima Kavi’s Daṅgvai Kathā (1493) and Hindavi tales (kathas) more in general, see Orsini forthcoming; for Mirigāvati see Behl.

⁵⁷ “puranic” refers to the Purānas, compendia of religious lore that, though written in Sanskrit, were often recited in the vernacular; see Orsini forthcoming.

⁵⁸ Auerbach; I realize that mimesis in Aristotle’s own terms, and in Arabic understandings of his Poetics, does indeed include imaginative and “elevating” renderings, but what I want to stress here is that indexical representation is never what literary description does in the texts I have seen; see Gould, Mallette (2009), van Geert and Hammond.

⁵⁹ Quoted in A. Bilgrami (265-267). Already Ahmin Razi had used this strategy and quoted Khusrau’s verses when praising India in Seven Climes (Razi, 505).

⁶⁰ Sāqīnāma, in Fani Kashmiri (197-202); I thank Sunil Sharma for his help in reading this text.

⁶¹ See Paramasivan for a similar theological interpretation in Ramanandi rasik commentaries on Tulsidas's Avadhi/Hindavi Rāmcaritmānas (1624), which however Laldas does not mention.

⁶² See Alam 2012. Abu'l Fazl in the A'īn-i Akbarī had simply placed the two systems side by side, while others, like the historian Firishta or the 17c Awadh Sufi 'Abd al-Rahman Chishti that Alam writes about, tried to aggregate the two chronologies in inventive ways.

⁶³ We may also note the multiple dating in several texts of this period; in his Hindavi tale Yūsuf Zulekhā, Shaykh Nisar gives four dating systems! (Hijri 1200, Vikram Samvat 1847, Shaka year 1712, and 1790 of the Christian era.) This excess may be connected to the author's awareness of the existence of this famous story in "Ibari [Hebrew], Arabic, Suryani [Syriac], Parasi [Persian], Turki, and Nasarani [Christian];" Saksena (405-407).

⁶⁴ "The mistake is chiefly due to the compilation of history from written materials only. The unwritten annals of the Hindús are little known and less consulted; while the chronicles of the Muhammadans throw hardly any more light on Indian history, than the Court Circular does on the proceedings of Parliaments, or the movements of classes in England;" Bennett (68).

⁶⁵ "Had we stayed our hand, it is possible that even now a Hindú Rája would be ruling a Hindú nation from the ancient seat of Hindú religion and empire, on a

throne supported by a landed aristocracy lately developed from the hierarchy of chieftains whose ancient ranks had been reinforced by the addition of all that was most vigorous in the late regime;" Bennett (65).

⁶⁶ It was those local and other traditions that Babu Balewshar Prasad systematically brought into the world of print for his Belvedere Steam Press in nearby Allahabad from 1878 onwards. Kabirdas, Surdas, and Tulsidas were by Nirala's time enshrined as classics in the Hindi University curriculum (hence the sarcastic reference to those "Chaturvedi" i.e. Brahmin scholars).

⁶⁷ Thus the chapter on Bilgram's Hindavi poets in Ghulam 'Ali Azad's Persian tazkira reveals a whole range of poetic engagements with Hindavi by Indo-Persian qasba intellectuals – witty repartees, poetics and erotics, music, gnostic/mystical poetry.

⁶⁸ E.g. knowing authors or works without knowing the texts recalls Genette's definition of "paratext without a text."

⁶⁹ Nor necessarily a clash of cultures, as ethno-religious nationalisms would have it.