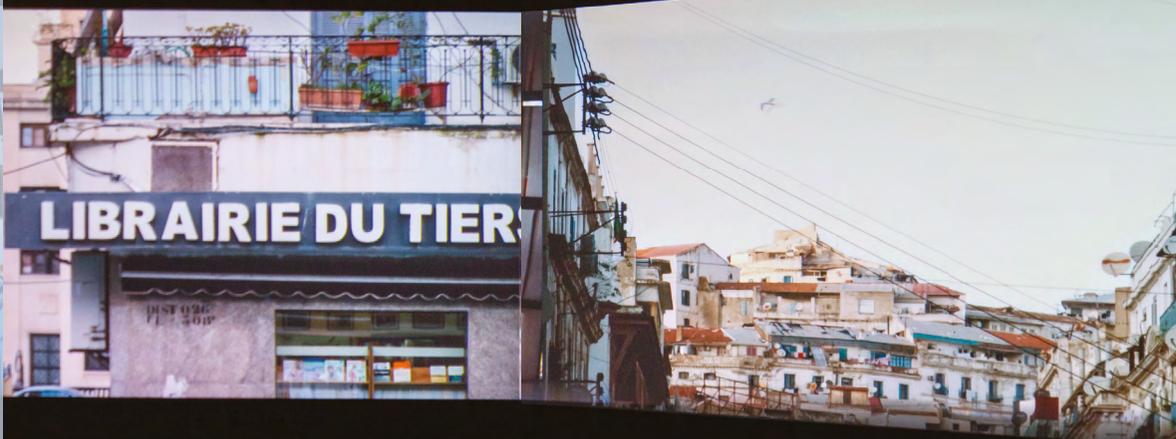


EDITED BY FRANCESCA ORSINI, NEELAM SRIVASTAVA  
AND LAETITIA ZECCHINI



# The Form of Ideology and the Ideology of Form

Cold War, Decolonization and Third  
World Print Cultures

THE FORM OF IDEOLOGY  
AND THE IDEOLOGY  
OF FORM



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Cold War, Decolonization  
and Third World Print Cultures

*Edited by Francesca Orsini,  
Neelam Srivastava and Laetitia Zecchini*



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# Acknowledgements

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This volume draws on a conference organized by Francesca Orsini at SOAS, University of London, in January 2019 under the aegis of her MULO SIGE (Multilingual Locals and Significant Geographies) project and the Postcolonial Print Culture (PPC) network led by Neelam Srivastava at Newcastle University and Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan at New York University.<sup>1</sup> We first and foremost thank the European Research Council for funding the MULO SIGE project and this open access book, and the Centre for Cultural, Literary, and Postcolonial Studies at SOAS for hosting us. We also thank the MULO SIGE and PPC network members and other speakers who presented at the SOAS conference but could not submit their papers (Sara Marzagora, Hala Halim, Anjali Nerlekar, Tanya Agathocleous, Rossen Djagalov, James Procter, Ruvani Ranasinha, Asha Rogers, B. Venkat Mani and Duncan Yoon), and Emily Sibley for her invaluable administrative help. We are delighted that this is the first volume to bring together members of MULO SIGE (Francesca, Itzea, and Karima) and the PPC network (Neelam, Paulo, Supriya, and Laetitia). We also thank Peter Kalliney for contributing an Afterword, and Laetitia for facilitating it. Finally, we thank the anonymous Open Book Publishers (OBP) readers for their suggestions, and OBP for being the great open access publishers they are.

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://postcolonialpc.com>. This volume is an output of the Multilingual Locals and Significant Geographies project, which received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 670876.



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# Notes on Contributors

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# Note on Transliteration

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In order to make the volume readable, we have kept diacritical marks to a minimum, using them only for book and journal titles and direct quotations. For Devanagari, we have mostly followed the transliteration used by R. S. McGregor, *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), with the exception that we have transliterated soft c (च) and its aspirate ch (छ) with ch and chh, and ś (श) and ṣ (ष) with sh, and have simplified the transcription of final nasalised vowels (using n instead of ण). For Arabic, we have followed the guidelines of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*.



# Introduction

Francesca Orsini, Neelam Srivastava,  
and Laetitia Zecchini

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Duncan White opens his book, *Cold Warriors: Writers Who Waged the Literary Cold War*, with the following anecdote: in 1955, the CIA orchestrated the launching of hundreds of ten-foot balloons into Communist territory. In them, instead of explosives: books. 'At the height of the Cold War, the CIA made copies of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* rain down from the Communist sky'.<sup>1</sup>

What the Cold War and the decolonization period show so crucially (and excitingly, for literary scholars) is how seriously literature was taken at the time, and how instrumental print cultures were considered to be in order to wage and advance certain struggles and ideas. Literature was everything *but* innocuous. The Cold War was famously also about the weaponization of literature, and it was predicated on its power, or its agency. Hence the vast amount of money (and thought, time, etc.) put into devising programs for disseminating, translating, and promoting certain kinds and forms of print and literature, and the impressive range of resources channeled to *press the fight*—Barnhisel and Turner's expression rehearsed in Monica Popescu's recent monograph, *At Penpoint: African Literature, Postcolonial Studies, and the Cold War*.<sup>2</sup> Cold War, decolonial, and postcolonial struggles were indeed also fought *at penpoint*.

---

1 Duncan White, *Cold Warriors: Writers Who Waged the Literary Cold War* (London: Little, Brown Group, 2019), p. 1.

2 Greg Barnhisel and Katherine Turner, eds, *Pressing the Fight: Print, Propaganda and the Cold War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010); Monica Popescu, *At Penpoint: African Literature, Postcolonial Studies, and the Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

Much has been written on Cold War literature, though until recently mainly from within the national literary frameworks of primarily the USA, Soviet Russia, and China.<sup>3</sup> But was the 'rest' of the literary world of Asia, Africa, and Latin America merely a battlefield for rival ideologies, falling under either American or Soviet influence? As this book shows, such a perspective is not only acutely Eurocentric, it also does not do justice to the vitality of literary activism in the decolonizing world, and to the multiple ways by which Third World print cultures broke free from Cold War antagonisms, and from imperial superpowers.<sup>4</sup>

Popescu convincingly argues for restoring the Cold War as the background and shaping element of decolonizing struggles, and it is the necessity of such an intersecting approach that we also emphasize here. This book thus contributes to the increasing scholarly interest in the cultural politics of the so-called Bandung era, and in the determining role that Third World print cultures played throughout the Cold War.<sup>5</sup>

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- 3 See for example: Julia Mickenberg, *Learning from the Left: Children's Literature, the Cold War, and Radical Politics in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Adam Piette, *The Literary Cold War, 1945 to Vietnam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); Derek C. Maus, *Unvarnishing Reality: Subversive Russian and American Cold War Satire* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2011); Roland Vegso, *The Naked Communist: Cold War Modernism and the Politics of Popular Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013); Greg Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature and American Cultural Diplomacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Eric Bennett, *Workshops of Empire: Stegner, Engle, and American Creative Writing During the Cold War* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015); Justin Quinn, *Between Two Fires: Transnationalism and Cold War Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Duncan White, *Cold Warriors*.
- 4 See Tony Day and Maya H. T. Liem, eds, *Cultures at War: the Cold War and Cultural Expression in Southeast Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 2010); Monica Popescu, *South African Literature Beyond the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) and *At Penpoint*; Patrick Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: the Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); and Peter Kalliney, 'Modernism, African literature, and the Cold War', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 76.3 (2015), 333–36.
- 5 These were nurtured by meetings such as the Bandung Conference of 1955, the Asian Writers' Conference in Delhi in 1956, the First Afro-Asian Writers' Conference in Tashkent, 1958, and the Congresses of Black Writers and Artists (1956 and 1958). See especially Popescu, *At Penpoint*; Rossen Djagalov, *From Internationalism to Postcolonialism: Literature and Cinema Between the Second and Third Worlds* (Montreal: McGill Queen's University Press, 2020); and Steven Belletto and Joseph Keith, eds, *Neocolonial Fictions of the Global Cold War* (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 2019). See also: Duncan Yoon, 'Our Forces Have Redoubled: World Literature, Postcolonialism, and the Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau', *The Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Enquiry*, 2.2 (2015), 233–52; Hala Halim, 'Lotus, the Afro-Asian Nexus, and Global South Comparatism', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa*

Restoring this conflict as one of the important genealogies of decolonizing and post-colonial struggles is not only a means to highlight the truly *global* scope of the Cultural Cold War, however.<sup>6</sup> It is critical to understand the emergence of new literary aesthetics and internationalisms at the time, to make sense of the complexity and vitality of Third World print cultures and of the debates and tensions (between or across ideologies and forms) that shaped them. It also makes us appreciate the challenges faced by many Third World, postcolonial writers, and the significance of the aesthetic, editorial, and political choices they made.

The intersecting approach of this volume is also manifest in its comparative and multilingual focus. The essays in it cover different geographical contexts in the Global South (China, India, Morocco, Tunisia), but also Italy and Catalonia (in the post-Franco transition to democracy), because the book is as much about the Third World as about Third-Worldism. It tells a story about non-aligned nations coming together as well as European solidarity for Third World struggles, and highlights the combination of local and internationalist networks that found expression in magazines, manifestos, translations, and other kinds of literary production in Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Hindi, English, Italian, and Spanish.

Finally, while much scholarly literature on Third World print cultures in the period of decolonization and the Cold War seems to follow the Cold War divide,<sup>7</sup> we have tried to bring together print cultures and literatures that seem to belong to different and even antithetical genealogies or 'fronts', but often cross them. In doing so, we aim to recover alternative legacies of the Third World (not systematically associated with Bandung), for instance highlighting the importance of the largely overlooked lineage of liberalism for anticolonial and postcolonial struggles, and for ideas and forms of self-determination.<sup>8</sup>

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*and the Middle East*, 32.3 (2012), 563–83; and Vijay Prashad, ed., *The East Was Read: Socialist Culture in the Third World* (New Delhi: Left Word Books, 2019).

- 6 Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- 7 For instance, Prashad's *The East was Read* on the one hand, and on the other hand Giles Scott-Smith and Charlotte Lerg's *Campaigning Culture and the Global Cold War: The Journals of the Congress for Cultural Freedom* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017).
- 8 See also Kalliney, 'Modernism, African literature, and the Cold War'; Roland Burke, "'Real Problems to Discuss": The Congress for Cultural Freedom's Asian and African Expeditions 1951–59', *Journal of World History*, 27.1 (2016), 53–85;

We also aim at revising some of the canonical temporal boundaries of decolonizing and postcolonial struggles waged through Third World print cultures, both *before* and *beyond* what is usually considered the apex of the Cold War (1950s–1960s). We therefore provide a pre-history of these struggles in the 1930s and 1940s (Chaudhuri, Zecchini), while also gesturing towards the future, as with Paulo Horta’s essay on Catalan print culture in the 1970s and 1980s, and Peter Kalliney’s Afterword.

Our book’s original focus on various print culture formats (magazines, newspapers, manifestos, conference proceedings, ephemera, etc.) and modes of cultural mediation and transnational exchange (including translation) helps to showcase the unprecedented range of literary texts, particularly from the Global South, that became available for differently accented Cold War era liberationist projects. These texts acted as fertile territory for the dissemination of radical, non-aligned, dissenting ideas in the era of decolonization. As scholars such as Patrick Iber have acknowledged, the ‘language of fronts’ is hardly relevant to make sense of the complex, often labile aesthetic and ideological texture of these print cultures in which Third World internationalisms and struggles found expression. Anticolonial commitment, Afro-Asian solidarity, and anti-totalitarianism declined the different meanings of ‘freedom’ and ‘resistance’.

The variety of the print-culture formats we consider here, from the perspective of specific locations and publishing spaces and of the many individual writers and editors whose positions often crossed ideological fault-lines, helps complicate and deepen our understanding of the life of literature and of postcolonial cultures. As suggested above, all these actors also took literature *seriously*. And as each of the essays in this volume demonstrates, the literary platforms on which they were engaged bristled with questions and debates about the aims and agency of literature; about the function of a writer; about how one should write and for whom; and about the significance of genres, literary movements and modes: what is a short story? What is criticism? What is realism? What is modernism? The meanings and implications of certain words that recur across meetings, essays, and statements (such as freedom, peace, engagement, independence, (anti)imperialism, (anti)

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Scott-Smith and Lerg, *Campaigning Culture*; and Laetitia Zecchini, ‘What Filters Through the Curtain: Reconsidering Indian Modernisms, Travelling Literatures, and Little Magazines in a Cold War Context’, *Interventions*, 22.2 (2020), 172–94.

totalitarianism, progressivism, literary value, autonomy, neutrality, and Non-Alignment) were also hotly debated, and this volume helps to make sense of their specific, *located* meanings, embedded in particular histories, debates, and aesthetics—in specific forms.

We thus posit (and focus on) the entanglement of form and ideology. The quest for alternative modes of political connection and representation was indistinguishable from a quest for alternative modes of aesthetic connection and expression.<sup>9</sup> This was a period when, despite claims to the contrary, literary texts were almost necessarily interpreted through ideological and political grids, and forms were ‘weaponized’ to present an explicit message. Certain forms and styles, certain types of art (realism, abstraction, experimentalism, etc.) were identified with certain ideologies, modes of government, struggles, and even with certain parts of the world. Yet, if forms were weaponized, they also escaped the intentions of ideology: and as many of the essays in this volume demonstrate, literary works produced in this era cannot be easily pigeonholed or straightjacketed within broad aesthetic-political-ideological categories.

Let us now unpack, one by one, the keywords of our title, namely Cold War Print Cultures, Forms, the Third World, World Literature and the Cold War, in order to provide a framework and a guide to the essays in this volume.

## Cold War Print Cultures *in situ*?

Decolonizing movements and Cold War propagandists invested heavily in print media (as well as radio and, when possible, film). The result was mountains of printed materials—from illustrated news bulletins to cultural and literary magazines with limited and wide distribution, from book series to a wealth of translations. If magazines, meetings, festivals and translations were the pillars of Cold War culture, they all happened through print, or found their way into it: even meetings and festivals produced reports, dispatches, travelogues, and memoirs (see Yan in this volume). Political solidarities encouraged other print forms as well: the manifesto and declaration, the testimony (Srivastava in this volume),

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<sup>9</sup> See also Christopher J. Lee, ed., *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010).

the 'letter from', the poem, or the book review (Zecchini)—often short, 'portable' forms that suited periodicals, rather than long forms like the novel.

Attention has understandably tended to focus on large-scale and high-profile propaganda programmes, such as the United States Information Services (USIS) and the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) activities in Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia, the USSR's Progress Publishers, *International Literature* and its other TASS publications, and China's Foreign Languages Press, International Bookstore, and *Chinese Literature*.<sup>10</sup> But while Frances Saunders's pioneering *The Cultural Cold War* (1999) and other more recent books such as Joel Whitney's, *How the CIA Tricked the World's Best Writers* (2016) revel in spy-story shenanigans, shady characters, and conspiracies, work on individual CCF magazines in Bombay, Ibadan, or Kampala has shown that their editors often used US/CIA funding instrumentally to pursue their own projects.<sup>11</sup> Although revelations about the origins of their funding sometimes damaged these magazines irreversibly (as with *Transition* or *Al-Hiwār*), they are better viewed in terms of their editors' and contributors' own 'literary activism', to use Amit Chaudhuri's term, an activism on behalf of literature that held literature, its value, aesthetics, and function, to account.<sup>12</sup>

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- 10 For the CCF and USIS see: Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy, The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe* (New York: The Free Press, 1989); Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 2013); Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom*; Sarah Brouillette, 'US–Soviet Antagonism and the "Indirect Propaganda" of Book Schemes in India in the 1950s', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 84.4 (Fall 2015), 170–88; Scott-Smith and Lerg, *Campaigning Culture*. For USSR propaganda publications, see Rossen Djagalov, 'The People's Republic of Letters: Towards a Media History of Twentieth-Century Socialist Internationalism' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Yale University, 2011). For Chinese programmes, see: Nicolai Volland, 'Clandestine Cosmopolitanism: Foreign Literature in the People's Republic of China, 1957–1977', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 76.1 (2017), 185–210, and *Socialist Cosmopolitanism: The Chinese Literary Universe, 1945–1965* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); also Yan Jia, 'Beyond the "Bhai-Bhai" Rhetoric: China-India Literary Relations, 1950–1990' (unpublished doctoral thesis, SOAS, University of London, 2019) and in this volume.
- 11 Popescu *At Penpoint*; Caroline Davis, *African Literature and the CIA: Networks of Authorship and Publishing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Zecchini, 'What Filters Through'; Kalliney, 'Modernism, African Literature, and the Cold War'.
- 12 Amit Chaudhuri, ed., *Literary Activism: Perspectives* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017).

The essays in this volume are firmly *located*—in Tunis, Rabat, Delhi, Bombay, Beijing, Barcelona, etc. This emphasis on location allows us to focus on what local editors, writers, and readers *did* with such a mass of material, and how they selected, inflected, or understood key ideologemes like ‘freedom’, ‘peace’, or ‘modernity’, as well as individual texts and authors. This localized entry is also a study in reception and *consumption*, and we claim a certain kinship with Carol Breckenridge and Arjun Appadurai’s approach to ‘public culture’ as an arena of cultural contestation and debate in which modernity is a ‘diversely appropriated experience’.<sup>13</sup> Consumers of these mass-mediated forms—here the writers and readers of Cold War print cultures and of these travelling texts and literatures—were agents or actors, not passive recipients or purveyors of ideologies, forms, and terms dictated by the two superpowers.

Brazilian João Guimarães Rosa’s philosophical story ‘The Third Bank of the River’ (1962) could for instance be read in Bombay as a yearning by Third World writers and readers for a path away from the ‘two banks’ of the Cold War fronts (see Orsini in this volume). Location requires us to have a double vision: clued into specific debates and inflections while being aware of international geopolitics and activities. Local political and literary actors used Cold War propaganda to bend it to their own struggles, like those between the Leftist Progressives, Nehru, and the critics of both in 1950s India (see Zecchini ‘What Filters Through’ and in this volume); between pro- and anti-Castro intellectuals in Latin America (Iber); and between Moroccan leftist intellectuals looking towards Egypt and beyond and the US-leaning Moroccan state (see Laachir in this volume). Both *Lotus* and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations’s Arabic journal *Thaqāfatul Hind* (Chaudhuri in this volume) bear witness to Nasser’s role in the Non-Aligned Movement, while Laachir’s essay shows Nasser’s pan-Arabist appeal in the region.<sup>14</sup>

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13 Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge, ‘Public Modernity in India’ in *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World*, ed. by Carol A. Breckenridge (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 1–20 (p. 5).

14 As such, our volume complements Popescu’s *At Penpoint* and the special issue she co-edited with Bhakti Shringarpure on ‘African Literary History and the Cold War’, *Research in African Literatures*, 50.3 (Fall 2019), which emphasizes local literary activism while stressing the benefits of the ‘Cold War lens’.

Our volume shows a wider range of actors at play in this booming print culture than is usually acknowledged in much of Anglo-American scholarship: from *state publishers* like China's Foreign Languages Press or the USSR's People's Publishing House that invested heavily into translations from and into Chinese and Russian; to *foundations* and *associations* like the Fairfield, Asia and Ford Foundations, the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) or the Association of Afro-Asian Writers; *large private publishers* like Longmans, Oxford University Press (OUP) and Heinemann in London, Nigeria and Kenya or *media groups* such as the Times of India Group in Bombay; and finally the many *small* and *medium private publishers* of books and magazines with regional or national reach.

Smaller ventures were neither necessarily avantgarde nor countercultural. Bourdieu's opposition between large-scale commercial or 'heterogenous' (i.e. political) production and restricted 'artistic' production in *The Rules of Art* is heuristically useful, but it was historically theorized on the basis of the French literary scene. Blown up to international proportions, it sets up simplistic and unhelpful universal systems of value that are hardly fitting (or universal) in such an ideologically charged time.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, it is an opposition that needs to be tested against actual circumstances in each context, given that local print histories and experiences of colonialism produced different ecologies of print. Caroline Davis speaks of the 'persistence of the colonial model' in African publishing during decolonization, with the Fairfield Foundation and the ICCF joining hands with educational giants Longmans and OUP to invest in, and give visibility to, new (Anglophone) African literature in the 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>16</sup> In Egypt, *Lotus* ambitiously punched above its weight and was supported by multiple agendas: partly funded by an East German foundation, it also enjoyed strong state support from President Nasser, who saw it as part of his own expansive internationalism.

Complementing the emphasis on book publishing and small magazines with magazines that enjoyed medium-to-large circulation, like Rajat Neogy's *Transition* in Kampala (12,000 copies) or the

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15 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

16 Davis, *African Literature and the CIA*, p. 11.

Hindi *Kahānī* (Short Story) in Allahabad and Kamleshwar's *Sārikā* (Starling) in Bombay, is also important because of the emphasis on the democratization of reading in decolonizing countries. While some Indian little magazines were consciously marginal and anti-commercial, medium magazines like *Kahānī* and *Sārikā* prided themselves on their large circulation, on providing plentiful reading matter cheaply, and on publishing works that would accompany middle- to lower-middle-class readers in their life struggle (Orsini).

Scholarship on the CCF, UNESCO, and Leftist internationalism emphasizes *networks*—with conferences, congresses, and bilateral exchanges bringing writers and intellectuals together to an unprecedented degree (see Chaudhuri and Yan in this volume). But once we broaden our view, other configurations also emerge, such as the *local ecology* of magazines in intense conversation with each other, sometimes across language and regional boundaries and the 'communities of the medium' they formed, to use Raymond Williams's term. Literary magazines reveal a cut-and-paste *relay* of news and texts (often short forms like stories, poems, reviews): looser than a network, this relay nonetheless took advantage of the abundant material made available by the propaganda programmes. At the same time, jarring combinations reveal the editors' own idiosyncratic choices, preferences, and cartographies. Sources are often unacknowledged, translations often second- or third-hand.

Finally, as always with periodicals, questions arise about their visibility, their permanence, and perishability. Many essays in this volume recuperate previously inaccessible archival material, or present us with a counter-canonical archive (e.g. Orsini and Goikolea), thus offering an important contribution to literary-historical scholarship about Cold War decolonization.

## Form

Throughout the period of decolonization and the Cold War, it is often impossible to disengage discussion of political and social debates from debates about form. In the contributions to this volume we posit the malleability of 'form' and stretch it as widely as possible, to encompass forms as 'genre', form as format (the visible or material shape of how

texts, anthologies or magazines are presented and structured), and form as personal style. Forms offer a way into refracting and multiplying rigid or received notions of the 'Third World', with a focus on how pluralistic understandings and expressions of liberation and freedom develop in the wake of decolonization. In other words, if Third World solidarity and Global South exchanges inhabit diverse (and sometimes overlapping) ideological spaces, such as socialism, Non-Alignment, or liberalism, the forms in which these ideologies are articulated (the so-called 'vehicles' or carriers of ideology) are equally diverse and artistically innovative.

Caroline Levine argues that 'there is no politics without form'; in this sense, literary forms can be read as exercising a political power, rather than merely acting as inert 'containers' for politics.<sup>17</sup> Form can be both political and aesthetic; and as Levine says, '*Forms do political work in particular historical contexts*'.<sup>18</sup> This is the case for these essays' heterogeneous archive, produced in the wake of anticolonial revolutions and emerging nation-states that fought to achieve freedom from Soviet and Western hegemony. Form thus shaped the way in which important political and ideological messages were conveyed to national and international audiences. A helpful insight Levine offers in her analysis of forms is the idea of their portability and iterability across time and space. This does not imply a universalizing history of genres; it rather acknowledges, as she puts it, the 'affordances' of form, namely their 'potential uses and actions latent in materials and designs'.<sup>19</sup> The forms analyzed in these essays share affordances with existing forms such as the novel, the short story, the travelogue, the critical essay, the magazine, and the testimony, but evolve and differ from these previous iterations in crucial ways, thanks to the revolutionary postcolonial contexts in which they appeared and by which they were shaped.

Forms do not always take on defined characteristics in the way established genres do; much like the alliances and networks that developed across different liberation movements, they are not fixed but rather in flux, and subject to shifts in perspective. For example, the *travelogue*, inherently inter-subjective and porous, emerges in the Indian

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17 Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 3.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 5, italics in the original.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

and Chinese Cold War contexts as a form that can eloquently express solidarity and inter-connection across different cultures. Supriya Chaudhuri, in her analysis of the Bengali writer and traveller Syed Mujtaba Ali, examines the travelogue as a fluid medium through which Ali navigates his many intellectual trajectories across borders, continents and languages, and as a conversational space where he recounts his varied encounters with intellectuals, artists and activists in Afghanistan and Berlin, places that fostered anticolonial activism. The role of travel is particularly important for establishing these Global South routes of exchange in the Cold War period. Chaudhuri discusses the 'anecdotal realism' that animates Ali's travel writing as well as his short stories, in which the sharing of experience with audiences and listeners plays a crucial role (p. 61).

In a related manner, Yan Jia explores the 'fraternal travelogue' produced by Chinese and Indian writers who visited each other's respective countries in the 1950s and 1960s, 'as significant textual outcomes of 1950s China-India diplomacy' (p. 69). The travelogue often fuses literary and political elements, a characteristic of Cold War forms that we witness throughout the texts examined in this volume. Jia argues that the travelogue is a 'complex form of ideology that fulfils propagandist functions while offering scope for self-reflections, silences, tensions, and interrogations' (p. 70). The travelogue also acts as a form of witnessing, of having seen things with one's own eyes, and offers a deliberate counter-narrative to the colonialist and Orientalist representations of Asia that have tended to dominate western travel writing.

What we notice in these travelogues, and in other forms discussed in this book, is that the locations of these Global South exchanges shift from the interwar to the post-war period, as exemplified by Mujtaba Ali's reminiscences before and after the war. The momentous political and cultural encounters among Third World intellectuals no longer take place exclusively in the imperial metropolises of Paris or London, as they did in the 1930s, but rather in the capitals or decolonized territories of the new nations, such as Beijing, Delhi, Bombay, Kabul, and revolutionary Havana. Forms take on a specifically dialogic quality in the era of decolonization. Alongside the conversational and anecdotal form of the travelogue, we also identify the role of the *critical essay*,

which flourished as a Cold War form in journals and periodicals, as a key platform that enabled discussion and dialogues on political and literary issues with other readers and writers (see Chaudhuri, Zecchini, Orsini, and Srivastava in this volume).

Forms should be distinguished from *formats*, namely the material shape taken by texts within the constraints of their physical production. Forms are moulded, serialized and shortened, i.e. *formatted*, to fit the layout of the journal or magazine in which they appear. Periodical culture is crucial to the textual construction of resistance and liberation discourses in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, and in general it is a central vehicle for political debates, thanks to the fertile cross-pollination of ideas between writers, editors, and readers. The reason why the critical essay flourishes as a Cold War form is because it capaciously accommodates literary with political sensibilities: debates around ideas of 'freedom' in Indian magazines, for instance, can articulate freedom both from western literary influences and from Cold War political polarities (Zecchini).

Modernism is a form that many Cold War era writers debate and wrestle with as one of the two main 'ideological carriers', alongside socialist realism, of opposing political positions: that of the 'free world' versus the Soviet bloc. The redefinition of 'realism' and 'modernism' during the Cold War is a glowing illustration of the ideologization or weaponization of literary forms and movements. Both superpowers tried to construct and enforce a partition of the world and world literatures between modernism on the one hand (redefined as being focused exclusively on form, and supposedly free from ideology), versus socialist realism on the other (which the anti-communist West strove to present as being *only* ideology). Zecchini comments on how modernism's 'so-called autonomy and abstraction', its presumed emphasis on style, craft, or the 'medium' itself, rather than content or ideology, was seen as a bulwark against totalitarianism, and a symbol of the freedom of Western writers and artists (p. 203). However, she argues that many Indian writers fought to craft their own forms, meanings, or idioms of modernism. Freedom thus takes on the meaning of liberation from Cold War alignments and cooptation. The notion and the exercise of 'freedom' itself, as it were, had to be freed from ideological and nationalist recuperation, and modernism liberated from exclusive definition and ownership by the 'West'.

In fact, debates taking place among writers and artists in the era of decolonization raise questions about how modernist and realist forms could be re-imagined in Global South locations, and re-defined by their Asian or African contexts and audiences. Moving beyond critical paradigms that pit modernism and literary autonomy against socialist realism and *engagement* as the polarizing modes of Cold War writing, this book thus examines the ways in which the varied and ephemeral archive of print culture from the non-aligned Third World complicates and indeed upends these crystallized polarities. Srivastava's essay, for example, discusses how an Italian editor's misreading of African realism in the 1960s as an 'outdated' literary style reveals gaps in the understanding of how social realism was taking on a renewed life in nation-building projects that centred on the novel, and was gaining a new meaning among its postcolonial audiences (see also Laachir's and Goikolea-Amiano's essays on the Cold War Arabic novel).

The permeability and malleability of form in these years is most evident in the shape-shifting undergone by the short story. Francesca Orsini examines the genre across a broad range of Indian literary magazines in the 1950s and 1960s in Hindi to uncover the ways in which the presence of the short story reveals lively debates around world literature, the introduction of foreign literatures to Indian readers, and the translations of classic and contemporary stories from across the globe, all of which took place in the pages of these periodicals. Orsini formulates a new term for this kind of Hindi short story: the 'magazine story', namely the story that was easily accessible to readers in a cheap format, a 'democratic genre', especially important in a developing nation like India where readers had shallow pockets. The 'magazine story' implies the idea of the short story as format, not just as form; its affordances are determined, in part, by the serial and ephemeral features of the outlet in which it is published. As Orsini remarks, working with magazines as one's archive requires the scholar 'to look at each issue *and* each magazine as a self-contained text, but also at each magazine as a platform for different voices and agendas, and as part of a wider ecology of print publications' (p. 107). The magazine issue, and the contents of the magazine itself, need to be considered within a broader network of print cultures that were actively producing both writers and readers in the Third World.

Radical magazines—as sites of political dialogue, propaganda, and literary debates—take on a variety of forms in the postcolonial Cold War, and usher in a revolutionary aesthetics in their format and layouts. Srivastava examines the multilingual periodical *Tricontinental*, published out of Havana in four languages (Spanish, English, French, and Italian), which featured trendy visuals such as iconic photographs of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro and other Third-Worldist icons, and ironic send-ups of advertisements for airlines or consumer products, sure to appeal to young militants from Europe to Latin America. In his essay, Horta argues that the xeroxed counter-cultural zines of post-Francoist Spain, such as the short-lived periodical *Berthe Trépat*, were crucial to Roberto Bolaño's early militancy within the anti-fascist movement and his engagement with radical and experimental aesthetics.

Internationalist solidarity and engagement with anti-imperialist struggle were relayed through *testimony* and documentary. These are key narrative forms that cut across the different genres of the travelogue, the political testimonial, the essay, and even the short story. Witnessing the decolonization struggle and conveying it to international audiences in order to gain support and engender empathy were central aims of the anticolonial text. Srivastava examines the testimonies of Algerians during the war of independence, collected by the Italian editor Giovanni Pirelli with the aim of producing subalternist accounts of liberation struggles. Horta reads Bolaño's participation in collective volumes and counter-cultural magazines as a form of denunciatory testimony of the Pinochet regime and other counter-revolutionary regimes in Latin America.

The novel in the era of decolonization engages in nation-building, but also in nation-critiquing, as Laachir discusses in her essay about the Moroccan thinker and novelist Abdallah Laroui. The '*two-friends novel*' he created emphasizes the importance of dialogue and debate, this time around a narrative form in which the protagonists embody the divergent, and equally incomplete, trajectories of the postcolonial intellectual. Laachir argues that Laroui used the novel as a form to mediate his political thought, which was typical of the Arabic novel of the time, within the political constraints and censorship in Morocco. As Goikolea-Amiano discusses in her essay, the historical novel in the Tunisian context references travel and the political solidarities it

engendered, as in the picaresque Pan-African and Pan-Arabist alliances represented in Khreyif's novel *Barg-el Lil* (1961), featuring a black slave protagonist's adventures in sixteenth-century Tunisia.

Language and translation become spaces of political commitment and literary decolonization. Many of the essays in the volume testify to the desire of Third World writers and publishers to liberate both colonial and metropolitan languages from their European legacy and infuse them with revolutionary potential, while rejecting any form of neo-imperialist linguistic hegemony by espousing multilingual projects. Khreyif's resolute turn to the Tunisian vernacular in his novel, moving away from classical Arabic as the language of literary tradition; the translation of short stories by world authors into Hindi; the publication of *Tricontinental* in four languages; or the poet and critic Nissim Ezekiel's push to transform English into a contemporary, 'live, changing' Indian language (Zecchini, p. 207), a language 'of one's own', are all powerful examples of this. Form shapes and is in turn shaped by the linguistic innovations introduced by postcolonial writers.

The dialogism inherent in these forms of ideology gives especial prominence to the figure of the editor and writer-as-editor, the cultural and ideological mediator between the print format and the author, between local and international networks, and perhaps in a broader sense, between 'ideology' and 'aesthetics'. The editor is also the one who decides on the form, format, and layout of these texts (which books to review; which parts to excerpt or abridge; how to present them; which blurbs or editorials to introduce these texts and authors, etc.). Zecchini analyzes the literary activism of the Indian editors of *The Indian PEN*, *Quest*, and other little magazines, who played a decisive role in formal debates around the future shape of postcolonial Indian literature and criticism. Orsini considers how Hindi magazine editors experimented with different formats for world literature—regular translation slots, broad surveys, dedicated columns and articles, or impressive special issues—producing 'thick' or 'thin familiarity' (p. 106). Pirelli, the Italian editor and activist who effectively brought Fanon's work to Italian audiences, strove to give international visibility to little-known Algerian perspectives on the war of liberation. Pirelli nurtured the development of testimony as a form that could best convey urgent political messages about torture, imprisonment and repression to the wider world. Similarly,

Bolaño's early editor, Sergio Macias, thus prefaced a collection of anti-fascist poetry he published in the 1970s: 'we will not concern us with the romantic, epic or descriptive, nor the anti-poem nor lyric or intimate verse [...] we include only texts born of critical circumstances, under pressure from reality'. The goal was 'unveiling the horror of the violence of the political oppression of Pinochet's military regime' (Horta, p. 290). The editor is both an experimenter, an innovator of forms and formats, hence a literary activist, *and* a political activist, often underlining the political stakes in the discussions of aesthetics within the pages of his or her journal or edited volume. The correspondence by publishers and editors contained in archives yields fascinating 'unpublished' forms of ideology (see Srivastava) that acts as a form of preliminary cultural gate-keeping and reveals the ideological impulses that animate supposedly 'aesthetic' choices and decisions.

## The Third World

The Third World is both a relational term and a rather fuzzy one. It is fraught with connotations, rather than denotations; it simultaneously evokes the idealism of liberation struggles and is deeply grounded in real-life inequalities across global populations. It is a relational term in the sense that it came to define a group of nations, or regional areas of the globe, that offered an alternative bloc to Soviet socialism and US capitalism in the post-war period. As such, it is integral to Cold War rhetoric, occupying the vast, if ill-defined, conceptual and political spaces between the 'free world' and the 'Iron Curtain'. As suggested above, the idea of the Third World is grounded in *Third-Worldism*, namely the internationalist solidarities and shared political commitments engendered by connections across various liberation movements. These were experienced and practiced also by European militants who saw in the Third World an ideal continuation of the anti-fascist and anti-Nazi struggle that had dominated World War II.

Famously, the term 'Third World' gained wide currency in 1952 when it was used by the French economic historian Alfred Sauvy, who juxtaposed a 'Third World', comprising new or decolonizing African and Asian states, to the West, defining it as an area of under-development but also of radical militancy: 'the Third World has, like the Third Estate, been

ignored and despised for too long, and it too wants to be something'.<sup>20</sup> Though nowadays the term is often simply used as a shorthand for economically under-developed regions across the globe, in political terms the Third World could be identified with the twenty-nine non-aligned nations hailing from the Global South that came together with a common purpose at the Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955. As B. R. Tomlinson remarks, though the conference is seen as an inaugural moment in Third-Worldism, its participants—from countries like India, China, Indonesia, Egypt, and Vietnam that took on a leading role among developing nations—did not use the term 'Third World' to define their new alliance.<sup>21</sup> Third World is effectively a term invented in the West, and it carried connotations of dependency and the residual legacy of colonization. However, in the era of the anticolonial liberation movements of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, it came to take on a positive and militant meaning, building on an existing political and cultural body of thought that sought to enfranchise itself from Eurocentric theories of self-determination and equality: Pan-Africanism, African socialism, Gandhism, Latin American revolutionary theory (such as that of Che Guevara), and even Maoism form part of this rich theoretical corpus of anticolonialism.

While Third-Worldism's distance from the ex-colonial powers is easy to comprehend, its relationship with the Communist bloc, and indeed with Marxism as an ideology, is a more complex one to parse. At first glance, Marxism could be seen as enduringly supportive of anticolonial movements, and critics such as Neil Lazarus and Timothy Brennan have been at pains to point out that postcolonial studies as a field cannot be considered to be autonomous or particularly original, since it owes its principal intellectual debts to international Communism.<sup>22</sup> However, Third-Worldist political alliances during the Cold War directly critiqued

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20 Alfred Sauvy (1952), quoted in B.R. Tomlinson, 'What was the Third World?', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 38.2 (April 2003), 307–21 (p. 309). In her essay for this volume, though, Supriya Chaudhuri mentions an earlier (and non-European) genealogy for the term, observing that "Third World" was first used at the Asian Relations Conference (ARC) held in Delhi, India, in March–April 1947.

21 Ibid.

22 See, for example, Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), especially the Introduction, pp. 1–20; and Timothy Brennan, 'Postcolonial Studies between the European wars: An Intellectual History', *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies*, ed. by Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 185–203.

Euro-Communism via the development of tricontinentalism. Latin American revolutionaries, especially Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, were wary of Moscow and resolutely rejected being subsumed within the USSR's sphere of influence. In Congo, Angola, and Algeria, there were similar Third-Worldist/non-aligned positions.

Tricontinentalism, as a political, cultural and economic alliance comprising the three continents of the Global South, namely Africa, Asia, and Latin America, is a much more positive term than 'Third World' to describe the ex-colonial countries dominated by European and American powers. It was established at the First Conference of the Organization of Solidarity of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America at Havana in 1966, although its founding principles originated in the Bandung Conference of 1955.<sup>23</sup> Robert Young calls the Havana Conference 'the first global alliance of the peoples of the three continents against imperialism, and the founding moment of postcolonial theory, in its journal, *Tricontinental*'.<sup>24</sup> As Anouar Abdel-Malek remarks in his seminal text on Third World thought, *Social Dialectics* (1972), Guevara spoke of 'we, the exploited people of the world', and not 'we communists of the Third World'.<sup>25</sup> Third World peoples, oppressed by imperialism and western hegemonies, were now the global proletariat. The innovativeness of Guevara's resolute internationalism was to see the commonality of oppression across races and cultures.<sup>26</sup> In other words, imperialism and racism produce similar effects (exploitation, alienation, dispossession) across different regions.

In literary terms (perhaps a spurious distinction from the political definition) the Third World delineates a space of radical aesthetics and a rethinking of European literary traditions and styles. It is never so straightforward as a *rejection* of such legacies: it is rather a repurposing of modernism, social realism, and experimentation for the specific needs and interests of these new postcolonial audiences, radical networks of militants. The Third World is also a perspective on world literature,

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23 As Anne Garland Mahler argues, 'The Bandung and Tricontinental moments might be taken as two major cornerstones of Cold War anticolonialisms, separated by an ocean and a decade', *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), p. 23.

24 Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), p. 5.

25 Anouar Abdel-Malek, *La dialettica sociale* (Bari: Dedalo Libri, 1974), p. 131.

26 See Young, *Postcolonialism*, pp. 212-13.

and as Orsini notes, in Indian appraisals of foreign literature, 'Third World here stood for non-European stories rather than for stories that embraced a postcolonial vision'. Kamleshwar, the editor of the Indian literary periodical *Sārikā*, defined the Third World as 'ordinary people and writers as fellow travellers' (p. 103).

The increased prominence of aesthetics in Third World political debates was due to the fact that culture was seen as central to the revolutionary process. As Barbara Harlow argues in relationship to Palestinian resistance poetry of the 1960s and 1970s, culture became 'an arena of struggle'.<sup>27</sup> This insight, which is now foundational to the field of postcolonial studies, is actually the product of Third-Worldist and Global South forms of knowledge elaborated during the decolonization struggles. For example, the Guinean revolutionary Amílcar Cabral, writing in 1970, argued that 'it is generally within the culture that we find the seed of opposition, which leads to the structuring and development of the liberation movement'.<sup>28</sup> The autonomy of the aesthetic is for the first time profoundly challenged by revolutionary movements during decolonization; this then becomes a critical insight crucial to the contemporary field of postcolonial studies, though it was elaborated back in the 1960s.

Perhaps one of the main legacies of Third-Worldism in cultural terms is not so much the literature that was produced in those years, but the critical frameworks it has bequeathed us. Not only did it initiate a move away from 'western' categories, but it was often a move away from the idea of aesthetic autonomy, though of course this is more complex than it appears at the surface.<sup>29</sup> Texts and ideas originating from anticolonial and anti-imperialist struggles in the Global South, and circulating in multiple languages and in translation, sketch out a form of aesthetics that is neither derivative of western literary forms and 'Eurochronology' (as Appadurai calls it), nor is it harking back to 'traditional' aesthetic forms of the literary traditions belonging to the societies involved in the political struggle for

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27 Barbara Harlow, *Resistance Literature* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 55.

28 Amílcar Cabral, 'National Liberation and Culture', *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches of Amílcar Cabral*, ed. Africa Information Service (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), p. 43.

29 Postcolonial/Third World intellectuals also seized on the idea of aesthetic (and modernist) autonomy, repurposing it to declare their freedom from colonial tutelage, and sometimes assert their ideological neutrality; see Kalliney, 'Modernism, African Literature, and the Cold War'.

liberation.<sup>30</sup> These aesthetics came about through a shared sense of the way in which decolonization would change culture: not in terms of a re-colonization of indigenous arts, but an integrated development of a new culture coming out of anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism, social justice, and social progress for the people, which constantly oscillated between local and universal forms, as Cabral theorized. For example, Laachir and Goikolea-Amiano explore the diverse aesthetics of the Arabic novel in the era of decolonization in Morocco and Tunisia, at times through heteroglossia and the iconoclastic use of non-standard Arabic linguistic forms that strongly referenced the vernacular, spoken elements and thus emphasized the popular traditions within a supposedly 'high' literary form. As Ernesto Che Guevara's writing on art and literature demonstrates, there was a constant, very sophisticated analysis of aesthetics debates that were taking place among internationalist Third-Worldists, precisely because they were seen as central to political struggle.<sup>31</sup>

## The Cold War and World Literature

When I was growing up [in Bombay in the early 1970s], I could easily name Soviet or European writers, dissident writers abroad. I knew of them and their work, Solzhenitsyn, Kundera, Holub, Havel, Brodsky, and all these names were familiar to me.

Salil Tripathi<sup>32</sup>

To a certain—and still largely unacknowledged—extent, the Cold War contributed to *create* world literature, or at least created the conditions for its possibility in part by bringing literatures and writers into new or unprecedented contact and conversation with each other.<sup>33</sup> But ideology,

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30 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 3.

31 In debating a new socialist aesthetics for Cuba, Guevara criticized the 'frozen forms of socialist realism', while also denigrating the 'anguish of alienated man' that characterizes late-twentieth century European art, decadent art; see Ernesto Che Guevara, *Che Guevara and the Cuban Revolution: Writings and Speeches of Che Guevara*, ed. by David Deutschmann (London: Pathfinder, 1987), p. 250.

32 Salil Tripathi 'From a Very Young Age in Fact, I Used to Collect Books that Were Banned', Interview with Laetitia Zecchini, <https://www.writersandfreexpression.files.wordpress.com/2017/02/interview-with-salil-tripathi3.pdf>

33 Andrew Rubin, *Archives of Authority: Empire, Culture and the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Quinn, *Between Two Fires*.

though often draped in claims of literary value, was the driving force here—rather than the market.<sup>34</sup>

The Cold War underpinned world literature in terms of *visibility* and *availability*. Journalist and author Salil Tripathi may well wonder why he grew up familiar with Soviet and East European dissident authors (while young people now would hardly be as familiar with contemporary dissident writers like Asli Erdoğan or Liu Xiaobo), but we only need to look at the pages of the ICCF magazine *Quest* or to examine which books were available in cheap subsidized paperback editions on the footpaths of Bombay to see how that familiarity came about: all the writers he names were featured.<sup>35</sup> Familiarity was as much created through translations as through name-dropping, snippets of information, and relayed recognition. From our current Anglocentric world literary perspective, to which every literature not in English, French or Spanish is ‘minor’, going back to the Cold War decades comes as a shock. Whether we speak of countries or of individual authors, Cold War propaganda efforts and the intense internationalism of decolonization *visibilized* literatures from most parts of the world to an extraordinary degree. As we have seen, this great expansion of world literature was facilitated by criss-crossing and contrastive print internationalisms, each creating its own version of world literature while selecting different authors from the same countries. Without the Cold War, we would have a very different, and much smaller, world literature. The *Lotus* anthologies, for instance, made an impressively wide range of contemporary poems and authors from Africa, Asia and the Middle East appear together, visible *to each other* and accessible to Arabic readers as well as to Asian and African readers through English and French. Meanwhile the magazines receiving support from the CCF in Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America were encouraged to connect or ‘talk to’ each other, through shared features, syndicated articles, cross-advertisements, and editorials.<sup>36</sup>

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34 Many of the journals and publications sponsored by the CCF or by the Soviets were maintained against the logic of the market, and sold at very cheap prices, in spite of their being (at least at times) lavishly produced and illustrated.

35 See Zecchini, ‘What Filters Through’.

36 See Scott-Smith and Lerg, *Campaigning Culture*.

Of course, this ‘visibilization’ involved selective processes of canonization and consecration. The writers and literatures that were promoted or subsidized, that were translated and circulated transnationally, were often those that each bloc considered ideologically correct or ‘compatible’. Conversely, voices that were considered deviant or too critical were censored, silenced or invisibilized.<sup>37</sup> Different politics produced different mappings, as well as different temporalities, of world literature. As Greg Barnhisel and other scholars have shown, US world literature pivoted around (a very subdued version of) modernism and favoured books that promoted the American or ‘Western’ way of life as vehicles of its so-called liberal values. It also included dissident Soviet and East European authors and non-Communist Latin American, Asian and African authors, while Soviet and Chinese networks translated and publicized approved Western classics and ‘friendly’ authors (like Howard Fast).<sup>38</sup> In line with Mao Zedong’s ‘three-way division of the world’ posited in 1947, which interposed an ‘intermediate zone’ between the socialist and capitalist blocs that stretched from Europe to China and included numerous colonial and postcolonial countries in Africa and Asia, Mao Dun, the Chinese writer and editor of the state world literature magazine *Yiwen* (Translated Literature), mapped the literary world in three parts: the Soviet Union and people’s democracies (i.e. the socialist bloc); capitalist countries; and former or current colonies/semi-colonies.<sup>39</sup>

The more elaborate map proposed by Nikolai Tikhonov at the Second Congress of Soviet writers in 1954 conceived of world literature as a ‘solar system’, with Soviet literature at the centre and progressive literatures from other parts of the world orbiting around it in five concentric circles. These included: (1) literatures of the people’s

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37 See especially Rubin, *Archives of Authority*.

38 Rossen Djalalov, ‘“I Don’t Boast About It, but I’m the Most Widely Read Author of This Century”’: Howard Fast and International Leftist Literary Culture, ca. Mid-Twentieth Century’, *Anthropology of East Europe Review*, 27.2 (Fall 2009), 40–55.

39 See Mira Sinha Bhattacharjea, ‘Mao: China, the World and India’, *China Report*, 31.1 (1995), 15–35 (p. 24), quoted in Jia, ‘Making a World of Literary Relations: The Representation of Indian Literature in the Chinese Journal *Yiwen/Shijie wenxue*, 1953–1962’ in *World Literature in Motion: Institution, Recognition, Location*, ed. by Flair Donglai Shi and Gareth Guangming Tan (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2020), pp. 379–408 (pp. 385–86).

democracies of East Europe; (2) literatures of the people's democracies in Asia (China, Mongolia, Vietnam, etc.); (3) progressive literatures of non-socialist Asian countries (such as India, Turkey, Iran, etc.); (4) progressive literatures of capitalist countries (the United States, Italy, Denmark, etc.); and (5) Latin American literature.<sup>40</sup> Translations and prizes, international visits, and conferences enacted these visions—with the Stalin/Lenin Prize bestowed on writers like Anna Seghers and Bertolt Brecht, Guo Moruo, Thakin Kodaw Hmaing, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Louis Aragon, Arnold Zweig, Artur Lundkvist, Paul Robeson, Jorge Amado, Pablo Neruda, and Nicolás Guillén, among others.<sup>41</sup>

In an oft-quoted passage from a 1952 text translated by Marie and Edward Said, Eric Auerbach warned that all human activity now seemed to be concentrated into European-American or Russian-Bolshevist forms and patterns: 'Should mankind succeed in withstanding the shock of so mighty and rapid a concentration [...] then man will have to accustom himself to existence in a standardized world, to a single literary culture [...] And herewith the notion of *Weltliteratur* would be at once realized and destroyed'.<sup>42</sup> And yet, as we have suggested throughout this Introduction, it would be extremely reductive to read this period only as one of standardization and even synchronization of literary cultures across the globe, or of the uniformization of world literature, and ultimately its obsolescence.

What from a distant or 'macro' perspective appear like integrated world literary systems (whether one, two, or three), each with its centre, satellites, and peripheries along clearly delineated aesthetic and ideological lines—a polycentric world literature—takes a very different complexion once we move closer. The picture becomes much more variegated or nuanced, marked by overlaps, with local actors never mere 'orbits' around one sun or the other, and often less ideologically or aesthetically regimented than their declarations may suggest.

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40 Jia, 'Making a World', p. 382.

41 Scholars like Adhira Mangalagiri have cautioned against rosy views of South-South solidarity in this period of Non-Alignment and decolonization as isolated from state diplomatic projects; Mangalagiri, 'Ellipses of Cultural Diplomacy: The 1957 Chinese Literary Sphere in Hindi', *Journal of World Literature*, 4.4 (2019), 508–29 (p. 508).

42 Erich Auerbach, 'Philology and "Weltliteratur"', translated by Edward and Marie Said, *Centennial Review*, 13.1 (1969), 1–17 (p. 3).

As we have seen, in newly-decolonized or decolonizing countries writers and enterprising editors (*literary activists*, as we have called them) curated the material made available to them by the rival cultural artilleries of both ‘fronts’, set their own ambitious agendas, encouraged new literary voices and forms, and laid out the terms of critical engagement and aesthetic value. True, in their literary curiosity and political engagement such literary activists drew on tropes and debates that circulated internationally but, as already argued above, they often reinterpreted and recast those terms for aesthetic, social, or political projects that could be at odds with the ideologies they were initially supposed to convey. A Cold War lens on world literature helps focus the relationship between literature and politics in terms that diverge from Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of the gradual accumulation of literary value translating into autonomous art—terms reprised by Pascale Casanova in her historical paradigm of world literature.<sup>43</sup> It does so in at least two ways: first, by showing how literature on all sides of the spectrum—whether overtly ‘political’ or force-read as apolitical and allegedly ‘autonomous’—was inevitably imbricated in real-world politics.<sup>44</sup> Second, it forces us to look closely at the relationship between party or front politics and the apparent or assigned ideology of a work on the one hand, *and its reading* on the other, without flattening the one onto the other.

These decades produced curious *world-readers* who regularly sought out literary (and non-literary) writings from other parts of the globe, particularly, though not exclusively, from the world’s hotspots or decolonizing nations. The Ghanaian writer Ellis Ayetey Komey noted in 1961 that the demand for African fiction outstripped supply.<sup>45</sup> Marathi-English poet Arun Kolatkar embodied the bulimic impulse of the postcolonial reader, non-deferential towards the English canon, and keen to explore the world through literature (he famously travelled very little). When asked to name his favourite writers in one of his rare

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43 Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

44 That every work is political in its worldliness and its position in its field is not something that either Casanova or Bourdieu would question, of course. But at the level of the *values* of the literary field, autonomy becomes disassociated from and superior to politics.

45 Ellis Ayetey Komey, ‘Wanted: Creative Writers’, 63, quoted in Davis, *African Literature and the CIA*, p. 10.

interviews, Kolatkar gave a dizzying list of eclectic names that reveals both his extraordinarily inclusive or indiscriminate conception of literature, but also speaks volumes of the environment in which he and other writers of his generation produced their work, of the immense broadening of literary horizons, or 'worldliness', which the Cold War also made possible:

Want me to give you a list? Whitman, Mardhekar, Manmohan, Eliot, Pound, Auden, Hart Crane, Dylan Thomas, Kafka, Baudelaire, Heine, Catullus, Villon, Dnyaneshwar, Namdev, Janabai, Eknath, Tukaram, Wang Wei, Tu Fu, Han Shan, Ramjoshi, Honaji, Mandelstam, Dostoevsky, Gogol, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Babel, Apollinaire, Breton, Brecht, Neruda, Ginsberg, Barthes, Duras, Joseph Heller, Enzensberger, Gunter Grass, Norman Mailer, Henry Miller, Nabokov, Namdev Dhasal, Patte Bapurav, Rabelais, Apuleius, Rex Stout, Agatha Christie, Robert Sheckley, Harlan Ellison, Bhalchandra Nemade, Durrenmatt, Aarp, Cummings, Lewis Carroll, John Lennon, Bob Dylan, Sylvia Plath, Ted Hughes, Godse Bhatji, Morgenstern, Chakradhar, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Balwantbua, Kierkegaard, Lenny Bruce, Bahinabai Chaudhari, Kabir, Robert Johnson, Muddy Waters, Leadbelly, Howlin' Wolf, John Lee Hooker, Leiber and Stoller, Eisenstein, Truffaut, Woody Guthrie, Laurel and Hardy.<sup>46</sup>

And yet, despite the existence of transcontinental writerly networks and the belief in a new 'global simultaneity of literary aesthetics' (Holt), not only did this ambition clash with the reality of translational delay, with authors from the 1930s being hailed as 'contemporary' in the 1970s or nineteenth-century authors numbered among those 'of the last twenty-five years' in the 1950s (see Orsini in this volume). More interestingly, geopolitical affiliations 'dragged' older authors into the present and erased unpalatable contemporaries.

And if many works and writers were (often unwittingly) enlisted in the tug of war between liberalism and totalitarianism, 'art for art's' sake vs 'art for life's' sake, at the point of reception they were in fact read, and can be read, as *both* engagé *and* modernist (Camus, Kamleshwar), as engagé *or* modernist, entertaining *or* political (Jack London), modernist *and* political (Guimarães Rosa), politically progressive *but* aesthetically

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46 Interview in Marathi translated by Philip Engblom in 'Arun Kolatkar: Reading Jejuri, and Arun Kolatkarachya Kavita in Tandem', *New Quest*, 146 (Oct.-Dec. 2001), 389-409. Also discussed in Laetitia Zecchini, *Arun Kolatkar and Modernism in India, Moving Lines* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 55-56.

conservative (see Srivastava in this volume), simply engagé or truly revolutionary (Lu Xun, Premchand), and so on, depending on the frame of reference. This of course pertains to the semantic richness and ambivalence of literary texts, but also to the fact that so many authors and texts were read according to different ideological and aesthetic frameworks in different parts of the world. Cold War reception studies can be a sub-field in itself.

Two final points. First, as already mentioned above and in several essays of this volume (Orsini in particular, but also Srivastava, Zecchini), Cold War literature was predicated on the accumulation and circulation of translations. Yet Cold War world literature would not have been possible without relay translations, i.e. translations of translations. Once again, sourcing, curating, and retranslating translations was as crucial for literary activism as translating 'from the original' in the first place. By implication, this 'literary poly-system' looks quite different from the one structured by 'open' and 'closed' relations theorized by Itamar Even-Zohar, or from the 'solar systems' theorized by Soviet and Chinese theorists.<sup>47</sup> Sometimes circulation went through roundabout and surprising circuits (e.g., the 'middlebrow' US magazine *Short Story International*, see Orsini in this volume). English and French translations appear crucial as *vehicles* of world literature into third languages rather than as points of arrival in the struggle for world recognition.

Finally, although of course many seminal novels were written—and some translated, excerpted and serialized in Cold War magazines and journals—Cold War print culture was at least as invested, if not more, in other forms such as the magazine, the short story, the travelogue, the testimonial, the book review, the poem, the editorial, the 'letter from', as well as forms of popular and public culture (radio broadcasting, cinema, music, etc.) which are outside the scope of this specific volume. Again and again in our respective work, and in this volume, we have asked, what happens if we consider world literature not through the novel, which encourages diffusionist models and Eurocentric histories, but through other genres?

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47 Itamar Even-Zohar, 'Polysystem Theory', *Poetics Today*, 11.1 (1990), 9–26.

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# 1. The Traveller as Internationalist

Syed Mujtaba Ali

*Supriya Chaudhuri*

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Among four artists shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 2018, and therefore on view that December at the Tate Britain gallery in London, was Naeem Mohaiemen, a film-maker and installation artist who grew up in Dhaka, Bangladesh, and whose work I have greatly admired since I first saw it in India at Kolkata's Experimenter gallery. He had three works on show: the feature film *Tripoli Cancelled* (2017), about a stranded traveller in the abandoned Ellinikon airport in Athens; a three-screen documentary called *Two Meetings and a Funeral* (2017), narrated by the Marxist historian Vijay Prashad, on the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1970s when it was overtaken by the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC); and *Volume Eleven (Flaw in the Algorithm of Cosmopolitanism)* (2018), a concertina book with photographs and text. All three were representative of Mohaiemen's research-driven art, focusing on decolonization, the radical left, failed transnationalisms in the post-World War II period, the history of Bangladesh, and family histories. Though I had seen his work before, it took me a few minutes to register that the book title, *Volume Eleven*, was actually a reference to the final volume of his great-uncle Syed Mujtaba Ali's collected works, which represent an exceptional Bengali literary oeuvre from the era after decolonization.

The exhibition left me thinking about a faint, almost invisible trajectory, one that Mohaiemen did not emphasize, that connected all three works and clarified for me certain aspects of South Asian history.

Mohaiemen's reference was to three articles by Syed Mujtaba Ali on Hitler and Germany, only one of which actually appears in the current Volume 11 of the *Collected Works*, under the damning title 'Hitler Māhātmya' or 'Hitler's Greatness'.<sup>1</sup> It was originally published in the Bengali newspaper *Dainik Basumati*, and is partly a review of Raymond Cartier's *Les Secrets de la Guerre dévoilés par Nuremberg* (Paris: Fayard, 1946), praising Hitler's military achievements. The other two essays are analyses of post-war Germany. In one of these, strongly critical of British-American Cold War policy and the self-serving calculations of the US-funded Marshall Plan, Ali recalls Goebbels's prediction that the Western powers would be forced to revive Germany in order to counter their real enemy, the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> In the other, one of a series of newspaper columns published from July 1945, he begins by noting the similarity between the Nazi myth of Aryan supremacy and the self-deluding 'Aryanism' of Hindu fundamentalists in late nineteenth-century India. Citing a brilliant satirical attack on the latter by Dvijendranath Tagore (Rabindranath's elder brother) in 1890, Ali contrasts the failure of the Hindutva version of Aryanism, described as an imported ideology that played no part in India's gaining of political independence, with the monstrous historical crimes generated by Nazi racist ideologies. This secular critique of racism, fascism, and communalism uncannily anticipates the issues dividing the Indian polity today. In the second half of the essay Ali urges support for the Social Democratic Party (SDP) in post-war Germany, recalling that it had been one of the pillars of the Weimar Republic, welcoming Rabindranath Tagore there in 1920 (actually 1921), and working tirelessly to revive Germany after World War I. Its members, whom he knew personally, had never endorsed the fascist Aryan myth.<sup>3</sup>

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- 1 'Hitler Māhātmya' (Hitler's Greatness) in Syed Mujtaba Ali, *Rachanābālī* (Collected Works) (11 vols, Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh, 2014–2015), vol. 11, pp. 118–20, cited henceforward as *Rachanābālī* with vol. and page no. See also 'Sudine Durdine Germany' (Germany in Good Days and Bad), in vol. 10, pp. 232–37, and 'Parājita Germany' (Defeated Germany), in vol. 9, pp. 306–16. Mujtaba Ali's writings and the scholarship on him are almost entirely in Bengali: all translations here are mine.
  - 2 'Sudine Durdine Germany', *Rachanābālī*, vol. 10, p. 236. The essay is undated but appears to have been written after the initiation of the Marshall Plan (1948–1951) by the USA to revive Western Europe.
  - 3 'Parājita Germany', *Rachanābālī*, vol. 9, pp. 306–09, 313–16. First published in the *Anandabazar Patrika* in a newspaper column (1948) titled *Satyapīr-er Kalame* (From the pen of Satyapir).

Yet despite this clear rejection of Nazi ideology and its Hindutva variants, Ali's pro-German stance dismays Mohaiemen, who refers to it in the text of *Volume Eleven* as 'a poisoned poultice', citing Subhas Chandra Bose's war-time collaboration with Nazi Germany and the troubled inter-war politics of revolutionaries like Taraknath Das. There is a connection here between what Mohaiemen calls a flawed cosmopolitanism, the internationalism of the interwar years (or what Raza, Roy and Zachariah call the 'scramble for the transnation'), Pan-Asianist dreams under colonial rule later fostered by the Afro-Asian alliance of Bandung, the Non-Aligned Movement itself, and the ideological struggles within print cultures of the Cold War period.<sup>4</sup> Mujtaba Ali's writings and travels offer a key to understanding literary cosmopolitanisms and transnational alliances before and after Indian Independence. As I went round the exhibition, the hidden history towards which Mohaiemen gestures seemed newly important and relevant in a world under fascist threat and shadowed by another Cold War.<sup>5</sup>

## Syed Mujtaba Ali, Writer and Traveller

By any reckoning Syed Mujtaba Ali was an extraordinary figure: scholar, polyglot, academic, traveller, raconteur, anecdotal essayist, editor, and political commentator. His contributions to twentieth-century Bengali literature are generally classed in an in-between genre suited to periodical publication called *ramya-rachana* (*belles-lettres*). From the later 1940s onwards, he wrote voluminously, both in the essay form for journals and newspapers, and in the longer literary genres of the novel and short stories. After his death in 1974, his collected works were published in eleven volumes in Kolkata by four of his literary colleagues, Gajendrakumar Mitra, Sumathanath Ghosh, Sabitendranath Ray, and Manish Chakraborty.<sup>6</sup> Right up until his death, Mujtaba Ali produced a running commentary on his life and times, in which travel and *adda* (conversation) in all kinds of settings, including Cairo, figure

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4 Ali Raza, Franziska Roy and Benjamin Zachariah, *The Internationalist Moment: South Asia, Worlds and World-Views, 1917–39* (Delhi: Sage, 2014), p. xxi.

5 Both US-China and US-Russia face-offs have recently been so described, e.g. in the right-wing journalist Edward Lucas's *The New Cold War: Putin's Russia and the Threat to the West*, 3rd ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2014).

6 Syed Mujtaba Ali, *Rachanābali*, 1st ed. (Kolkata: Mitra and Ghosh, 1974–1983).

prominently.<sup>7</sup> His most characteristic work—travel narrative, short fiction, or essay—is presented in his signature *baithaki* or *majlisi* style, a major gift to twentieth-century Bengali prose, and has been described as *adda-sahitya* or *majlisi-sahitya* (conversational literature).<sup>8</sup> Steeped in the Bengali, Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic literary cultures that mingled in the soil of Bengal, Mujtaba Ali brought breadth of learning, as well as geographical range and historical depth, world affairs, and world writers, into the conversational space he created for Bengali literature.

Born in Sylhet, now Bangladesh, in 1904, Syed Mujtaba Ali was one of the first students to graduate from Rabindranath Tagore's university, Visva-Bharati, having studied (1921–1926) not only under Tagore himself, but within a circle of extraordinary scholars and artists who fostered his linguistic, philological, philosophical, and literary interests: Vidushekhar Shastri, Haricharan Bandyopadhyay, Kshitimohan Sen, Nitaibinode Goswami, Mark Collins, Carlo Formichi, Giuseppe Tucci, Moriz Winternitz, Sylvain Lévi, Stella Kramrisch, Binodebehari Mukhopadhyay, Nandalal Bose, Abanindranath Tagore, and many others.<sup>9</sup> Following a few months at Aligarh Muslim University, he accepted a lectureship in Kabul, setting out for Afghanistan in 1927 by train from Delhi to Peshawar, and crossing the Khyber Pass by bus. During his year and a half in Kabul, he witnessed the rebellion that led to the deposition of its ruler, Amanullah, by the tribal leader Bacha-e-Saqao, before being evacuated out during the turmoil and suffering that followed. Subsequently, he attended the universities of Berlin and Bonn between 1929 and 1932 on a Humboldt fellowship, writing his doctoral dissertation on the origin of the Khojas and their religious life. In 1934 he travelled around Europe before going on to post-doctoral studies at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo (1934–1935). Returning to India at the

7 See *Chāchā Kāhini*, in *Rachanābālī*, vol. 9, pp. 169–239; vol. 10, pp. 93–136. On *adda* in Cairo, see 'Āddā' in *Rachanābālī*, vol. 1, pp. 74–82; 'Āddā-Passport', vol. 3, pp. 308–13.

8 Gajendrakumar Mitra, 'Introduction' in Ali, *Rachanābālī*, vol. 1, p. 'ta'.

9 For Mujtaba Ali's own list of these luminaries, see 'Visva-Bhārati' in *Rachanābālī*, vol. 1, pp. 215–16; for his daily study of English, French, German, and the history of Sanskrit literature with Winternitz, see his letter of 15 January 1922 to Saraf-ul-Alam, in *Syed Mujtabā Ālīr Patra-gucchha* (Letters of Syed Mujtaba Ali), ed. by Bishmadeb Choudhury (Dhaka: Bangla Akademi, 1993), p. 58. Ali was already familiar with Bengali, English, Hindi and Urdu: he studied German, French, Sanskrit, Arabic and Farsi at Santiniketan, assisted Haricharan Bandyopadhyay in his lexicographical labours, and wrote out the library catalogue. See Prasanta Chakrabarti, *Syed Mujtabā Ālī* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2018), pp. 9–13.

invitation of Sayaji Rao Gaikwad, ruler of the princely state of Baroda, he taught at his new university there for eight years (1936–1944), making another European trip in 1938, but left after Sayaji Rao's death to travel and write. Following the Partition of India, he moved to East Pakistan, immediately attracting the wrath of the government by championing the cause of Bengali against Urdu as the state language. His speech on this incendiary issue, delivered in a meeting of the *Muslim Sahitya Samsad* at Sylhet on 30 November 1947, was published in the Calcutta literary journal *Chaturanga* in 1948.

Ali joined the Azizul Haq College in Bogura as its principal, but was forced to leave, returning to India in 1949 while the language movement in East Pakistan gathered momentum. On 21 February 1952, a day now commemorated as *Shahid Dibash* ('Martyrs' Day', also International Mother Language Day), several student protestors were killed in the capital, Dhaka. Bengali was eventually recognized as the state language of East Pakistan in 1956, and Mujtaba Ali's Sylhet speech was printed in Chattagram (Chittagong) as a booklet titled *Pūrba-Pākistāner Rāshtra-bhāshā* (The State Language of East Pakistan).<sup>10</sup> By then, Ali, an impressive linguist knowing at least twelve, and possibly fifteen languages, among them Arabic, Bengali, Farsi, Gujarati, Hindi, Marathi, Pashto, Sanskrit, Urdu, English, French, Russian, and German, had served in independent India as the first Secretary of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (1950–1952), editing its Arabic journal *Thaqāfatu'l-Hind*. After four years at All India Radio (1952–1956, posted in Delhi, Cuttack, and Patna), he was appointed professor of German and Islamic Culture at his *alma mater*, Visva-Bharati (1956–1964). This and the post-retirement period in Calcutta marked the peak of his intellectual and literary influence. After the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, Ali returned to his homeland. He died in Dhaka in 1974.

Incontestably, Mujtaba Ali's life was marked by momentous public events. He was a witness to, sometimes even an actor and agent in, anticolonial movements and revolutionary uprisings; he saw the rise of fascism and nationalism in interwar Germany and Egypt; he experienced the turmoil of decolonization, and shared the hopes and aspirations of at least three new nations, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. He commented

10 Syed Mujtaba Ali, *Pūrba-Pākistāner Rāshtra-bhāshā* (Chattagram: Boi-ghar, 1956); in *Rachanābalī*, vol. 10, pp. 137–70.

on many of these events, sometimes controversially. As a colonial subject, he made no secret of his lifelong detestation of British rule, and was more sympathetic to the Russians in Central Asia, especially Afghanistan. He was himself a beneficiary of the efforts by German diplomats and members of the Deutsche Akademie in the interwar years to cultivate Indian scholars and intellectuals, thereby enabling anticolonial activists to expand the bases established in Germany from before World War I.<sup>11</sup> Ali's student years in Berlin brought him into contact with the intense political ferment of interwar Germany, but he has received little attention in studies of transnational intellectual networks forged in the Europe of the time.<sup>12</sup> He has proved difficult to categorize as a writer, despite his influence and popularity in the print culture of the decades after decolonization.

In an important book on the 'travelling autobiographies' of M. K. Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Muhammad Iqbal, Javed Majeed has argued that for each, self, nation, and post-national identity are closely bound up with the experience, and conscious literary representation, of travel. For each, the travelling self, or selves, become a means of accessing the fluidity and interconnectedness of a modern world order.<sup>13</sup> Ali's travelling personhood, expressed in a body of writing produced almost entirely in the era following decolonization but drawing upon his global travels in the interwar years, is a significant marker of the times he inhabited. I argue in this essay that it is key to our understanding

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- 11 On Indian students, activists and political networks in Germany, see Benjamin Zachariah, 'Indian Political Activities in Germany, 1914–1945' in *Transcultural Encounters between Germany and India: Kindred Spirits in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, ed. by Joanne Miyang Cho, Eric Kurlander and Douglas T. McGetchin (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 141–54. Zachariah writes (p. 146) that 'The Deutsche Akademie's India Institute awarded scholarships to about 100 Indian students between 1929 and 1938'. See also Nirode K. Barooah, *Germany and the Indians Between the Wars* (Norderstedt: BoD, 2018), and Kris Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement: German and Indian Intellectuals Across Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), pp. 48–52, 88–108.
  - 12 There is a strange and inaccurate essay by Kris Manjapra, 'Queer Diasporic Practice of a Muslim Traveler: Syed Mujtaba Ali's *Chāchā Kāhini*' in *How to Write the Global History of Knowledge-Making: Interaction, Circulation and the Transgression of Cultural Difference*, ed. by Johannes Feichtinger, Anil Bhatti and Cornelia Hülbauer (Cham: Springer Nature, 2020), pp. 151–66, marred by translation errors and failures to understand Mujtaba Ali's Bengali.
  - 13 Javed Majeed, *Autobiography, Travel, and Postnational Identity: Gandhi, Nehru and Iqbal* (Delhi: Primus, 2015), pp. 167–70 (here commenting on Nehru).

of his internationalism and his contribution to modern Bengali letters. The fact that his work is available to us not as a single *magnum opus* but in the dispersed mode of the newspaper article, journal essay, serial reminiscence, or short story (and some novels) is also representative of postcolonial print culture in India, when periodical publication, even for those working in longer genres, became a lifeline for literary networks and communities. The eleven volumes of Mujtaba Ali's collected works testify both to his prodigious output and to the respect he commanded, but they remain largely untranslated. His distinctive place as a writer of Bengali prose rests on the ease and naturalness of his style, drawing freely upon Urdu and Farsi to strengthen the historically 'mixed' vocabulary of modern Bengali, in which *tatsama* (Sanskrit-derived) words form only a small proportion. Even the linguist Suniti Kumar Chatterji acclaimed Mujtaba Ali's contribution to the Bengali language, and the scholar and critic Pramatha Bishi commented:

What Kazi Nazrul Islam has done in poetry, Syed Mujtaba Ali has done in prose. This is not the Persianate Bengali of *Alaler Gharer Dulal*—it is a new style, mingling Farsi with Bengali, yet it never appears un-Bengali. This style, characteristic of the *baithaki* mode in which he wrote, is his chief gift to Bengali. His second gift was to mingle the atmosphere of many lands with the air breathed by Bengalis. And for the third gift, we must go back to the first, which was to manifest his genius in the *baithaki* style. To have learning, but not to appear a pedant; this is like being weightless on the moon. He was a great scholar, yet he never flaunted his scholarship; this is why ordinary readers were drawn to his writings.<sup>14</sup>

### 'At Home and Abroad': History, Politics, and Culture in Afghanistan

It was as a traveller that Syed Mujtaba Ali entered the stage of Bengali letters, through his narrative *Deshe Bideshe* (At Home and Abroad), serialized from March 1948 in the Bengali periodical *Desh*, and appearing in book form in 1949 to become the best-loved, possibly the best-known, of all travelogues in a language especially rich in this

14 Pramatha Bishi, 'Kathārasik Syed Mujtabā Āli' in Ali, *Rachanābali*, vol. 1, p. 'cha'. Pyarichand Mitra's *Ālāler Gharer Dulāl* (The Spoilt Son of a Rich Family, 1858) is the first Bengali novel. For Suniti Kumar Chatterji's encomium, see *Visva-Bhārati Patrikā*, 'Grantha-Parichay', Kartik-Poush 1373 (1956).

form of literature.<sup>15</sup> Set in Afghanistan between 1927–1929, and written up in Bangalore from 1944 but published only after India gained political independence, it illuminates an important set of concerns in postcolonial history. It is a work of considerable structural depth and artistry, distinguished by its ‘architectonics’ from the simple linearity of travel narrative.<sup>16</sup> Only the first section (Chapters 1–12) reads like the record of a journey, as the author travels by train and bus to Peshawar and thence to Jalalabad and Kabul, providing vivid accounts of the landscapes and people he encounters *en route*. Descriptions of his companions on the train, the Anglo-Indian and the elderly *Sardarji*, followed by his host in Peshawar, the Pathan police officer Sheikh Ahmad Ali, then the Sikh bus driver who takes him and his fellow passengers to Kabul, and the military officer stationed at the Khyber Pass, mingle personal vignettes with informal ethnography. Ali’s account of the Pathans of Peshawar is offered with the self-deprecating humour of the ‘five-and-a-half-foot delicate Bengali’, raised on the rice and water of the Gangetic delta. Yet he commands respect from the martial Pathans since he is a Syed (belonging to the Prophet’s family), and also because the Bengalis, with their history of political insurgency, ‘bomb the British’.<sup>17</sup>

After a hair-raising bus journey, Ali arrives in Kabul, where he is welcomed by Igor Bogdanov, a Tsarist Russian philologist and professor of Farsi, one of the Russian scholars in exile earlier invited by Tagore to Santiniketan. In fact, Tagore’s Santiniketan and Visva-Bharati as an institution (founded in 1921) link four members of Kabul’s tiny academic community: Mujtaba Ali himself; Bogdanov, who returns to Santiniketan during the course of Ali’s narrative; the French-Swiss linguist Fernand Benoit, another of Tagore’s recruits, ‘like the bereft Yaksha’ perennially homesick for Santiniketan; and Maulana Ziauddin, a sometime Khilafat activist from Amritsar who had, like Ali, studied Farsi at Visva-Bharati under Bogdanov and who travels from there to Kabul.<sup>18</sup> Later, Mujtaba Ali recalled that Visva-Bharati was at that

15 *Deshe Bideshe*, in *Rachanābālī*, vol. 9, pp. 15–167; vol. 10, pp. 9–91. See Ali, *In a Land far from Home: A Bengali in Afghanistan*, trans. Nazes Afroz (Delhi: Speaking Tiger, 2015); but translations here are mine.

16 See Jitendranath Chakrabarti, ‘Introduction’, *Rachanābālī*, vol. 9, p. 7.

17 *Rachanābālī*, vol. 9, pp. 27–30, 46–47 (Ch. 3, Ch. 6).

18 *Rachanābālī*, vol. 9, p. 157 (Ch. 27); vol. 10, p. 18 (Ch. 31) on Benoit as the bereft Yaksha. For Mujtaba Ali and Ziauddin studying under Bogdanov at Visva-Bharati,

time the only place where one could learn French, Farsi, and German together, a fact that helped him obtain his job in Kabul.<sup>19</sup> It is worth pausing for a moment to reflect upon this network of scholars from Santiniketan in remote Kabul, proof of the cultural reach of a non-colonial institution whose degrees were not recognized by the British colonial government. Tagore's name is Ali's passport in both Peshawar and Kabul, and when he tells the German ambassador who promises him a scholarship that he had studied in Tagore's university, he is assured that no other certificate will be needed.<sup>20</sup> It is important to set these scholarly links, with Ali's own historicization of his Afghanistan experience, against the sentimental, trivializing impulse that is content to cite Tagore's short story 'Kabuliwallah' as a marker of the poet's love for Afghans.<sup>21</sup> Santiniketan, and the culture of transnational intellectual and affective links that it fostered, is a reference point that opens and closes the circle of Mujtaba Ali's peripatetic career, and Tagore's example remains at the core of his cosmopolitan humanism. As one of Visva-Bharati's first students, directly taught by Rabindranath himself, Mujtaba Ali testifies to the uniqueness and life-changing potential of that educational experiment. In a moving personal account appearing among the 'Uncollected Writings,' he speaks of the poet as his personal talisman in Kabul and Berlin, and of his last meeting with him in 1939.<sup>22</sup>

The narrative of *Deshe Bideshe* is built around Afghanistan's cultural and political history and its relation to the larger Indian landmass. Ali leaves us in no doubt of the critical importance of Afghanistan in the

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see Prasantakumar Pal, *Rabi-jībanī*, vol. 8 (Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 2001), p. 287. After sharing with Ali the extreme sufferings of their delayed evacuation from Kabul, Ziauddin returned to Santiniketan as a lecturer. Tagore wrote a poem of tribute after his death in Lahore in July 1938, reproduced in the epilogue to *Deshe Bideshe* as a memory of their friendship; see *Rachanābālī*, vol. 10, pp. 90–91.

- 19 'Gurudev' (undated), in 'Aprakāshita Rachanā', *Rachanābālī*, vol. 10, p. 184. Ali's degree from Visva-Bharati carried more weight in Kabul than any certification from a colonial university.
- 20 *Rachanābālī*, vol. 9 p. 157 (Ch. 27). On the non-recognized status of Visva-Bharati and Tagore's certification, see *Rachanābālī*, vol. 10, pp. 86–87 (Ch. 42).
- 21 E.g. the statement by Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2015), cited in Avinash Paliwal, *My Enemy's Enemy: India in Afghanistan from the Soviet Invasion to the US Withdrawal* (London: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 27–28.
- 22 'Gurudev', *Rachanābālī*, vol. 10, pp. 182–89. Ali recalls listening to Tagore's recorded voice in his phonetics class in Berlin, and Tagore's fervent hope for the obliteration of differences between Hindus and Muslims.

'balance of power' (another name for imperial rivalries, still evident today) in Asia and Europe, as evident in Britain's three Anglo-Afghan wars. The second of these (1878–1880), set off by Afghanistan's preferring diplomatic relations with Russia over Britain, saw Kabul occupied twice by the British, the second time after the murder of the British envoy and his escort. In 1919 the Afghan ruler Amir Habibullah, who had adroitly balanced British and Russian interests, was assassinated in a palace intrigue, and the throne was claimed by his younger son Amanullah, who consolidated his authority by defeating the British in the third Anglo-Afghan war (6 May–8 August 1919). The Durand Line became the territorial boundary between Afghanistan and the Indian Empire. For colonized Indians, especially Muslims, Afghan military victory and independence—'*Khudā-dād* [God-given] Afghanistan', as Ali describes it—were a source of inspiration. Anticolonialists and pan-Islamists laboured for decades to draw Afghanistan into the larger struggle against British imperialism. In 1914 a group of Muslim students (known as *muhajirs*, those who perform *hijrat*, religious flight or emigration) fled from Lahore to Kabul, hoping to join the anti-imperialist struggle after Britain declared war on Turkey. In 1920, when leaders of the pan-Islamist Khilafat Movement, inspired by Afghan independence, called for mass *hijrat*, their numbers swelled to nearly 40,000. The *muhajirin* received no encouragement in Afghanistan, but some travelled to Tashkent, where the Communist Party of India was founded in 1920, to join revolutionary movements.<sup>23</sup>

Ali deliberately includes one of the most remarkable preliminaries to the third Anglo-Afghan war, the 1915 Turko-German mission to Kabul, which sought Amir Habibullah's aid in liberating India from the British.<sup>24</sup> The delegation, sponsored by the German Foreign Office

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23 See Suchetana Chattopadhyay, 'Towards Communism: 1917 and the *Muhajirs* from India Adrift in Central Asia', *Social Scientist*, 47.7–8 (2019), 3–30 (pp. 5–8, 11–14). Chattopadhyay cites the Bengali revolutionary poet Kazi Nazrul Islam's support for *muhajirs* killed by the British military police.

24 The initiative came from the Berlin Committee (led by Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, Sarojini Naidu's eldest brother, known as 'Chatto') which became the Indian Independence Committee in 1915, after Har Dayal, founder of the Ghadar movement, reached Berlin. The Committee included Chatto, Bhupendranath Datta (brother of Swami Vivekananda), Champak Raman Pillai and other revolutionaries, and interacted with Iranian and Egyptian nationalists with their own Independence committees in Berlin. See Arun Coomer Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad*,

and backed by the Ottoman general Enver Pasha, was led by a colourful Indian Swadeshi revolutionary, Raja Mahendra Pratap, accompanied by the pan-Islamist Maulana Barkatullah. Habibullah gave the delegation a royal welcome, but isolated it in the Babur Gardens and showed no appetite for war, despite strong anti-British feeling among the powerful Afghan *mullahs* and nobles. A German-Afghan agreement was prepared, and Pratap liaised with Indian *muhajirs*, prisoners of war, and *mujahideen* in Kabul. Encouraged by these contacts, Pratap took a 'bold decision of considerable symbolic value.'<sup>25</sup> On 1 December 1915 he announced the formation of a provisional Government of Free India at Kabul, with himself as President, Barkatullah as Prime Minister, and Maulana Obeidullah Sindhi as Home Minister, sending a secret message to the Indian nationalist leader Maulana Abul Kalam Azad to join them in Kabul. Failing, however, to persuade Amir Habibullah to attack the British, Pratap left Kabul after the Russian Revolution in 1917.<sup>26</sup>

These stirring events are recounted by Mujtaba Ali to explain the Afghan succession, with Amanullah (backed by his friend Mahendra Pratap) not only claiming the throne over his uncle and elder brother, but winning a war against the British.<sup>27</sup> This political and family history—into which Ali inserts his own tennis matches with the Crown Prince, 'Moin-us-Sultana' Enayetullah—is a necessary prelude to the book's account of Amanullah's misplaced efforts at social modernization, his advocacy of women's education and removal of the veil, his lavish Western lifestyle, his efforts to alter public behaviour and impose Western dress (*direshi*), all treated by Ali with a characteristic blend of satire and sympathy. Ultimately, these measures led to popular resentment, fierce opposition from Afghanistan's *mullahs*, the Shinwari tribal rebellion, and the invasion of Kabul by the Tajik bandit Bacha-e-Saqao from

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1905–1922, in *the Background of International Developments* (Patna: Bharati Bhawan, 1971), pp. 91–94.

25 Bose, *Indian Revolutionaries Abroad*, p. 111.

26 For an account of these events, see *Rachanābālī*, vol. 9, p. 94 (Ch. 14), pp. 143–48 (Ch. 24); Raja Mahendra Pratap, *My Life Story of Fifty-Five Years* (Dehradun: World Federation, 1947), pp. 39–55. Pratap returned to Kabul during the third Anglo-Afghan war as part of a Soviet mission, after meeting Lenin in 1919 (see *My Life Story*, pp. 60–2); he remained a lifelong ally of Afghanistan, offering to lead a revolutionary army against Bacha-e-Saqao in 1929, and visiting the exiled Amanullah in Italy (*My Life Story*, pp. 156–57, 164).

27 *Rachanābālī*, vol. 9, p. 144. For the palace intrigue, see pp. 138–48 (Chs. 23–24).

Kohistan, all witnessed by Ali. There are suggestions in the text that the British, perturbed by Amanullah's closeness to Soviet Russia, colluded in this rebellion.<sup>28</sup> Kabul is overtaken by fighting and looting, Bacha declares himself the new Amir, and Amanullah surrenders the throne to Enayetullah, though eventually both flee Kabul. Told by the British ambassador that he and other Indians might be evacuated 'as a favour', Ali responds that Indian money is funding their planes and pilots, and his name is promptly crossed off the evacuation list.<sup>29</sup> He and Ziauddin suffer terrible hardship before an influential relative intervenes to have them flown out, and Ali reflects:

One does not fully realize the humiliation and insult suffered by a colonized country until one goes abroad. The German poet Goethe has observed that you cannot see the true image of your own country until you travel out of it.<sup>30</sup>

This realization is an integral part of Mujtaba Ali's sensibility as a traveller. His internationalism is linked to a critical understanding of history, politics and nation, while he absorbs and communicates the distinctive elements of the places he visits. The charm and brilliance of his narrative lies in its ability to combine explosive political content with accounts of ordinary life and his own response to the intensely cosmopolitan, multilingual society he inhabited at all levels, from the company of his rural neighbours and Panjshiri Tajik personal servant, Abdur Rahman, to the bustle of Kabul's bazars with the Pashto, Urdu, Turkish, and Farsi spoken there, and the convivial circle made up of colleagues, Afghan friends like Dost Muhammad and Mir Aslam, the ex-Bolshevik Russian *émigré* Bolshov, a pilot in Amanullah's airforce, and French, German, and Russian diplomats (the British remained aloof). The text seems uncluttered, though it is full of historical references, citations of Sanskrit and Persian literature, medieval and modern Bengali poetry (Sukumar Ray as well as Tagore), and snatches of remembered poetry and song. Ali speaks of his delight in the beauty of the Kabul spring, described untranslatably as '*gachhe-gachhe dekhan-hashi, patay-patay ara-ari*' (the smiles of trees, the whispers of leaves).<sup>31</sup>

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28 *Rachanābālī*, vol. 10, pp. 45–46 (Ch. 37); see Ali, *In a Land Far from Home*, 'Translator's note', pp. xx–xxi.

29 *Rachanābālī*, vol. 10, p. 58 (Ch. 39).

30 *Ibid.*, p. 40 (Ch. 35).

31 *Ibid.*, p. 16 (Ch. 31).

Among the most spell-binding episodes in *Deshe Bideshe* is the account of an old master singer at a wedding feast:

before the sitar's tone faded a low steady tone emerged from the old man's throat—no, not from his throat, from his chest, his heart, the pores of his skin. Who knows when the sitar was tuned, it seemed as though his whole body had been tuned by some other *ustad* of *ustads*, to reach its first fullness in the last quarter of this very night. [...] It was a Farsi ghazal.<sup>32</sup>

Language acquisition, as well as a genuine philological interest in etymology and transmission, are inseparable from Mujtaba Ali's cultural curiosity. Already fluent in German and French, Ali improves his Farsi in Kabul, and commences a formal study of Russian from the gentle, hospitable Russian envoy Demidov, to whom he explains that 'in Bengal, the place formerly occupied by French literature has for some years now been yielded to Russian. Many Bengali intellectuals rate Chekhov's genius much higher than Maupassant's'.<sup>33</sup> His Pathan host in Peshawar, Ahmad Ali, had predicted: 'Spend a month frequenting any one of these inns, you'll learn a dozen languages without strain or effort. Start with Pashto, you can quickly proceed to Farsi, after that Chagatai Turkic, Mongol, Usmanli, Russian, Kurdish—the rest will come of itself'.<sup>34</sup> But it is in Kabul, rather than Peshawar, that Ali's language skills are multiplied, and it is the rich human, material, and linguistic variety of Kabul's bazaar that reminds him of the first Mughal emperor Babur's listing, in the *Baburnāma*, of the languages he had heard there.<sup>35</sup>

Kabul's bazaar was far poorer than Peshawar's, but much more colourful. People from at least twenty-five ethnic groups, retaining their own costumes and customs, did their buying and selling here. Hajara, Uzbek (Bengali Uzbek), Kafiristani, Qizilbas (there's a reference to Qizilbas in the poet Bharatchandra, and the annotator has glossed it as 'a kind of curtain!'), Mongol, Kurd — the shopkeepers of Kabul could tell their country, business, parsimony or generosity, at a glance from their turbans, *topi*, *pustin* cloak or riding boots. They walked the streets without a care, accepting their differences. [...] It was like a pageant of dreams.<sup>36</sup>

32 *Rachanābali*, vol. 9, p. 122–23 (Ch. 19).

33 *Ibid.*, p. 159 (Ch. 27).

34 *Ibid.*, p. 32 (Ch. 4).

35 *Ibid.*, p. 111 (Ch. 17).

36 *Ibid.*, pp. 109–10 (Ch. 17).

Like the *Baburnāma* itself, Ali's text is part-travelogue, part-autobiography, part-regional history. Characteristically, his leave-taking of Kabul involves two moments of deep intimacy. The first is his visit to the simple, unadorned tomb of Babur, both emperor and 'fakir', unparalleled chronicler of his times, to pray for India's freedom. The other is the parting from his personal attendant, Abdur Rahman, a lonely figure waiting at the airfield as Ali's plane takes off, his dirty turban appearing at that moment as pure as his heart.<sup>37</sup>

### *Adda*, Print Culture, and Interwar Internationalisms

*Deshe Bideshe's* anticolonial content, forcing its late, 'post-colonial' printing, established Syed Mujtaba Ali as writer and cultural informant, a distinctive and original voice in newly independent Bengal. In 1952, he published *Pañchatantra* Part I (Five Treatises, borrowing the title of the Sanskrit fable-collection), which included his articles from the Bengali newspaper *Dainik Basumati* and the literary weekly *Desh*, and *Chāchā Kāhini* (Chacha's Tales), stories set mainly in Europe. *Chāchā Kāhini* gave cult status to its hero, 'Chacha' ('uncle,' used as a nickname), an East Bengali Muslim exiled in Germany between the wars, though he narrates only five of the eleven tales, the rest, with more dispersed settings, being told by Ali's own literary *persona*.<sup>38</sup> For Bengali readers in the 1950s and after, Mujtaba Ali's essays and reminiscences were a means of keeping the world in focus, his interwar experiences and cultural criticism casting light on the global divisions that produced bitter rifts among Indian writers and intellectuals in the Cold War era. The traveller's *persona* he adopted—speaking in his 'own' voice or through the fictional Chacha—allowed readers in a newly decolonized nation to identify themselves with migrant, dispossessed actors on an international stage during the upheavals of war and nation-building, and to take lessons learnt from them into the post-war period. Uniquely, Mujtaba Ali frames this engagement in the dialogic space of *adda* (conversation, conversational circle), giving print embodiment to the culture of oral sociability.

37 *Rachanābālī*, vol. 10, p. 70 (Ch. 41) and p. 89 (Ch. 42).

38 'Trimurti,' another of Chacha's tales, was separately printed: *Rachanābālī*, vol. 2, pp. 288–93.

Unusually for a Bengali writer in the 1950s, Mujtaba Ali maintained a studied, 'non-aligned' distance from both sides of Cold War divide. His literary tastes were classical and romantic, unlike those of his Bengali modernist peers, and he was not a member of left-leaning modernist groups surrounding journals like *Kallol* (1923–) and *Parichay* (1931–).<sup>39</sup> He never embraced Marxist cultural movements like the Indian Progressive Writers' Association (IPWA, 1933–), and its successors in Bengal, the Anti-Fascist Writers' and Artists' Association (1942–) and Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA, 1943–). Despite his prodigious linguistic expertise, knowledge of Russian and love of Chekhov, he resisted the call put out by the Soviet Foreign Languages Publishing House (FLPH, later split into Progress Publishers and Mir) to work as a translator in Moscow in the post-Stalinist period when so many of his fellow writers responded: among them the Hindi writers Madan Lal Madhu and Bhisham Sahni and the Bengali modernists Samar Sen, Kamakshiprasad Chattopadhyay and Mangalacharan Chattopadhyay. But an intransigent anticolonialism made him deeply sceptical of Anglo-American intentions after World War II, a distrust manifested in essays on post-war Germany and the Arab-Israeli conflict. He was not a crypto-Fascist or wartime Nazi, despite Mohaiemen's disquiet; nor was he linked to the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)-funded Indian Congress for Cultural Freedom (ICCF). The first ICCF meeting in Bombay in 1951 was endorsed by writers like Agyeya (S. H. Vatsyayan), B. S. Mardhekar, Sumitranandan Pant, Jainendra Kumar, and the distinguished Bengali modernist, Buddhadeva Bose (see Orsini and Zecchini's chapters in this volume).<sup>40</sup> But unlike Bose and his son-in-law Jyotirmoy Datta, with their links to PEN and the ICCF journal *Quest*, readily accepting invitations to lecture in the USA, Mujtaba Ali seems to have kept such contacts at arm's length. If, as Greg Barnhisel shows, aesthetic style was pressed into the service of ideology during the Cold War, with 'free world' support for modernism, and social realism endorsed by the communist bloc—a distinction dividing

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39 See Supriya Chaudhuri, 'Modernist Literary Communities in 1930s Calcutta: The Politics of *Parichay*' in *Modernist Communities Across Cultures and Media*, ed. by Caroline Pollentier and Sarah Wilson (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2019), pp. 177–96.

40 On the ICCF, see Laetitia Zecchini, 'What Filters Through the Curtain', *Interventions*, 22.2 (2020), 172–94.

Indian writers as well—Mujtaba Ali, romantic rather than modernist, fell between these two camps in respect of both form and ideology.<sup>41</sup> Ensnared in the Santiniketan cultural community, he resisted the group identifications of journals like Buddhadeva Bose's *Kabitā* (1935–), or the post-Independence *Kṛttibās* (1953–). In retrospect, it is significant that having begun by writing in the *Māsik Mohammadi* in 1932, he went on to publish almost exclusively in mainstream Bengali literary magazines like the universally respected *Desh* (1933–), *Chaturāṅga*, *Māsik Basumati*, *Kālāntar*, *Muktadhārā*, and newspapers such as *Anandabazar Patrika* and *Dainik Basumati*, commanding the largest readership in Bengal.<sup>42</sup>

But Ali is scarcely an apolitical writer. *Deshe Bideshe*, *Chāchā Kāhinī*, *Panchatantra* and the later travelogues like *Jale-Dāngāy* (By Sea and Land, 1956), *Bhabaghure o anyānya* (The Wanderer and other essays, 1962), *Panchatantra Part II* (1966), and *Musāfir* (The Traveller, 1972), as well as other stories and essays, use the figure of the Bengali traveller, in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, as a vehicle not simply for interwar cosmopolitanism, but for political commentary and social critique. The political stance of the anticolonial migrant, negotiating global ideological conflicts, is especially important in *Chāchā Kāhinī*, which opens in interwar Berlin and provides a vivid personal account of the atmosphere of cafes and beer-houses frequented by Indian students: notably the Hindustan Haus café-restaurant (described in *Chāchā Kāhinī* as the only Indian eatery in Berlin) at 179 Uhlandstrasse, close to the Kurfürstendamm crossing in the borough of Charlottenburg.<sup>43</sup> This was run (and perhaps owned from 1928) by Nalini Gupta, an early

41 See Greg Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists: Art, Literature, and American Cultural Diplomacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

42 For a full list of these early publications, see Chakrabarti, *Syed Mujtabā Ālī*, p. 34.

43 Contemporary records indicate that this was a student dormitory sponsored by the *Deutsches Institut für Ausländer* (German Institute for Foreigners) at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, now the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Its café-restaurant, at the Uhlandstrasse address (mentioned in 'Svayambarā', *Rachanābalī* vol. 9, p. 171) is said to have lasted up to the Nazi era ('Mā-janani', vol. 9, p. 201). Student cards of Indian residents have been located by Razaq Khan (see <https://www.projekt-mida.de/reflexicon/entangled-institutional-and-affective-archives-of-south-asian-muslim-students-in-germany/>); Somnath Basu has found Syed Mujtaba Ali's university registration record and the Ausländerkarten of both Syed Mujtaba Ali and Ram Manohar Lohia; Sujaan Mukherjee has shared a postcard showing the café interior. The verso reads 'Hindustan-House, Berlin W, 179 Uhlandstr. Tel J1 Bismarck 2461, Indian tea-room, ping-pong and indoor games.' The 'Indian restaurant' of 179 Uhlandstrasse is mentioned by Raja Mahendra Pratap in *My Life Story*, p. 162.

Communist and associate of Manabendra Nath Roy (M. N. Roy, a pseudonym adopted by Narendranath Bhattacharya), one of the founders of the Communist Party of India.<sup>44</sup> Bengalis in Berlin also frequented the ‘clubhouse’ in Halensee, at the other end of Kurfürstendamm (called ‘Hindustan House’ in some accounts) and housing the India News Service and Information Bureau (Indian Information Bureau) started by the revolutionary socialist Virendranath Chattopadhyaya (Chatto) in 1921, and run by his brother-in-law A. C. N. Nambiar. Both it and Chatto’s home in Georg-Wilhelm-Strasse acted as meeting-place and lodging-house for Indian students, drawing them into networks of anticolonial resistance.<sup>45</sup>

This political and revolutionary tumult is refracted by Mujtaba Ali through the distinctive cultural lens of a Bengali *adda*. Ali is himself a justly celebrated witness to this Bengali social habit, a cosmopolitan site where, for historians like Dipesh Chakrabarty, the ‘debates of modernity’ were played out.<sup>46</sup> Unlike those who see the practice as uniquely Bengali, Ali finds *adda* wherever he travels, assigning its highest form to the coffee-houses of Cairo. *Adda* is his chosen setting for the ‘traveller’s tale,’ just as it provides the distinctive mode for his *baithaki* or *majlisi* style, which converts the spoken word to the medium of print. In *Chāchā Kāhīnī*, the *adda* of expatriate Bengalis conveys political and social commentary through a critical, sympathetic, but non-partisan narrator, whether ‘Chacha’ or Ali’s own *persona*:

In 1929, a restaurant called ‘Hindustan Haus’ was born in Berlin’s Uhlandstrasse, and true to their nature, the Bengalis established an *adda* in its furthest corner. The *adda*’s leader was Chacha—a rank East

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44 ‘Sunil Das Gupta is No More’, *Mainstream Weekly* 53.8 (14 February 2015) at <http://mainstreamweekly.net/article5452.html>, claims that Nalini Gupta owned the Hindustan Haus restaurant from 1928.

45 On the busy cosmopolitan character of the Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf neighbourhoods, see Gerdien Jonker, *On the Margins: Jews and Muslims in Interwar Berlin* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), pp. 35–39. Manjapra (*Age of Entanglement*, pp. 93, 106) confuses the Uhlandstrasse and Halensee properties. For conflicting accounts of the latter, see Jonker, *On the Margins*, p. 55, and Zachariah, in ‘Indian Political Activities in Germany’, pp. 145, 145n.33. Jonker (p. 37) quotes Reginald Dyer, the butcher of Amritsar, as saying ‘persons educated in Germany... talk sedition’.

46 Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘*Āddā*: A History of Sociality’ in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 180–213 (p. 210).

Bengali Muslim from Barishal—and Gossain, Mukhujye, Sarkar, Roy and the flippant young Golam Moula were his disciples.<sup>47</sup>

The stories in *Chāchā Kāhini* create a succession of character vignettes, sharp, humorous, and ironic, of individuals caught up in the upheavals of ‘world events’: they cast a clear, unsparing light upon interwar politics, the rise of fascism, the pain of colonial subjection, communal prejudice, and ethnic hatred. Berlin between the wars was a hub for revolutionary groups, especially from India and the Middle East, while Germany provided a haven for disaffected colonial intellectuals. The poet Muhammad Iqbal completed a doctorate in Persian metaphysics at Munich in 1909; Zakir Husain, future President of independent India, studied economics in Berlin in the 1920s; and the Indian socialist leader Ram Manohar Lohia, Ali’s direct contemporary in Berlin, also frequented Hindustan Haus. Even Raja Mahendra Pratap was in Berlin in 1929, trying to build a ‘World Federation’.<sup>48</sup> Bengali circles in Berlin also included fascist fellow-travellers like Benoy Kumar Sarkar and Tarak Nath Das.<sup>49</sup> Sarkar later claimed intermittent attendance at the Hindustan Haus *adda* and acquaintance with its original Chacha, whom he described as belonging to a well-known Bengali family, one of the many individuals swept away on the currents of resistance to rising Nazi power.<sup>50</sup>

Researching the origins of the Nizari Ismaili Shi’a community of Khojas, and attending the Fehrbelliner Platz mosque in Berlin’s Wilmersdorf district (an ecumenical centre frequented even by Bengali

47 ‘Trimurti’, *Rachanābālī*, vol. 2, p. 288.

48 See Pratap, *My Life Story*, p. 157. Manjapra’s identification (in ‘Queer Diasporic Practice’, p. 157) of the newspaper columnist ‘Surya Ray’ in *Chāchā Kāhini* with M. N. Roy is questionable. Roy was in Berlin for just the first year of Muftaba Ali’s stay, though he began publishing his journal *Vanguard* from there in 1922. In the 1920s Roy travelled and wrote extensively to prepare the East for revolution, at Lenin’s behest. He incurred Stalin’s wrath after his 1927 mission to China, and was forced to escape from Moscow to Berlin in 1928 for medical treatment, returning to India (and imprisonment) in 1930. For Roy in Berlin, see V. B. Karnik’s ‘Epilogue’ to M. N. Roy, *Memoirs* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1964), pp. 580–87.

49 On Indian fascism, see Benjamin Zachariah, ‘A Voluntary *Gleichschaltung*? Perspectives from India towards a Non-Eurocentric Understanding of Fascism’, *Transcultural Studies*, 2 (2014), 63–100, and ‘At the Fuzzy Edges of Fascism: Framing the Volk in India’, *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 38.4 (2015), 639–55.

50 See Chakrabarti, ‘Introduction’, *Rachanābālī*, vol. 9, p. 11; Chakrabarti identifies the *adda*’s youngest member, Golam Moula, as Muftaba Ali himself.

Hindus), Ali must have come into contact with *émigré* Muslims from India and the Middle East.<sup>51</sup> Gerdien Jonker speaks of an ‘odd transnational mix of religious scholars, linguists, diplomats, students, journalists and political entrepreneurs, in which Shi’ites peacefully rubbed shoulders with Sunni Muslims’.<sup>52</sup> Indian Muslims in Berlin during and after World War I included revolutionary Pan-Islamists like Maulana Barkatullah, the brothers Abdul Jabbar and Abdul Sattar Khairi, Khwaja Abdul Hamied, founder of India’s oldest pharmaceutical company (Cipla), the ornithologist Salim Ali, and India’s future President, Zakir Husain. Yet though this vibrant milieu is conveyed in *Chāchā Kāhinī*, Ali’s testimony is neglected in the growing scholarship on Muslim communities in interwar Germany and institutions like the Berlin mosque, founded in 1925 and run by the Lahori-Ahmadiyya sect.<sup>53</sup>

Ali has left a vivid record of his own arrival in Berlin, and his accidental encounter with Rabindranath Tagore’s communist nephew, Saumyendranath, who was in and out of Berlin from the late 1920s to 1933, and accompanied his uncle from Berlin to Russia in 1930. He took Ali along to meet the charismatic Chatto, referred to as Chatujye, ‘honorary public relations officer for Indians’ in Berlin. Tall, dark, romantic, immaculately dressed, with wavy hair, dreamy eyes, and sideburns, Chatto is described closeted in the remotest corner of the Hindustan Haus restaurant, sharing a glass of watery beer with Nalini Gupta, and ‘thinking all day, his head supported on his hand’.<sup>54</sup> During the 1930s, Chatto was active in the resistance to Hitler, and issued calls from Moscow to free Asia from colonial rule. He was

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51 See Syed Mujtaba Ali, *On the Origin of the Khojas and their Religious Life Today* (Bonn: Ludwig Röhrscheid, 1936). On the ecumenism of the Berlin mosque, see *Rachanābalī* vol. 9, p. 173.

52 Jonker, *On the Margins*, p. 42.

53 Gerdien Jonker, *The Ahmadiyya Quest for Religious Progress: Missionizing Europe 1900–1965* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 63–76. On pan-Islamism, see K. H. Ansari, ‘Pan-Islam and the Making of the Early Indian Muslim Socialists’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 20.3 (1986), 509–537; Humayun Ansari, ‘Maulana Barkatullah Bhopali’s Transnationalism: Pan-Islamism, Colonialism, and Radical Politics’ in *Transnational Islam in Interwar Europe: Muslim Activists and Thinkers*, ed. by Götz Nordbruch and Umar Ryad (London: Palgrave, 2014), pp. 181–209; and David Motadel, ‘The Making of Muslim Communities in Western Europe, 1914–1939’ in *Transnational Islam in Interwar Europe*, pp. 13–43.

54 *Musāfir*, in *Rachanābalī* vol. 7, pp. 270–71. Ali cites a Bengali proverb ‘Mukhujye’s a devious crook, Bandyo straight as anything: Chatto sits among them, undisputed king’.

executed in Stalin's Great Purge on 2 September 1937.<sup>55</sup> Nalini Gupta (educated at Visva-Bharati, like Ali) was active on M.N. Roy's behalf in organizing socialist-communist networks in Bengal, before being arrested in the Kanpur ('Bolshevik') Conspiracy case on 20 December 1923, and sentenced to four years' imprisonment. The Communist Party of India believed him to have betrayed his co-conspirators, since he was released early, returned to Berlin and opened a restaurant.<sup>56</sup> Such figures were part, as Hari Vasudevan puts it, of 'a cosmopolitan set whose "revolutionary" character was shaped within a global defiance of empire located in transnational social spaces'.<sup>57</sup> But while Mujtaba Ali may have drawn from Gupta's personality, the fictional Chacha is, like Ali himself, a Bengali Muslim, a patron of the restaurant and nucleus of its *adda*, not its owner.<sup>58</sup>

The Berlin stories refer to post-World-War-I economic hardship in Germany, the Munich Putsch of November 1923, the flight of Jews to Shanghai, and bullying and racist abuse by young Nazis.<sup>59</sup> Two complementary tales, 'Colonel' in Part I, related by Chacha, and 'Punascha' ('Postscript') in Part II, from the narrator's own boyhood in Sylhet, analyse race or caste prejudice coupled with the humiliation of poverty. In the first a Prussian colonel, close to starvation but unyielding

55 See Nirode K. Barooah, *Chatto: The Life and Times of an Indian anti-Imperialist in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); see also Arun Coomer Bose, 'The Indian Revolutionaries and the Bolsheviks — their Early Contacts, 1918–1922', *Asian Studies*, 8.3 (1970), 336–51 (pp. 346–48).

56 See M.N. Roy, *Memoirs*, pp. 489–90, 547–48; Bose, 'The Indian Revolutionaries', pp. 346–348; and Suchetana Chattopadhyay, *An Early Communist: Muzaffar Ahmad in Calcutta, 1913–1929* (New Delhi: Tulika, 2011), pp. 105–109, 129–133; and <http://cpiml.org/library/communist-movement-in-india/introduction-communist-movement-in-india/peshawar-and-kanpur-conspiracy-cases/>. My thanks to Dr Chattopadhyay for details of Gupta's education and his political career.

57 Hari Vasudevan, 'Communism in India' in *The Cambridge History of Communism, vol. 2: The Socialist Camp and World Power 1941–1960s*, ed. by Norman Naimark, Silvio Pons and Sophie Quinn-Judge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 491–517 (p. 494).

58 Gupta's first arrival in Berlin in 1920 and his return to start the restaurant in 1928 (Chacha's dates are 1919 and 1929, see *Rachanābali* vol. 9, pp. 174, 186, 201); his family's origins in Barishal, East Bengal (*Rachanābali* vol. 2, p. 288), and his reputation as a storyteller, roughly agree with the Chacha of Mujtaba's stories, but unlike Gupta, Chacha is a Muslim whose upbringing seems closer to that of Ali himself (vol. 2, p. 288; vol. 9, p. 196).

59 See *Rachanābali* vol. 9, pp. 224–39 ('Beltolay') and pp. 196–97 ('Colonel'); vol. 2, pp. 289–90 ('Trimurti'); vol. 11, pp. 105–11 for political commentary.

in his pride of race and bloodline, explains the principles of the *Manusamhitā* to his 'pupil' Chacha; in the second, a Brahman pandit's caste pride is ironically undermined by his state of colonial subjection. Chacha reflects:

I am a Muslim, and moreover I've had to stand at a distance of three feet from the Brahman pandit at school to show him my slate; as a youth I've visited the Hindu Hostel in Calcutta and been refused admission—I'm unlikely to feel overly enthusiastic about caste discrimination.<sup>60</sup>

For post-Independence Bengali readers, *Chāchā Kāhinī* offered a unique perspective on the bitter legacies of revolutionary aspirations, war crimes, ideological conflicts, and social inequalities. Formally, it offered *adda* at two levels, with the social occasion refracted through its print embodiment. Its cosmopolitan content bore the unmistakable stamp of Mujtaba Ali's *baithaki* style, offering anecdotal access to places, people, and events, through the sceptical but sympathetic gaze of the Bengali abroad: traveller, interpreter, gossip, political critic, and cultural informant. Moreover, it established the *adda*, a conversational free-for-all serving as stage for the gifted *raconteur*, as the distinctive medium for Mujtaba Ali's literary self-representation. Political and historical commentary is leavened by witty allusions to rural or urban life in India, Ray, Tagore, and Sanskrit and Persian romantic poetry. Writing with immense stylishness but informally and without pretension of transnational social spaces and the experiences of migrants, students, renegades, and exiles, not just in Berlin, the Rhineland, or Paris, but also Suez, Jerusalem, Cairo, and Kabul, Mujtaba Ali drew the attention of his Bengali readers to global power struggles and the anticolonial prehistories of post-war 'Non-Alignment.'

*Pañchatantra* Part I includes justly celebrated essays on 'Cairo,' and 'Āddā,' while 'Āddā-Passport,' also about *adda* in Cairo, appears in a later collection, *Rājā-Uzir* (*Kings and Ministers*, 1969).<sup>61</sup> There is no single connected account of Ali's stay in Egypt. In *Jale-Dāngāy*, he describes his first voyage to Europe in 1929, when the ship stopped at Suez and he was able to make a quick dash to see the pyramids and visit Cairo. He notes

60 *Rachanābalī*, vol. 9, p. 196.

61 'Cairo' and 'Āddā' in *Pañchatantra*, *Rachanābalī* vol. 1, pp. 7-10, 74-82; 'Āddā-Passport' in *Rājā-Uzir*, *Rachanābalī* vol. 3, pp. 308-13.

the declining reputation of Al-Azhar University owing to its failure to engage with modern learning, and arraigns both India and the Arab world for the mistaken belief that they could live off the riches of their ancient cultures.<sup>62</sup> The most sustained treatments of the cosmopolitan culture of Cairo are in the essays on *adda*, locating the true nerve-centre of this most 'Bengali' of social habits in a city where, he reports, even Egypt's great leader Sa'd Zaghlul Pasha might be found holding court in a café.<sup>63</sup> In the essay on 'Cairo,' he explains:

I love Hedua, Hatibagan, Shyambazar. Those places have no Taj Mahal, no Pyramids. This doesn't cause me the slightest regret. I love my neighbourhood tea-shop. I visit it morning and evening, meet up with Potla and Habul, to enjoy ourselves smoking our *bidis* and airing our collective expertise. Whatever I have by way of knowledge is collected from the scraps of that *adda*.

So when I was compelled by fate to set up lodging in Cairo, I was ready to give up the ghost in three days or so. I kept wandering around the city in a daze, mingling my sighs for the Basanta Restaurant of Potla and Habul with the hot winds of the Sahara. At this point, by my good Guru's grace, I noticed that about five people were carrying on arguments and shouting-matches, consuming endless coffee and cigarettes in our local coffee-house.<sup>64</sup>

Soon, he contrives to get himself invited to join this group, reciprocates with an invitation to sample the duck-egg omelettes of Basanta Restaurant should they happen to visit Calcutta, and rapidly concludes that his homegrown *adda* is not a patch on Cairo's. In 'Āḍḍā', he remarks humorously that the typical Cairo conversationalist claims to have a direct line to Beria in Russia, Himmler in Germany, and Teggart in Calcutta. Even if your visits are infrequent, the coffee-house welcomes you, he says, 'with open arms, as though you are a rediscovered, long-lost brother'.<sup>65</sup>

*Rājā-Uzīr*, which contains the essay on 'Āḍḍā-Passport' describing Ali's quest for a visa to visit Palestine, then under the British Mandate in 1934, also features later essays from the 1960s on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

62 *Jale-Dāṅgāy*, in *Rachanābalī*, vol. 7, p. 76.

63 'Āḍḍā' in *Rachanābalī*, vol. 1, p. 81.

64 'Cairo' in *Pañchatantra*, *Rachanābalī*, vol. 1, p. 8.

65 'Āḍḍā' in *Pañchatantra*, *Rachanābalī*, vol. 1, p. 82.

In these six essays Ali offers, in his characteristic style, a close political and historical analysis of the antagonism, thrown into harsh focus because of the backdrop of war, together with personal reminiscences of his efforts to learn Hebrew and his travels in Palestine.<sup>66</sup> In 'East is East and—', he writes categorically on the eve of the Six-Day War of 1967:

Israel is a pretext. Rais Jamal Abdel Nasser is a pretext. Behind these two stands the divided world: that we have so long known as the West and the East. [...] These two parts of the world are unitedly facing off against each other, ready for war. The mighty soldiers of the West are Johnson, Wilson and De Gaulle. The warriors of the East are Kosygin and Mao. Israel is supported by the Americans and the British, the Arab states by Russia and China.<sup>67</sup>

On the one hand Ali is sharply critical of the British role in creating the problem of Palestine, which he sees as fundamentally insoluble because of the Israeli state's denial of full citizenship rights to displaced Palestinians and its insatiable hunger for land, exacerbating Arab hostility towards it. On the other, he presents himself, in the spring of 1935, a traveller standing at the long-distance bus-station outside the walls of Al-Quds, the Arabic name for Jerusalem. From this perspective, that of the enquiring traveller, Ali offers a spatial tour of the Jerusalem's sacred sites, including the Wailing Wall, interspersed with amusing anecdotes of his personal encounters with tourists, rabbis, and touts. At the same time, he writes with sympathy and understanding of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic sacred histories, of the meaning of the Greek *diaspora*, of later oppressions (including the Nazi Holocaust), and of the present conflicts.

Most striking is the personality of the traveller himself, recalling, in a decolonial era when economic constraints, new visa regimes, and the hardening of state borders caused by the Cold War made travel impossible for most Indians, an earlier time of transnational links and cosmopolitan attitudes fostered by relatively easier international mobility. To re-read these essays today is to recall India's support for

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66 For the six succeeding essays on the Arab-Israeli conflict, Jerusalem and the Wailing Wall, see *Rachanābalī*, vol. 3, pp. 316–38. 'Palestine,' which first appeared in *Satyapīr-er kalame* (1948) is in vol. 9, pp. 316–22.

67 See 'East is East, and—' in *Rājā-Uzīr*, *Rachanābalī*, vol. 3, p. 314.

Palestine right through the Nehruvian period, and its opposition to Israel's foreign policies, although Israel had been formally recognized in 1950. For Bengali readers in the 1960s, Mujtaba Ali's articles, appearing in the daily press and in mainstream journals, were influential in forming public opinion (and informing the public) on Cold War antagonisms in the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

## India in Global Networks

If Ali's cosmopolitanism was fostered by international travel, anticolonial and nationalist aspirations, and transnational ideologies emerging in the interwar period, what vision of the world, and India's place in it, does he offer his decolonized readers? As I have suggested earlier, there is a link between his personal history, the role he plays in the internationalist cultural initiatives of a newly independent India, and the emergence of the Non-Aligned Movement itself in the 1950s, post-Bandung, as a rejection of the neo-colonialism of the Great Powers, forging anti-imperial solidarities in a world polarized by the Cold War. In some ways, Mujtaba Ali appears as a pivotal figure in the long history of decolonization, Afro-Asian alliances, the new internationalisms of the 'developing' world (that we would today call the Global South), and its cultural expressions.

In one of the throwaway comments for which *Deshe Bideshe* is justly celebrated, Ali himself distinguished his stance from earlier pan-Asianisms:

It's astonishing. Article after article on the ruins of Borobudur and twenty out of focus prints of the same photograph have strained the limits of our endurance, yet the proponents of 'Greater India' show no curiosity or family feeling regarding this very-much-alive Indian colony. Dead Borobudur became part of our kin-group, but this living Indian settlement was rejected, cast out.<sup>68</sup>

Crucial ideological affiliations are at issue here. Ali refers derisively to the 'Greater India' dream that obsessed a group of a Calcutta-based 'Orientalist' scholars (including Hindu nationalists), with links to Tagore's Santiniketan, such as R. C. Majumdar, Suniti Kumar Chatterji,

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<sup>68</sup> *Rachanābali*, vol. 9, p. 109 (Ch. 17).

O. C. Gangoly, P. C. Bagchi, and Kalidas Nag. Inspired by the French Indologists Sylvain Lévi and Jean Przyluski (under whom Nag and Bagchi had trained in Paris), the Greater India Society, founded in 1927 and surviving well into the 1950s, assembled a wide range of archaeological, linguistic, and anthropological scholarship to offer ‘polemical and often provocative accounts of Indian culture as a supra-local civilising force’, and a ‘trans-local and supra-national’ ideology extending beyond the unitary nation-state.<sup>69</sup> Susan Bayly describes Kalidas Nag’s view of history as a ceaseless ‘onward march’ by Indian explorers and adventurers, a ‘cultural colonisation’ of Asia, into which Mujtaba Ali slyly inserts his example of Indian economic colonization in Afghanistan.<sup>70</sup> This ‘Greater India’ vision of cultural identity competed with other religious, cultural, and political transnationalisms of the time, like the Buddhist revivalism propagated by the Sinhalese monk Anagarika Dharmapala, or the pan-Islamist Khilafat movement, and the Pan-Asianism expressed in *Ideals of the East* by the Japanese curator Okakura Tenshin, friend and associate of Tagore, and fellow-performer on the world stage.<sup>71</sup>

Mujtaba Ali’s disdain for the ‘Greater India’ pundits who neglect the historical, political, and economic underpinnings of India’s regional identity, demands that we read *Deshe Bideshe* in the context of another transnationalist undertaking that directly preceded its publication, the Asian Relations Conference (ARC) held in Delhi in March–April 1947, where both Gandhi and Nehru gave stirring calls for greater Asian solidarity. The ARC, with 193 delegates and fifty-one observers from thirty-four ‘contingents’, and up to 10,000 auditors, crowding into the Purana Qila in Delhi, has received some attention recently. In a useful essay Vineet Thakur notes that the phrase ‘Third World’ was first used on this occasion.<sup>72</sup> The ARC was a precursor to the Conference of African

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69 Susan Bayly, ‘Imagining “Greater India”: French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 38.3 (2004), 703–44 (pp. 706–07), urges the need ‘for recognition of those far-reaching twentieth-century “imaginings” which envisaged modernist futures on a far wider scale than those of any single ethnic or civic nationality or subnationality’ (p. 708).

70 Bayly, ‘Imagining “Greater India”’, pp. 717–18.

71 On Okakura’s pan-Asianism and Tagore, see Rustom Bharucha, *Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

72 Vineet Thakur, ‘An Asian Drama: The Asian Relations Conference, 1947’, *The International History Review*, 41.3 (2019), 673–95 (p. 673). Thakur traces the term

and Asian nations at Bandung in 1955, seen by Walter Mignolo as key to 'decoloniality' and the epistemic reconfiguration of the Third World,<sup>73</sup> but Thakur urges that it should not be regarded simply as a 'footnote to Bandung.' He sees it as 'situated in a particular transitional moment in which a decolonial vision is at variance with a postcolonial vision', when post-war allegiances had not yet hardened, and the solidarity of oppressed peoples could still be imagined in non-state terms. While Carolien Stolte reads the event as 'a culmination of interwar Asianism,' Thakur emphasizes its rifts and dissensions.<sup>74</sup>

Non-alignment was indeed an outcome of the transnational imaginaries and global movements of the inter-war years. Nehru had been a member of the League against Imperialism and attended its Brussels meeting in 1927, but was suspended from membership in 1932.<sup>75</sup> The dream of Afro-Asian solidarity, forged by anti-imperialist struggles, by the need for development and social justice, and by disillusionment with the betrayal of Abyssinia to Italian fascist aggression in 1936 by the League of Nations, anticipated the meetings in Delhi, in Bandung, and the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity conference in Cairo in 1957. By the time of Bandung, however, Asia was so deeply divided by the global

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'Third World' to the British ambassador Terence Shone's despatch to Whitehall, recording the suggestion that 'Asia, or at least South East Asia, constituted a "third world" which had its part to play in restoring to equilibrium a balance of power at present too exclusively dependent on the opposed worlds of America and Russia'; Terence Shone to Secretary of the Cabinet, 25 April 1947, BL, IOR and PP, Despatch No. 36, File 20/1 1947, IOR/L/I/1/152, p. 4; reference in Thakur, 'An Asian Drama', p. 690, n.2. Thakur believes that the term, predating Alfred Sauvy's 'tiers monde' of 1952 by five years, was picked up by Shone from the conference deliberations and was not his coinage.

73 Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. xxiii, 59.

74 Thakur, 'An Asian Drama', pp. 675–76. See Carolien Stolte, "'The Asiatic hour: New perspectives on the Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, 1947,' in *The Non-Aligned Movement: Delhi-Bandung-Belgrade*, ed. by N. Miskovic, H. Fischer-Tine, N. Boskovska (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 57–75.

75 On this, see Dietmar Rothermund, 'The era of Non-Alignment', and Maria Framke 'International events, national policy: The 1930s in India as a formative period for Non-Alignment' in *The Non-Aligned Movement and the Cold War*, pp. 19–34, 37–56; Kris Manjappa, 'Communist Internationalism and Transcolonial Recognition' in *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas*, ed. by Sugata Bose and Kris Manjappa (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 159–77; and Akhil Gupta, 'The Song of the Nonaligned World: Transnational Identities and the Reinscription of Space in Late Capitalism', *Cultural Anthropology*, 7.1 (1992), 63–79.

Cold War that Nehru's mood was sombre and apprehensive. Warning against the danger of reducing the 'unaligned area', he urged members in the closed session on 22 April 1955: 'Let us not align ourselves as independent nations of Asia and Africa, but take a line of our own'.<sup>76</sup>

Nehru's invitation for the ARC was issued the very day of his famous radio address stating the cornerstones of India's future foreign policy as Non-Alignment, anticolonialism, anti-racism, and efforts towards world peace. The meeting itself, organized on the cusp of India's independence by a body calling itself the Indian Council for World Affairs (ICWA), was ostensibly non-political, though as Carolien Stolte notes, the ICWA was scarcely free from political ambitions and interventions.<sup>77</sup> Nehru himself told the ICWA that he had conceived the idea for the ARC at the Brussels conference of the League against Imperialism in 1927, where he had met leaders from all across Asia and Africa. Its task was to break the barriers erected by the old imperialisms and bring about 'a new imagination of Asia'.<sup>78</sup> This Asia included New Zealand, Australia, Egypt, and some Soviet republics. The Tibetan delegation braved Chinese displeasure, trekking for twenty-one days across the Himalayan plateau to reach India. The Hebrew University of Palestine attended despite the Arab League's disapproval. Egypt and Turkey were present, but the Muslim League in India and other Muslim countries boycotted the Conference. A three-member delegation (their messengers had been killed in transit) from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam protested French colonial rule, represented by puppet regimes from Laos and Cambodia.<sup>79</sup> Southeast Asian nations condemned Japanese fascism, and a delegate from Ceylon warned against 'economic and demographic aggression' by 'big brothers like China and India' towards small countries like

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76 Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Speech in the Closed Session of the Asian-African Conference, Bandung, 22 April 1955', File No. SI/162/9/64-MEA, in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, Second Series*, vol. 28 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 101–02.

77 Stolte, "'The Asiatic hour'", p. 58.

78 See Thakur, 'An Asian Drama', pp. 676–77. On Nehru's debts to the League, see Michele L. Louro, 'India and the League Against Imperialism: A Special "Blend" of Nationalism and Internationalism' in *The Internationalist Moment*, pp. 22–55.

79 Nehru refused permission for Sarat Chandra Bose's 'Vietnam Brigade' to go to Indo-China to fight the French. See *Asian Relations, being Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, March–April 1947* (New Delhi: Asian Relations Organization, 1948), pp. 76–78; Thakur 'An Asian Drama', pp. 679–80.

Ceylon, Burma, Malaya, and Indonesia.<sup>80</sup> Japan was forbidden to travel by an embargo placed on it by General MacArthur. The fear of pre-Partition violence in Delhi led to a curfew being imposed for several periods during the Conference. Asia appeared still in thrall to colonial powers and divided against itself, yet the Conference itself was proof of an impulse towards unity.

The Conference produced a wealth of printed material: five books and ninety-four pamphlets, including Gandhi's closing speech.<sup>81</sup> Nehru's inaugural address on 23 March 1947 suggested that an Asian meeting was a cautious step towards a 'world federation,' though he was careful to distinguish his vision from earlier pan-Asianisms and the political networks of the interwar years.<sup>82</sup> In a triumph of diplomatic phrasing, he projected India as a 'meeting-point' of Asian cultures, citing both the expansionist Greater India vision (largely Hindu and Buddhist) and the 'mixed Irano-Arabic culture' (mainly Islamic, but commencing in pre-Islamic antiquity) that 'poured into India,' but moved on decisively to immediate tasks: 'in order to have 'One World', we must also in Asia think of the countries of Asia co-operating together for that larger ideal'.<sup>83</sup> The Asian leaders he named were Sun Yat-Sen of China, Sa'd Zaghlul Pasha of Egypt, Kemal Ataturk of Turkey, and Mahatma Gandhi from India. But although an Asian Relations Organization (ARO) was set up and scheduled to meet in China in 1949, civil war in China led to the venue being shifted to the Philippines, with severely curtailed representation. Nehru suspected Western efforts to build an anti-communist alliance, and the ARO quietly closed down in 1955, the very year of Bandung.

The Afro-Asian Writers' Bureau (AAWB), formed at Bandung, first met at Tashkent in 1958. But in December 1956, Mulk Raj Anand enlisted Nehru's support after his return from Bandung to organize an Asian Writers' Conference (AWC) in Delhi.<sup>84</sup> This brought together a wide

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80 *Asian Relations*, p. 74.

81 *Ibid.*, pp. 242–45.

82 On these, see Raza et al., 'Introduction', *The Internationalist Moment*, pp. xi–xxxvi, and Benjamin Zachariah, 'Internationalisms in the Interwar Years: The Traveling of Ideas' in *The Internationalist Moment*, pp. 1–21.

83 *Asian Relations*, p. 25.

84 For a detailed account, see Yan Jia, 'Beyond the "Bhai-Bhai" Rhetoric: China-India Literary Relations, 1950–1990' (unpublished doctoral thesis, SOAS, University of London, 2019), pp. 91–117, 117–36. For Mulk Raj Anand's role in organizing it with Nehru's support, see Mulk Raj Anand, 'Mulk Raj Anand Remembers', *Indian Literature*, 36.2 (1993), p. 183.

spectrum of Indian and Asian writers, but exposed their ideological rifts in the Cold War era.<sup>85</sup> The prominence of left and communist comrades from the Indian Progressive Writers' Association, like Faiz Ahmed Faiz from Pakistan, Sajjad Zaheer, Mulk Raj Anand, and Krishan Chander from India, and communist invitees from China, was censured by Congress and ICCF-affiliated writers like Agyeya and Prabhakar Padhye.<sup>86</sup> Several of these writers attended the even more divided AAWB meeting at Tashkent in 1958, where a section of the Indian delegation, led by the Gandhian Tarashankar Banerjee, submitted 'minutes of dissent,' expressing unease at the 'political' (i.e. communist) tone of the meeting.<sup>87</sup>

True to the trajectory we have been tracing, Syed Mujtaba Ali did not attend either the Delhi or Tashkent meetings, both shadowed by Cold War antagonisms, but became heir to another legacy of the Asian Relations Conference, the founding of the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICCR) in 1950 by India's first Education Minister Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, with the mandate to look towards Asia.<sup>88</sup> On 29 September 1950, Mujtaba Ali wrote to his friend Prantosh Ghatak from Constitution House in Delhi that he had been brought over from Calcutta by the Maulana as the ICCR's first Secretary and editor of its quarterly Arabic journal, *Thaqāfatu'l-Hind* (1950):

The main (and at present the only) task of the organization is to establish Indian cultural relations with Turkish, Arabic and Farsi-speaking nations in the Middle East. The Maulana was born in Mecca and educated at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo. He knows all the languages of the Middle East and writes Arabic with great facility. We are at present running an Arabic quarterly. In Iraq and Egypt especially, there is infinite curiosity about India: building on this, we seek to present India's ancient tradition, complex of later cultures, and the contemporary achievements of Gandhi and Tagore.<sup>89</sup>

85 See Jia, pp. 101–06.

86 See *ibid.*, p. 103.

87 See Krishnalal Shridharani, 'Association and Isolation at Tashkent,' *Indian Literature* 2:1 (Oct. 1958–Mar. 1959), 57–60.

88 *The Indo-Asian Culture*, 1.1 (1952), prelims, and pp. 1–11, for letters from Rajendra Prasad, Azad and Nehru. The Council took over responsibility for the Calcutta-based (founded 1944) Iran Society's Persian journal, *Indo-Iranica*; the English journal, initially titled *The Indo-Asian Culture*, and later (from 1971) *Indian Horizons*, was started in 1952.

89 Ali, *Rachanābālī*, vol. 10, pp. 322–23.

Ali mentions the projects of translating the *Pañchatantra* into Arabic, sending Sanskrit professors to Cairo, Beirut, Damascus, and Baghdad, initiating scholarly and cultural exchanges, and extending the ICCR's reach to Southeast and East Asia in the coming years. With his philological and literary interests, Ali is equipped to act as cultural emissary for a newly independent secular nation, making allies in the decolonized world. That his efforts are directed towards 'Western Asia, Egypt and Turkey,' and 'Southeast and East Asia' places him at a formative juncture of India's post-Independence cultural policy, emphasizing anti-imperial Asian and African solidarities against both Eastern and Western blocs.

The roundtable on 'cultural problems' at the ARC had suggested translation of Asian classics, collaboration among libraries and museums, scholarships and research visits, comparative study of Asian cultures, and evolving a common script with the ambitious aim of the 'ultimate evolution of a common [Asian] language'.<sup>90</sup> Early volumes of the ICCR's English journal, *The Indo-Asian Culture*, do include archaeological, historical, and philological articles by scholars of the Greater India persuasion like R. C. Majumdar and Suniti Kumar Chatterji (with an interesting subset of essays written in Pali), but look equally towards West Asia, the Islamic world, and Africa. The ICCR sponsored translations of the *Bhagavad Gita* and Kalidasa's *Sakuntala* into Persian and Dara Shikoh's earlier Persian translations of the Upanishads, as well as the Arabic translations of six Sanskrit classics including the *Gita*, *Ramayana*, and *Mahabharata* by the noted Lebanese poet Wadi-al-Bustani.<sup>91</sup> The journal also published poems by leading poets, like Maithili Saran Gupta, Mahadevi Varma, and Shamsur Rahman from East Pakistan.<sup>92</sup> These are substantial volumes, carrying scholarly contributions as well as essays for the general reader by writers like Rabindranath Tagore, Zakir Husain, Humayun Kabir, and S. Radhakrishnan, with the usual medley of semi-official reports on cultural missions, exchanges, scholarships, and celebrations.

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90 *Asian Relations*, pp. 193–94, 202–06 for the 'cultural problems' roundtable, with the language proposal; *The Indo-Asian Culture*, vol. 2.3 (1954), p. 404, for Asian-African exchanges. Jia notes, p. 96, that the Marathi writer Kaka Kalelkar renewed the call for a common Asian language at the AWC, 1956.

91 *The Indo-Asian Culture*, 6.4 (1958), p. 444.

92 *The Indo-Asian Culture*, 2.3 (1954), pp. 397–401.

## The Traveller as Internationalist

But Mujtaba Ali never settled into a career of cultural diplomacy. After two years he left to join All India Radio, a favoured destination for intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s, moving from Delhi to Cuttack and Patna.<sup>93</sup> Returning to Visva-Bharati (Santiniketan) and Kolkata brought some repose, but his career, commencing in Sylhet and taking him across continents and borders, only came full circle when he crossed one final border to settle in the newly-founded nation of Bangladesh. A traveller to the end, his last published work was a travelogue, *Musāfir* (The Traveller, 1971), though he wrote there that travel had been forced upon him by circumstance, rather than being a way of life he had chosen.<sup>94</sup> This is also true of the figures Javed Majeed focuses on in his study of travel, autobiography, and postnational identity—Gandhi, Nehru, and Iqbal—and others he does not mention, like Kazi Nazrul Islam and Rabindranath Tagore. Not only was travel constitutive of Mujtaba Ali's internationalism, it was a constant resource for his sense of identity: for a self in relation to others, and for the nation in relation to *its* others. What conveys that self-in-motion, accessing the difference and multiplicity of the modern world, connecting Europe with Asia and Africa, is anecdotal realism, the *majlisi* writer's strength. In a semi-parodic account of the anecdote in history, Joel Fineman called it a '*historeme*, or smallest minimal unit of the historiographic fact', uniquely compacting literature and history through its narrative reference to the real, and opening into both the teleological domain of historiography, and the contingency of circumstance, by 'establishing an event as an event within and yet without the framing context of historical successivity'.<sup>95</sup> Using the textual frame of the periodical article or essay, the *ramya-rachana*, to address his audience, Mujtaba Ali is not Benjamin's story-teller so much as he is a travelling companion in a railway carriage, or someone with whom one might share a table in a café. Framed in the dialogic space

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93 The history of All India Radio and its pre- and post-Independence staff (the brilliant Bokhari brothers, Nirad C. Chaudhuri, Samar Sen, Syed Mujtaba Ali, Amita and Iqbal Malik, P.C. (Tiny) Chatterjee, and my father Amalendu Das Gupta) remains to be written.

94 'Kaiphayat' ('Apologia'), in *Musāfir, Rachanābālī*, vol. 7, p. 221.

95 Joel Fineman, 'The History of the Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction' in *The New Historicism*, ed. by H. Aram Veeser (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 57–62.

of *adda*, the part-fictional, part-autobiographical content of his writings made it possible for Cold War debates and their interwar pre-histories to be played out on a 'neutral' stage that was, simultaneously, the theatre of the world.

But while Mujtaba Ali wrote on politics and history, I would argue that what lies at the core of his identity both as writer and traveller—as for Tagore and Nazrul Islam—is the life of language. His celebrated address on *Purba-Pākistāner Rāshtrabhāshā*, one of the most important documents of the language movement in Pakistan and Bangladesh, is a sustained examination of the claim of a 'regional' language, Bengali, with deep roots in the life of a people, to national recognition. Not only does he argue here for education in the mother tongue, he makes a nuanced case for distinguishing 'unity' from 'uniformity', for cherishing regional differences in a united nation, and warns against a popular revolt that might cause East Pakistan to secede from the West, which actually happened in 1971.<sup>96</sup> Throughout his life, Mujtaba Ali opposed English as a medium of instruction in India, and claimed untruthfully (like Tagore) that his own command of it was poor. This may seem an argument for regionalism, yet it comes from a truly multilingual repertoire, from profound learning in the languages of both Europe and India, as shown in the literary and etymological references that mark his work, published almost exclusively in Bengali. Though a practising Muslim, his range of reference was uniquely broad, ranging from a Sylheti proverb, a Vaishnava *padavali*, lines from Kalidasa, an *ayah* of the Qur'an, to the poetry of Tagore or Sukumar Ray.

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Naeem Mohaiemen's film, *Two Meetings and a Funeral*, looks at a much later period of the Non-Aligned Movement than the one cited here. He refers to the fourth NAM summit in Algiers in 1973, and the meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in 1974 (the year of Ali's death). The narrator Vijay Prashad comments on the desolation of architectural spaces (like Oscar Niemeyer 'giganticist' Hall of Nations in Algiers), as a visual metaphor for the failure of Non-Alignment, with

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96 See *Rachanābālī*, vol.10, pp. 153, 169–70; see also vol. 2, pp. 86–95, 'Ingreji bonam matribhasha' (English versus the mother-tongue) for Ali's views on English education, a burning issue in post-Independence India.

Bangladesh aligning itself to the OIC. In Mohaiemen's recent Bengali film, *Jole dobe Na* (2020), a character reads from Mujtaba Ali's stories to his dying wife. But the earlier film is placed at the end of a long history, one that covers the period of the Cold War and its resulting dissensions, the gradual failure of the Non-Aligned Movement (despite its formal survival), and the emergence of new alliances in an increasingly polarized world. I do not think that Mohaiemen was mistaken in placing his great-uncle Syed Mujtaba Ali's writings at the heart of that history.

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## 2. Writing Friendship

### The Fraternal Travelogue and China-India Cultural Diplomacy in the 1950s

*Jia Yan*

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The decade after 1950, when the Republic of India became the first non-socialist country to establish diplomatic relations with the Communist-led People's Republic of China, is famously remembered as the era of 'Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai' (Indians and Chinese are brothers). Despite ideological differences and constant negotiations over unsettled geopolitical issues such as the demarcation of borders, the two emerging Asian states made significant efforts to collaborate under both bilateral and multilateral frames, with the shared intention of consolidating their newly-won independence and reshaping Cold War international orders.

Although relations between the two countries deteriorated in 1959 and came to a standstill after the 1962 border conflict, the 1950s deserve to be considered as more than a period of inflated political romanticism floundering on the hard rock of geopolitics. Rather, this decade provides a fertile field of study precisely for the numerous 'friendship-building' efforts that resulted in the emergence of unprecedented forms of political solidarity, opportunities to travel, spaces to meet, conduits of knowledge flows, and modes of textual transfer between China and India. Taking these moments seriously instead of focusing on the causes of conflict, as Arunabh Ghosh suggests, contributes to 'decentering the teleology of 1962 and its overt emphasis on the evolution of Sino-Indian

relations'.<sup>1</sup> This approach also enables a deeper understanding of the conceptualization, workings, effects, and limits of Third World internationalism during the Cold War.

Focusing on the contacts between Chinese and Indian writers, this chapter offers a comparative analysis of the travelogues they produced in the context of China-India cultural diplomacy of the 1950s. While cultural diplomacy may be defined in general terms, its meanings, mechanisms, and effects, as scholars have shown, can in fact vary greatly from context to context, and the intentions behind it 'depend very much on the cultural mindsets of the actors involved as well as the immediate organizational and structural circumstances'.<sup>2</sup> In the case of VOKS, the USSR's Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, cultural diplomacy was very much state propaganda despite its non-governmental disguise.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, in the case of Nitobe Inazô and other early mediators of Japanese culture for foreign audiences, cultural diplomacy was largely an individual endeavour with no direct state involvement, part of their self-identification with 'national culture' and the obligation to promote it internationally.<sup>4</sup> Most cultural diplomacy activities lie in the middle of this spectrum, with an unstable combination of the propagandistic and the personal. Therefore, my approach to studying China-India cultural diplomacy foregrounds specific configurations and practices on each side, rather than following a generalized model.

As we shall see, in the 1950s cultural diplomacy enabled an unprecedented series of frequent 'writerly contacts' between China and India.<sup>5</sup> The establishment of different agencies of cultural diplomacy, such as friendship associations and national chapters of

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- 1 Arunabh Ghosh, 'Before 1962: The Case for 1950s China-India History', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 76.3 (2017), 697–727 (p. 700).
  - 2 Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht, 'What Are We Searching For? Culture, Diplomacy, Agents and the State' in *Searching for A Cultural Diplomacy*, ed. by Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), pp. 3–12 (p. 8).
  - 3 Jean-François Fayer, 'VOKS: The Third Dimension of Soviet Foreign Policy' in Gienow-Hecht and Donfried, *Searching for A Cultural Diplomacy*, pp. 33–49.
  - 4 Yuzo Ota, 'Difficulties Faced by Native Japan Interpreters: Nitobe Inazô (1862–1933) and his Generation' in Gienow-Hecht and Donfried, *Searching for A Cultural Diplomacy*, pp. 189–211.
  - 5 Karen Thornber defines 'writerly contacts' as the 'interactions among creative writers' from different nations; Karen L. Thornber, *Empire of Texts in Motion: Chinese, Korean, and Taiwanese Transculturations of Japanese Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 2.

the World Peace Council (WPC), provided effective institutional frameworks within which Chinese and Indian writers could travel abroad, meet face-to-face, acquire first-hand knowledge of each other's societies, exchange ideas and works, and build personal connections. The numerous travelogues constitute one of the most significant textual outcomes of these writerly contacts. Usually published right after a trip, these travelogues contributed to strengthening a sense of simultaneity and familiarity as well as shaping certain impressions of Chinese and Indian peoples. Due to the hybrid nature of cultural diplomacy, which combines cultural forms and diplomatic functions, these travelogues often fuse literary and political elements. They form a rich genre that shows a convergence *and* tension between the authors' personal considerations and the state/party ideology they (were expected to) represent. My readings in this chapter underscore how the texts navigate between the two poles.

A few recent studies have used the genre of travelogue to challenge the rhetoric of 'China-India friendship'. Tansen Sen questions the fraternal discourse by examining primarily travelogues written by anti-communist Indians who were critical of the Chinese way of 'managing' foreign visitors and of the PRC's communist path in general.<sup>6</sup> In her reading of the travelogue by the nationalist Hindi poet Ramdhari Singh 'Dinkar', Adhira Mangalagiri foregrounds the 'ellipses'—'the mark of silences, tensions, the unsaid'—in order to make visible 'those literary ties that frustrate the logic and aims of cultural diplomacy' and to decentre "'dialogue"' as an easy metaphor for transnationalism'.<sup>7</sup> These approaches reveal that travelogues facilitated by cultural diplomacy do not necessarily conform to state ideology, but at the same time they leave a large number of travelogues espousing the idea of 'friendship' out of sight, as if they were simply propaganda.

This chapter focuses on the genre of 'fraternal travelogue', which denotes travel writings produced with the aim of creating and disseminating transnational friendships. Instead of treating 'friendship' as a monolithic political slogan, I propose a critical understanding of it as a discursive amalgam that involved various strategies of expression

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6 Tansen Sen, *India, China, and the World: A Connected History* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), Chapter 5.

7 Adhira Mangalagiri, 'Ellipses of Cultural Diplomacy: The 1957 Chinese Literary Sphere in Hindi', *Journal of World Literature*, 4.4 (2019), 508–29 (p. 508).

and carried different significations, as my comparative reading of the similarities, differences, convergences, and tensions between the travelogues produced on both sides shows. As we shall see, while the idea of cultural diplomacy highlights mutuality, egalitarianism, and reciprocity, the different political cultures and national interests of China and India produced significant asymmetries in their cultural diplomacy. These asymmetries in turn produced noticeable contrasts in the fraternal travelogues written by Chinese and Indian writers, as the examples of Bingxin's Chinese travel essay 'Yindu Zhi Xing' (A Journey to India) and Amrit Rai's Hindi travel book *Sūbah ke rang* (Morning Colours) show.<sup>8</sup> The fraternal travelogue, I argue, is a complex 'form of ideology' that fulfils propaganda functions while offering scope for self-reflection, silence, tension, and interrogation. One of its main features, which gives concrete shape and meaning to the somewhat hollow state ideology of enhancing 'friendship' and expresses the writers' own political commitment, is its emphasis on chance encounters with ordinary people. For Bingxin, the fraternal travelogue is essentially an account of trips in which repeated chance encounters are deployed to present Indian people's affinity with China as a spontaneous, ubiquitous, and therefore unchallengeable, 'reality'. As for Rai, a card-carrying communist writer at the time, focusing on the ordinary people he encountered in China instead of state or communist party officials helped present his favourable comments on the PRC and harsh critique of India's Congress regime as grounded in an objective evaluation of everyday experiences.

### Asymmetries of China-India Cultural Diplomacy

China-India relations in the post-World-War-II period, like the general international order of the time, took place under the influence of the Cold War and the contest between the socialist and capitalist blocs. But whereas the PRC established a strategic alliance with the Soviet Union following the 'Lean to One Side' policy announced by Mao Zedong in June 1949,<sup>9</sup> independent India under Jawaharlal Nehru adopted

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8 Bingxin, the pen name of Xie Wanying, is also spelled Bing Xin.

9 Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), pp. 51–53. The Sino-Soviet alliance broke in 1960 mainly due to their different interpretations of Marxism-Leninism.

the path of Non-Alignment so as to avoid being entangled in the confrontation between the two superpowers while, at the same time, securing economic and political assistance from both.<sup>10</sup> However, China and India also succeeded in finding common grounds for collaboration on the basis of their similar concerns and aspirations. Entering the 1950s as the two most populous countries in the world, their leaders realized that they needed to play a decisive role in post-war world affairs, instead of being swayed again by foreign powers. To this end, the two countries considered mutual friendship and support indispensable.

When Mao Zedong announced China's alliance with the Soviet Union, he also proposed the 'intermediate zone' theory that complicated the Cold War division of the world into two blocs. Between the Soviet Union and the United States, Mao stated, there was an intermediate zone spanning Asia, Africa, and Europe, and 'American imperialists' would first attempt to encroach on these areas before waging war against the Soviet Union.<sup>11</sup> 'The international united front that communist China encouraged after 1949', Mira Sinha Bhattacharjea contends, 'had a single reference point at its core—anti-imperialism'.<sup>12</sup> By situating China itself as part of the intermediate zone, Mao emphasized China's solidarity with all the countries that had freed themselves from colonial rule or were still undergoing national liberation struggles. 'As long as all these continued to be anticolonial and anti-imperialism even though not led by communist parties, they were regarded by Mao as being revolutionary in nature'.<sup>13</sup> India thus gained a significant place in China's international order thanks to its successful anticolonial struggle and the leading role Nehru was playing in the Third World. Mao's 'intermediate zone' theory appealed to Nehru because it matched some of the key elements of the Non-Alignment framework, such as world peace and Asian solidarity. Moreover, Nehru had long considered China integral to his imagination of pan-Asianism, which was manifest in his moral support and practical

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10 Rajendra Prasad Dube, *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Study in Ideology and Social Change* (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 1988), pp. 242–43.

11 Chen Jian, 'China and the Bandung Conference: Changing Perceptions and Representations' in *Bandung Revisited: The Legacy of the 1955 Asian-African Conference for International Order*, ed. by See Seng Tan and Amitav Acharya (Singapore: NUS Press, 2008), pp. 132–59 (p. 133).

12 Mira Sinha Bhattacharjea, 'Mao: China, the World and India', *China Report*, 1 (1995), 15–35 (p. 25).

13 Ibid.

assistance during China's anti-Japanese struggle. The fact that India was the first non-socialist country to establish diplomatic ties with the PRC testifies to Nehru's conviction about the need to befriend China.

Based on this mutual dependence, emphasized by the two leaders in the early 1950s, China and India ushered in a decade of frequent diplomatic exchanges, both formal and informal. By the time Nehru and the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai first exchanged diplomatic visits in 1954, various activities of cultural diplomacy had been underway between the two states for years, with a view to creating a favourable environment in the media and in the minds of the general public. Compared to the United States and the Soviet Union that deployed cultural agents and products to 'win the minds of men' in Europe and the Third World,<sup>14</sup> the cultural diplomacy between China and India was arguably less competitive. However, despite the egalitarianism they claimed, the two countries carried out cultural diplomacy with one another in different ways, thus generating different results.

A major difference between China and India was in the relationship between the state and individuals. State involvement means that the exchange activities carried out by cultural agents are, to varying degrees, 'in the service of the "national interest", as defined by the government of the time'.<sup>15</sup> What complicates a simple understanding of cultural diplomacy and differentiates it from inter-governmental diplomacy, however, is the fact that 'the state cannot do much without the support of nongovernmental actors. [...] The moment these actors enter, the desires, the lines of policy, the targets and the very definition of state interests become blurred and multiply'.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the state-individual relationship is central to my comparative investigation of the mechanisms, motives, strategies, agents, and effects of China-India cultural diplomacy.

Throughout the 1950s, China-India cultural diplomacy operated at two different, yet overlapping, structural levels: the bilateral and the multilateral. At the bilateral level, the China-India Friendship Association (CIFA) and India-China Friendship Association (ICFA),

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14 Gienow-Hecht and Donfried, 'The Model of Cultural Diplomacy', pp. 13–15.

15 Giles Scott-Smith, 'Cultural Diplomacy' in *Global Diplomacy: Theories, Types, and Models*, ed. by Alison Holmes and J. Simon Rofe (Boulder: Westview Press, 2016), pp. 176–95 (p. 177).

16 Ibid.

two non-governmental organizations created in 1952 and 1953, ran a series of exchange programmes. They sent cultural delegations to visit the other country, organized receptions, meetings and sightseeing for visitors, helped popularize each other's culture through exhibitions, cultural programmes, and film screenings, and attempted to favourably influence public opinion by inviting influential delegates who had returned from such visits to deliver public speeches and disseminate the sentiment of friendship to wider audiences.



Fig. 2.1 Assembly celebrating the founding of the CIFA, Beijing, May 16th, 1952. On the podium, from left to right: K.M. Panikkar, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Ding Xilin, Guo Moruo, and Zhang Xiruo. Photo by *Renmin Huabao*, public domain, Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1952-06\\_1952%E5%B9%B4%E6%9C%8816%E6%97%A5%E4%B8%AD%E5%8D%B0%E5%8F%8B%E5%A5%BD%E5%8D%8F%E4%BC%9A%E6%88%90%E7%AB%8B.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1952-06_1952%E5%B9%B4%E6%9C%8816%E6%97%A5%E4%B8%AD%E5%8D%B0%E5%8F%8B%E5%A5%BD%E5%8D%8F%E4%BC%9A%E6%88%90%E7%AB%8B.png)

Despite the similar names and functions, CIFA and ICFA differed significantly in terms of administration and leadership. Though established to promote people-to-people contacts with India, the Chinese CIFA was sponsored by the state. From its inception CIFA remained a centralized, national association with no provincial branches and it worked efficiently in cooperation with the central government, national people's organizations, and regional governments to form Chinese delegations to India, invite and receive Indian visitors, and organize India-related cultural activities.

In contrast to CIFA's distinctively official makeup, the Indian ICFA remained a civil society organization with few formal links to the government of India or any political party. It developed from local branches set up by enthusiastic intellectuals before becoming a

nationwide organization in December 1953. While the National Executive Committee of ICFA was responsible for organizing national conferences, passing resolutions, and devising plans, it was the local branches that organized specific activities.<sup>17</sup> The unofficial and voluntary nature of ICFA helped it grow and expand and turn it quickly into a widespread movement joined by people from all over the country. By February 1958, ICFA was reported to have eighteen state or regional branches and as many as 140 district and primary branches.<sup>18</sup>

At the multilateral level, the main arena for China-India cultural diplomacy in the 1950s was the World Peace Council (WPC), founded in 1950 under the auspices of the Soviet-dominated Communist Information Bureau (Cominform). The Soviet-backed WPC and the US-backed Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF, see Zecchini in this volume) served as the cultural 'fronts' for the two Cold War superpowers, propagating 'peace' and 'freedom' as competing codes that respectively implied a pro-Soviet and pro-US position.<sup>19</sup> In spite of its conspicuous association with the Soviet Union, the WPC appealed to both communists and non-communists, partly because the Cominform hoped to make it as 'extensive' as possible, and partly because pacifists around the world, who had witnessed the tragedies caused by fascism and were now worried about a potential nuclear war waged by the United States, identified with the concept of 'peace'.<sup>20</sup> The WPC promoted intercultural exchange by organizing delegation visits and cultural festivals, and it projected itself as preserver of world culture and humanity by commemorating 'Noted Figures of World Culture' and awarding the 'International Peace Prize' to intellectuals who made a particular contribution to the movement.

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17 The institutions that Chinese delegations visited in India were not all left-leaning. In addition to ICFA branches, they also visited literary organizations like the Sahitya Akademi and the Indian PEN. For a reception for a Chinese delegation held by the Indian PEN in Bombay, see *The Indian PEN*, 1 January 1952, pp. 2–3. I thank Laetitia Zecchini for sharing this material.

18 *New Age*, 16 February 1958, p. 16.

19 Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 1999).

20 Günter Wernicke, 'The Unity of Peace and Socialism? The World Peace Council on a Cold War Tightrope Between the Peace Struggle and Intrasystemic Communist Conflicts', *Peace & Change*, 26.3 (2001), 332–51.

National chapters of the World Peace Movement—the Chinese People’s Committee for Defending World Peace (CPCDWP) and the All-India Peace Committee (AIPC)—were established in China and India in 1949. The PRC wholeheartedly embraced the Soviet-dominated peace movement not only because it was in line with Mao’s ‘Lean to One Side’ policy, but also because the new government regarded it as a platform that would allow China to broaden its external relations and gain international recognition. The fact that the CPCDWP was founded on 2 October 1949—the day after the PRC was born—testifies to the country’s keenness in joining the movement.

Unlike China, the World Peace Movement in India began with a dilemma. Since the movement was under the leadership of the Cominform, the mandate to create an Indian chapter initially went to the Communist Party of India (CPI).<sup>21</sup> However, the movement did not receive much support from the CPI. Although the communist-dominated All-India Trade Union Congress convened the first All-India Congress for Peace and set up the AIPC in November 1949, the CPI did little to advance the movement in the next two years since its own radical, anti-bourgeois strategy contradicted the Cominform’s call to broaden the movement by bringing together all possible forces.<sup>22</sup> With little backing from the CPI, the peace movement in India also faced obstacles from the Congress government. As the CPI had been waging a class war against the ‘bourgeois’ Congress since 1949, relations between the two parties were deteriorating dramatically. Aware of the movement’s intrinsic (though weak) connection with the communists, the Congress government took a hostile attitude: not only did it refuse passports to the Indian delegates who were to attend the 1949 Peace Congress in Paris, it also thwarted the AIPC’s attempt to host a gathering in Delhi.<sup>23</sup> The hostility continued after the CPI party line became more moderate in 1951. While Nehru’s attitude towards the communists may have changed, at the provincial level relations remained strained because

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21 Most of my discussion about the peace movement in India is informed by Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, *Communism in India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959). Due to the authors’ anti-communist stance, I refer to the historical information included in this book while remaining sceptical about their arguments.

22 Bhabani Sen Gupta, *Communism in Indian Politics* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1972), pp. 1–65.

23 Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism*, pp. 416–17.

Congress leaders at the regional state level were mostly conservative.<sup>24</sup> Communists continued to encounter problems when applying for passports to visit China and sometimes had to approach the central government for a solution (as Amrit Rai did).

In the face of the peace movement's predicament in India, a group of influential leftist intellectuals, including Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Karanjia, K. A. Abbas and Krishan Chander, were elected leaders of the AIPC Bombay branch in October 1950, and they proved to be more committed to the movement than their communist predecessors.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, the CPI's apathy continued in spite of the change in the party line, so that very few CPI members were part of the AIPC leadership or of Indian delegations to WPC conferences abroad throughout the 1950s.<sup>26</sup> While US observers claimed that in India 'the peace movement has proved to be an effective device with which the Communists can gain influence among the non-Communist intelligentsia and the middle-class in general',<sup>27</sup> it was in fact mainly driven by non-communist leftist intellectuals. Apart from Anand, Karanjia, Abbas, and Chander, other non-communist leftist writers closely associated with the peace movement included the English poet and independent Member of Parliament Harindranath Chattopadhyay, the Malayalam poet Vallathol, the Punjabi novelist Gurbaksh Singh, and ICFA president Pandit Sundarlal.

## Writerly Contact and the Travelogue

Thanks to these bilateral and multilateral frames of cultural diplomacy, in the 1950s writerly contacts between independent China and India greatly increased in volume and closeness compared to the first half of the century. After Tagore's sensational visit to China in 1924, over the next two decades encounters between Chinese writers and Indian

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24 Gupta, *Communism*, pp. 26–27.

25 Anand, Karanjia and Abbas were also founding members of the Bombay branch of ICFA and delegates to the 1951 goodwill mission to China.

26 Romesh Chandra, member of the Central Committee of the CPI, seemed to be the only card-carrying communist, who held an important position within the AIPC leadership.

27 Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism*, p. 429.

writers were rare and mostly took place in the European metropolises.<sup>28</sup> It was in wartime London, for instance, at Bloomsbury gatherings and PEN International conferences, that the Indian English writer Mulk Raj Anand became acquainted with Ye Junjian and Xiao Qian, two Chinese writers who had gone to England as journalists to enhance the anti-fascist alliance between Britain and China. Underlying their friendship was a shared aspiration to make the oppressed voices of China and India heard in the West by writing in English and participating in England's literary life, albeit from a marginalized position.<sup>29</sup> By contrast, post-1950 at least forty Chinese and Indian writers travelled between the two nations and met to discuss the burning issues of the 1950s, such as cultural reconstruction and nation-building, peaceful coexistence, Asian solidarity, and the global Cold War. Nor did they need to be affiliated to literary organizations in Europe in order to speak to an international audience. Although they continued to meet in European cities (especially under the aegis of the WPC), these cities were supplementary rather than primary sites of contact.



Fig. 2.2 Guo Moruo (middle) seeing off Anand (left), Sundarlal (right) and other Indian delegates of the 1951 mission at the airport. Source: Pandit Sundarlal, *China Today* (1952).

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- 28 Cheena Bhavana at Tagore's university in Shantiniketan hosted passionate interactions between Indian intellectuals and visiting Chinese academics, artists, Buddhist monks and political leaders, but literary figures were rarely involved. See Sen, *India*, Chapter 4.
- 29 Xiao Qian laments in his memoir that when he attended a PEN seminar hosted by E.M. Forster in 1944, he and Anand were the only two representatives of the 'East'; see Xiao Qian, *Wenxue Huiyilu* (Ha'erbin: Beifang wenyi chubanshe, 2014), p. 278.

The variety of positions on the ideological spectrum is noteworthy on both sides. The Chinese writers selected to participate in India-oriented cultural diplomacy comprised both communists and non-communists who adhered to the party line on art and literature. The fact that non-communist writers such as Ding Xilin (the ICFA president), Zheng Zhenduo (the leader of the 1954–1955 cultural delegation to India) and Bingxin (who visited India twice) were given such prominent roles suggests that the PRC government wanted to showcase an ideologically diversified image in its cultural diplomacy with India.

On the Indian side, non-communist leftists and Gandhians were more present and played a more decisive role than the communists. Leftist writers like Anand and Abbas, who had been strongly involved in CPI-backed progressive cultural organizations such as the All-India Progressive Writers' Association and the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) under the moderate party line of CPI Secretary P. C. Joshi, were expelled in the late 1940s.<sup>30</sup> Their engagement with ICFA and the peace movement in the early 1950s can therefore be understood as an attempt to seek an alternative path for their leftist activism on an international level. Equally noticeable is the participation of Gandhians like Pandit Sundarlal, the leader of the 1951 Indian goodwill mission. As Herbert Passin points out, though Gandhians considered the Chinese revolution a contradiction to Gandhi's non-violent creed, they regarded it as 'something of the past' and were instead attracted by 'Chinese "communitarianism", mass persuasion techniques, and puritanical morality'.<sup>31</sup> They even attempted to make Gandhism a new template for India-China fraternity, in addition to the prevalent discourses of old civilizational bonds and anti-imperialism. Interviewed by Guo Moruo in Beijing, Sundarlal claimed that 'if some of the angularities could be removed', the teachings of Gandhi and Marx 'could become supplementary to each other and could even become one'.<sup>32</sup>

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30 Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, *I Am Not an Island: An Experiment in Autobiography* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1977), pp. 329–37.

31 Herbert Passin, 'Sino-Indian Cultural Relations', *The China Quarterly*, 7 (1961), 85–100 (p. 88).

32 See Pandit Sundarlal, *China Today* (Allahabad: Hindustani Culture Society, 1952), pp. 72–73. An earlier attempt to harmonize socialism with Gandhism was made by Congress Socialist Sampurnanand; Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere*

As already mentioned, few Indian communists, including communist writers, took part in China-India cultural exchanges in the 1950s. Although frequently labelled 'communist fronts' in non/anti-communist discourse, the ICFA and the AIPC were only loosely connected to the CPI and there is no evidence that they had direct links to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In fact, direct relations between the CPI and the CCP were limited throughout the 1950s, either as cultural or formal diplomacy. Although the revolutionary movements in India proclaimed themselves to be 'Maoist', the CCP exerted no direct influence on them and in fact 'maintained a policy of studied non-involvement in Indian communism all through the 1950s' because it accepted the Soviet Union's direct supervision of the Indian communist movement.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, since CCP leaders were likely aware of the CPI-Congress tensions, they may have wanted to prevent state-to-state friendship from being undermined by inter-communist party interactions. A few Indian communists such as Amrit Rai did visit China, but they were mainly selected because of their active engagement in the peace movement or their friendly attitudes towards China rather than any prominent role in the CPI.

The frequent writerly contacts prompted by China-India cultural diplomacy gave rise to various kinds of textual production, such as translations, travelogues, and reportages. In some cases, writerly contacts converted directly into textual contacts, as when Bingxin translated Anand's anthology *Indian Fairy Tales* (1946) in 1955 and Li Shui translated Jainendra Kumar's Hindi novella *Tyāg-patra* (The Resignation, 1937) in 1959.<sup>34</sup> But such cases were unusual because they required not only a high degree of mutual interest but also for the writers in the host culture to be qualified translators (like Bingxin and Li Shui) and for the original works to be available in a language that they knew. This is especially relevant in Li Shui's case, for his translation would not have been possible had *Tyāg-patra* not been already translated into English by Sachchidananda Hirananda Vatsyayan 'Agyeya' in 1946.

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1920–1940: *Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 355.

- 33 Bhabani Sen Gupta, 'China and Indian Communism', *The China Quarterly*, 50 (1972), 279–94 (p. 279). Other than the CPI delegation led by E.M.S. Namboodiripad that observed the eighth CCP Central Committee Conference in September 1956, no CPI leader was formally invited to visit Beijing.
- 34 Bingxin met Anand during her 1953 visit to India. Li Shui worked as Jainendra's interpreter during the latter's 1956 visit to China.

On the Indian side, I have been unable to trace any visitor to the PRC in the 1950s who translated the works of the Chinese writers they met.<sup>35</sup> Most of the translations of Chinese literature circulating in 1950s India were English versions produced either by the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing or by Western translators, or re-translations of these English versions into Indian languages.<sup>36</sup>

Compared with the literary translations, the travelogues that emerged from China-India cultural diplomacy are greater in number. And not only did they originate from the cultural interactions between the two countries, they were also directly *about* these interactions. Unlike press reports, which mostly offer bare summaries of major activities and are often laden with official rhetoric, the travelogues usually blend formal and informal voices and therefore can bring into view the authors' negotiation between their individual interests and the 'national interests', thanks to the intrinsically ambivalent nature of travelogue as a literary genre. Three features distinguish the genre, according to Carl Thompson: a pronounced first-person account of the journey, the author's sensibility and style, and an ostensibly non-fictional narrative of what *really* happened.<sup>37</sup> Travelogues are therefore simultaneously informative and emotional, objective and subjective. This ambivalence gives the form both epistemological depth and affective weight.

What makes the travelogue a particularly good carrier of ideology in the context of cultural diplomacy is the authority engendered by the sense of 'being there' and 'witnessing' not just reality but also history. This authority was particularly significant in the 1950s because back then travel between China and India was very much a privilege enjoyed only by few. The claim to objectivity was particularly conspicuous among Indian writers, who tended to insert a marker of truthfulness in the titles of their travelogues, such as Rahul Sankrityayan's *Chīn men kyā dekhā* (What I Saw in China, 1960) or Raja Hutheesing's *The Great Peace: An*

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35 K.M. Panikkar, the first Indian ambassador to the PRC, compiled an anthology in English entitled *Modern Chinese Stories* (1953) during his tenure in Beijing. Panikkar did not translate himself but played a key role in selecting authors and texts and deciding how they would be presented. For the organizational aesthetic and selection strategies of this anthology, see Jia Yan, 'Subterranean Translation: The Absent Presence of Shen Congwen in K.M. Panikkar's "Modern Chinese Stories"', *World Literature Studies*, 12 (2020), 5–18.

36 For more information about the Chinese short stories published in Hindi magazines, see Orsini's chapter in this volume.

37 Carl Thompson, *Travel Writing* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 9–33.

*Asian's Candid Report on Red China* (1953). Considering the conflicting views regarding the PRC and communism in India's public sphere during the 1950s, these truth claims helped to project a travel account as *the* authentic version, making it appear attractive and persuasive to the readership.

If 'friendship' indeed served as a prominent ideological link between post-1950 China and India, what did it exactly mean to Chinese and Indian writers who visited each other's country? How were their perspectives, impressions, and representations affected by the ideological and organizational asymmetries of China-India cultural diplomacy? What strategies or techniques did these travelogues adopt to foster a particular sense of friendship? In the following pages, I attempt to answer these questions by examining a number of fraternal travelogues, particularly those written by Bingxin and Amrit Rai.

### Bingxin's 'Yindu Zhi Xing'

For the PRC, which in the early 1950s was still seeking international recognition, the purpose of cultural diplomacy was to promote its new image as an independent, sovereign, and progressive state. Thus, whether facing inward or outward, cultural diplomacy for the PRC featured a strong element of self-presentation. The state considered official involvement to be necessary in order to ensure that its 'cultural ambassadors' presented the nation's image properly. To take the first unofficial Chinese cultural delegation to India in September 1951 as an example, Premier Zhou Enlai is said to have scrutinized the list of delegates himself, and before they left for India, delegates were asked to gather in Beijing for a short course that included the history of the Communist Party of China, the current situation in Asia, and China's Asian policy, so that they would have the requisite political awareness and knowledge to communicate 'appropriately' with their Indian hosts.<sup>38</sup>

Chinese policymakers were fully aware that, if mismanaged, the ideological discrepancy between China and India could endanger the success of bilateral cultural exchange. One key strategy to avoid conflict was to distance the Chinese delegates from any explicit political agenda that might be deemed provocative by the Indian authorities. The novelist

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38 Tian Wenjun, *Feng Youlan* (Beijing: Qunyan chubanshe, 2014), pp. 328–29.

Zhou Erfu, who co-led an official Chinese cultural delegation to India in late 1954, recollected that when the delegates were preparing cultural programmes for Indian audiences, Zhou Enlai emphasized that, 'The selection of programmes [...] should express Chinese people's wish for peace rather than impose on [the audience] programmes that are charged with strong political overtones. Improving cultural exchanges and friendly interactions between Chinese and Indian [...] governments and peoples is itself politics'.<sup>39</sup>

Nonetheless, the PRC's cultural diplomacy targeting India in the 1950s was far from monolithic, because 'cultural exchanges' and 'friendly interactions' took quite different forms in different fields. Dance diplomacy, for instance, emphasized mutual learning, and its primary goal was to learn from, rather than export to, India. As Emily Wilcox argues, it was mainly the sweat and pain that Chinese dancers endured while practising Bharatanatyam moves that made their bodies representative of 'the dedication [that] China as a nation espoused toward ideals such as working together, valuing diverse Asian cultural traditions, and learning from one another'.<sup>40</sup> Sino-Indian exchanges in the field of statistics, according to Arunabh Ghosh, also highlighted 'learning from each other's experiences', but differed from dance diplomacy in the pragmatic expectation of outcomes rather than emphasizing the learning process. In statistics the PRC's aim was to learn about India's cutting-edge methods of random sampling in order solve its social problems.<sup>41</sup>

Chinese writers' contacts with India, by contrast, emphasized the idea of learning *about*, rather than learning *from*, India. While responsible for presenting a positive image of the PRC in India, Chinese writers were also required to bring back home a positive image of India. This meant depicting India as a promising country, and Indian people as true friends of the Chinese people. To this end, travelogues proved to be more effective than reportages, literary translations, and fictional writings.

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39 Zhou Erfu, *Hangxing Zai Daxiyang Shang* (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1992), p. 417.

40 Emily Wilcox, 'Performing Bandung: China's Dance Diplomacy with India, Indonesia, and Burma, 1953–1962', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 18.4 (2017), 518–39 (p. 520).

41 Arunabh Ghosh, 'Accepting Difference, Seeking Common Ground: Sino-Indian Statistical Exchanges 1951–1959', *BJHS: Themes*, 1 (2016), 61–82 (p. 63).

Reading through Chinese travelogues about India published in the 1950s, one immediately notices their homogeneity in terms of both what and how they reported about India. Most Chinese writers emphasized India's rich cultural heritage, whereas comments (not to mention criticism) about the country's present social problems and political system are barely visible.<sup>42</sup> It is generally through their experiences of local cultural attractions or artistic performances that any discussion of the relevant aspects of Indian society or history emerge. This is evident in 'Yindu Zhi Xing' (A Journey to India, hereinafter 'Yindu'), a long travel essay by the non-communist writer Bingxin published after her 1953 India trip with a CIFA delegation.

In general, Bingxin provides the reader with knowledge about India in the manner of a tourist, echoing the delegation's sightseeing led by local guides. Given that, beside formal exchange activities, most of the places they visited were heritage sites, and the India they perceived and articulated was inevitably confined to the past. In 'Yindu', the magnificence of the Jama Masjid in Delhi and the Taj Mahal in Agra segues into an introduction to emperor Shah Jahan and Mughal history; her appreciation of Bharatanatyam dance is followed by a paragraph on Hindu deities and mythology; a visit to the tomb of Lakshmibai, the Rani of Jhansi, provokes a reflection on the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and the origin of Indian nationalism; and a tribute to the site of the old university of Nalanda immediately turns into a nostalgic account of ancient Buddhist pilgrims like Xuanzang and the long history of China-India cultural exchanges.<sup>43</sup>

Bingxin's account shows the PRC's ambivalent treatment of Buddhism as a resource for cross-cultural interactions. While Buddhism continued to be a symbol of China-India cultural intercourse from 1949, it seldom figured prominently in the interactions between writers.<sup>44</sup> For Bingxin

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42 Only in the diaries kept by a few visiting Chinese writers that remained unpublished until the 1990s can we find negative comments about India's caste system and criminal acts. See Ye Shengtao, 'Pianduan Zhi Si' in *Ye Shengtao Ji Di Ershisan Juan*, ed. by Ye Zhishan, Ye Zhimei and Ye Zhicheng (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994), pp. 166–98.

43 Bingxin, 'Yindu Zhi Xing' in *Bingxin Quanji Di San Ce*, ed. by Zhuo Ru (Fuzhou: Haixia wenyi chubanshe, 1994), pp. 235–56.

44 Rahul Sankrityayan, a scholar whose faith straddled Buddhism and Communism, was an exception. He visited China at the invitation of China's Buddhist Association; see his Hindi travelogue *Chīn men kyā dekhā* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1960).

說着，這兩位老者便顛簸的連上兩串花環，老大娘伸出枯乾的雙臂，一下就把我攆在懷裡。這時我們心中，真是有說不出的激動，因為言語不通，我們沒有說過半句話，但是緊緊的一抱，已經充分的表達了她的辛勞，她的痛苦，她的熱愛，她的希望……萬籟無聲之中，月光中只有我們沉靜的緊握的五六個人，但是在我們周圍，似乎洶湧着怒濤般的中印兩國九億人民保衛和平的呼聲！

在波傑爾城，我又有一次類似的經驗，這種熱烈擁抱的場面，以後是越來越多，這一次所以使我不忘，因為有一段小小的瑣劇在內。

十二月十八日，我們到了波傑爾，這是一個三山一湖週合成的明燭的城市，有些地方像我們中國的杭州。在赴了幾處招待會和參觀遊覽之後，晚上又參加了歡迎的群眾大會。我們遵照印度的風俗，脫鞋上台，席地而坐。快到散會的時候，有一位老大娘，招手叫我下去。我到台邊找鞋時，因為人多脚亂，大家的鞋都被踢到台底下去了。於是台邊群眾紛紛的爬入台下，替我找鞋。十幾分鐘之後，好容易找到了，我跳下台去，這位老大娘把我拉到台右婦女的小處，密密層層的婦女，立刻把我圍住，為首的兩位老大娘，淚痕滿面的把我擁抱起來。我那時在萬分感動之餘，還加上慚愧，但是我知這擁抱的不是我，而是新中國的宋慶齡，丁玲，郝建秀，田桂英……印度婦女對於新中國婦女的羨慕和熱愛，真是無法形容的。

十二月十九日的下午，在烏查因城的群眾大會上，正在許多個人和團體紛紛的向我們贈禮的時候，一位枯瘦憔悴的老大娘走了上來，台下群眾都熱熱的



印度愛國女英雄拉克西米·巴依的像

Fig. 2.3 A page from 'Yindu Zhi Xing' depicting a visit to the tomb of Lakshmi Bai, with a picture attached. Source: Bingxin, 'Yindu Zhi Xing' (part two), *Xin Guancha*, 11 (1954), p. 12.

and other writers of socialist China, Xuanzang's days were not a 'golden age' to return to, but a past that was limited in scope and needed to be transcended for a greater cause. Comparing post-war cultural exchanges between China and India with Xuanzang and his Indian teacher Silabhadra, Bingxin wrote: 'Our goals are higher than theirs because we are striving together not only for the Buddhists in the two countries, but for the sustainable peace of Asia and the entire world'.<sup>45</sup> Although Buddhism was invoked to suggest a history of friendly contacts and held symbolic and ideological overtones, new, broader and more relevant templates—in this case, the World Peace Movement—were to carry the China-India interchange forward.

Indeed, almost all the Chinese travelogues about India published in the 1950s contain messages of 'friendship' and evidence of the 'success' of cultural diplomacy. If the slogan 'Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai' is utopian, travelogues offer eyewitness accounts of that utopia realized. China-India friendship in travelogues is embodied in numerous 'moments of encounter', in which a visiting writer first mingles with a local crowd.

45 Bingxin, 'Yindu', p. 249.

Such moments usually took place at transport hubs like airports, railway stations, and ports, or in public places like squares and conference halls. The depiction of these encounters is always detailed and emotive. Bingxin, for instance, recounts more than ten such encountering moments in 'Yindu'. In her depictions of formal receptions and mass rallies, the host's acts of presenting garlands, bouquets and gifts feature extensively as tropes that epitomize goodwill. These symbolic items are sometimes hyperbolized to impress readers: 'We received more than three thousand garlands... which weighed over four hundred kilograms and would form a line of four kilometres if connected end-to-end'.<sup>46</sup>



Fig. 2.4 Bingxin and Ding Xilin (second and third left on the table) receiving garlands from Indian hosts. Source: Bingxin, 'Yindu Zhi Xing' (part two), *Xin Guancha*, 11 (1954), p. 14.

Yet it is Bingxin's depiction of unexpected moments of encounter that really makes her friendship narrative affective. Recounting a train journey in Andhra Pradesh, Bingxin describes a 'passionate picture' of her encounter with a group of peasants who look distinctly communist:

The train stopped, as it stopped when passing other small stations. Someone knocked on the door. When the door was opened and we looked down, several flaming torches showed up, clustering around a red flag. Illuminated by the glittering flare were scores of excited and unadorned faces. The one who was holding the flag was a thin and small woman,

46 Bingxin, 'Yindu', pp. 237–38.

under whose leadership a contingent of peasants dressed in tattered clothes gathered. They shouted welcoming words and the slogan 'Long Live Comrade Mao Zedong', with their eyes filled with tears of delight, zeal and pride. As we embraced, I could smell the pleasing odour of the sun and dust on her worn-out clothes. She was everything about the Indian people and earth. I have held 'Mother India' tightly in my arms!<sup>47</sup>

The scene is replete with sensory touches. The burning flare, red flag, and political slogan typical of the socialist symbolism of comradeship reinforce the joy, excitement, and pride in their tears, making this ephemeral encounter emotionally intense. The emphasis on the simplicity of the peasants' dresses serves the narrative function of expressing the purity and authenticity of their emotional response. The embrace is at once real and symbolic. By romanticizing the female peasant and blurring her identity with that of the nation—'Mother India'—Bingxin presents the embrace of two individuals as an allegory of the mutual affection between the Chinese and Indian peoples.<sup>48</sup> The unpredictability of the Indian woman's appearance along with her fellow peasants at the station strengthens the suggestion that she represents the 'Indian people'.

In 'Yindu', both formal and unexpected encounters appear repeatedly. Bingxin seems to deploy them as narrative devices that constantly remind the reader that China-India friendship is something that can be, and in fact has been, *felt* time and again in real life. Here, the structure of Bingxin's travel narrative, which follows the chronological order of her itinerary rather than a thematic arrangement, seems deliberate. It creates the opportunity to introduce such moments of encounter at every change of place. The continuous representation of India-China friendship in this case is largely (re)produced by the writer's own mobility. Notably, Bingxin's moments of encounter do not entail a mechanical iteration of the same content. Rather, the story and object depicted alter from one place to another, though characteristic motifs like garlands, gifts, and embraces regularly recur. For example, while the scene above centres on Indian peasants, Bingxin later depicts encounters with a group of Dalits

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47 Bingxin, 'Yindu', p. 249.

48 Here, the notion of 'Mother India' is best understood as in the 1957 film *Mother India*, which features the hardships and moral values of a village woman and alludes to post-independence nation-building, rather than the Bharat Mata goddess icon of the nationalist movement.

in Vanukuru village near Vijayawada, two women in Bhopal, and an old couple in Calcutta who each represent a different Indian social group—Dalits, women, and the elderly. In this way, India's affinity with Chinese people is represented as a ubiquitous phenomenon across different geographies, classes, genders, and ages.

### Amrit Rai's *Sūbah ke raṅg*

Compared to the Chinese delegations discussed above, India's direct governmental intervention in its cultural diplomacy with China was rather more limited, it seems. Most Indian delegations to China, like the 1951 goodwill mission, were unofficial, with few participants holding bureaucratic posts. Pandit Sundarlal stresses in his travelogue that the delegation he headed was 'neither sponsored by nor representing the Government of India'. According to him, the government was involved only in providing passports and other facilities.<sup>49</sup> There is no evidence showing that Nehru summoned the delegation before it left, as Zhou Enlai did.

The absence of an official agenda and guidelines allowed the motives, expectations, and outlooks of the individual delegates to surface more freely. Diverse and sometimes contrasting voices are clearly reflected in the China travelogues by Indian writers, whose perspectives were largely dictated by their respective ideologies. On the one hand, there are travelogues written by anti-communist intellectuals such as Raja Hutheesing and Frank Moraes, who wrote in negative terms about almost everything they saw in the PRC. They criticized the 'totalitarian' control by the communist state over the Chinese people, and interpreted the PRC's promotion of peace and friendship as an 'imperialist' scheme that threatened India and other Asian countries.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, most China travelogues were produced by pro-China intellectuals like Pandit Sundarlal, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, R. K. Karanjia, and Amrit Rai, who were key members of the ICFA or the All-India Peace Committee. Their travelogues are full of favourable comments on the PRC's accomplishments in various spheres, such as social dynamism,

49 Sundarlal, *China Today*, p. 4.

50 See Margaret W. Fisher and Joan V. Bondurant, 'The Impact of Communist China on Visitors from India', *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, 2 (1956), 249–65.

the equality of classes and genders, industrialization, agrarian reform, judicial system, mass literacy, and cultural rejuvenation. Compared with Bingxin's travel essay, the Indian travelogues pay much more attention to the contemporary socio-political context, and many were published in book form rather than as newspaper or magazine articles. Instead of following a chronological order, they were mostly arranged thematically, with each chapter covering a particular aspect of the 'new China', be it 'song and dance' or 'manufacturing workers'. This more systematic approach reveals a deep curiosity about what the Chinese revolution had achieved, and this curiosity, as discussed below, derived partly from a dissatisfaction with India's status quo. Even the writer who produced the most negative account of the PRC admitted before the visit that 'China seemed to offer a new way by which the Asian people could acquire the means of improving their lot'.<sup>51</sup>

In his analysis of Sundarlal's *China Today* (1952), Abbas's *China Can Make It* (1952) and Karanjia's *China Stands Up* (1952), three works in English by pro-Chinese yet non-communist authors that are representative of what I call the 'fraternal travelogue', Brian Tsui has highlighted their different strategies to make the Chinese revolution 'comprehensible in light of the Indian elite's own priorities as nation builders and social activists'.<sup>52</sup> Sundarlal's strategy was to 'mobilize terms central to the Congress-led anticolonial movement' (e.g. by calling the handwoven cloth sold in Beijing *khadi*) and to 'emphasize similarities between China and India' by highlighting the compatibility between Gandhian and Marxist thought, as discussed above.<sup>53</sup> Abbas focused primarily on industrial improvement and praised the PRC's achievements on 'criteria with which postcolonial societies would readily identify', such as economic self-sufficiency.<sup>54</sup> Adopting the genre of 'popular history', Karanjia situated his experiences of China in the 'longue durée' of Asia's subjugation to Euro-American powers, producing a sense of shared anticolonial solidarity.<sup>55</sup> In spite of their differences, these travelogues acted as bridges between communist

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51 Raja Hutheesing, *The Great Peace: An Asian's Candid Report on Red China* (New York: Harper, 1953), p. 4.

52 Brian Tsui, 'Bridging "New China" and Postcolonial India: Indian Narratives of the Chinese Revolution', *Cultural Studies*, 34.2 (2020), 295–316 (p. 295).

53 Tsui, 'Bridging', pp. 306–07.

54 Tsui, 'Bridging', pp. 308–09.

55 Tsui, 'Bridging', pp. 309–11.

China and postcolonial India and enhanced the fraternal perception of the PRC within India.

To push Tsui's argument further, I now turn to Amrit Rai's 1953 Hindi travelogue *Sūbah ke rang* (Morning Colours, hereinafter *Sūbah*) to explore how an Indian communist writer reported on communist China. What opportunities and challenges did ideological affinity create? How did it affect the perspective, content, language, and narration of these travelogues? Did 'China-India friendship' carry different meanings and politics for an Indian communist author, compared with non-communist authors? Answering these questions will help us gain a deeper understanding of the fraternal travelogue as a nuanced form of ideology.

Amrit Rai wrote *Sūbah* after visiting China in October 1952, where he attended the Asian and Pacific Rim Peace Conference in Beijing before travelling briefly to other places like Shenzhen, Nanjing, and Hangzhou.<sup>56</sup> Published by Rai's own Hans Prakashan in Allahabad in a substantial first edition of 2,000 copies, the book received positive reviews in the Progressive monthly *Nayā Path* (New Path).<sup>57</sup> The travelogue is book-ended by chronological chapters that loosely follow the timeline of Rai's travel, but the fourteen middle chapters are thematic, with titles like 'Woman's Rebirth' and 'Culture is a People's Matter'. This structure allows Rai to present his travel as both a journey and a survey, balanced between anecdotes and commentary. Like Bingxin's 'Yindu', *Sūbah* is rich in friendship symbolism, including welcoming crowds, flowers, handshakes, smiles, and songs, but Rai does not emphasize spectacle through emotional language and sensory details. His attempt to foster a sense of brotherhood with communist China in his Indian readers relies more on arriving at a correct understanding of the country than on immortalizing moments of friendship.

That Rai's observations about China are utterly favourable in every chapter comes as no surprise. But the questions to ask are not how or why Rai praised the PRC, but how he rendered his praise credible and convincing to his readers. Comparing his book to the 'big picture' of

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56 The Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) shocked Rai and propelled him to re-evaluate his opinions of China and his associations with communism. He later excluded *Sūbah* from his oeuvre and stopped mentioning it in public. Interview with Alok Rai on 23 October 2016.

57 *Nayā Path*, June 1954, p. 300. I thank Francesca Orsini for sharing this material.

systematic socio-economic progress, with the aid of statistics and maps in Sundarlal and Karanjia's travelogues Rai told his readers:

You will not find any of these in this little book. Its scope is very small. I tried to understand the new rhythm and melody in the life of China only through the ordinary men and women with whom I came into contact. Telling the story from this point of view was necessary because it was these ordinary men and women who struggled for the people's revolution and who are now dedicated to rebuilding their ruined country. They are the creators of the new China.<sup>58</sup>

Rai presented his travelogue as written from the perspective of ordinary people rather than the state, and his focus was primarily on the everyday. Such a choice stemmed not only from his progressivist aesthetics, but may have also been a deliberate attempt to make his travelogue more relatable to readers. He also presented himself as an 'ordinary Indian citizen' rather than a committed communist: 'In this little book created out of my memories', he wrote in the preface, 'I will only talk about the anecdotes concerning the ordinary people that have left a mark on my mind. And my mind is that of an ordinary Indian citizen, whose sole claim is love for his own country'.<sup>59</sup> In this light, readers were asked to interpret Rai's many unfavourable comparisons between India and the PRC as patriotic, not partisan.

By crediting ordinary people for the success of the Chinese revolution and nation-building, Rai framed his appreciation of the accomplishments of the PRC as a recognition of their contribution rather than a tribute to communist party leadership. In fact, Rai's travelogue seldom comments directly on the Chinese communist party but rather refers to it figuratively. The most recurring trope is that of 'morning colours', which also appears in the book's title. 'If the glow of the new morning', Rai writes, 'has made today's Chinese life bright, it is only because this new morning is true. It is impossible for one not to see its gleam and colours'.<sup>60</sup> The 'new morning' stands unequivocally for the communist regime, and its 'gleam and colours' for the regime's policies and achievements. Yet by couching his tribute in figurative terms, Rai goes some way toward presenting his arguments as non-party political.

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58 Amrit Rai, 'Bhūmikā ke do shabd' in *Sūbah ke rang* (Allahabad: Hans Prakashan, 1953), n.p.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

*Sūbah* is characterized by meticulous argumentation. Unlike most pro-Chinese authors, who often jumped quickly to conclusions, Rai works more slowly towards predictably positive assessments, adding a lot of argumentative detail and anecdotal evidence in the process. Whatever particular topic relating to Chinese society he discusses, he always begins with a paradox or a question. In the chapter entitled 'Where We Set Foot on the Land of New China', for instance, he first posits the 'miraculous' cleanliness of Chinese cities and villages is 'unbelievable' because 'it is of such a high degree that we can hardly associate it with a backward, ignorant, predominantly agricultural, and semi-colonial country'.<sup>61</sup> Riding on the popular expectation among the general Indian public that 'China must have been more backward than India', he asks: 'How did it become possible that such a backward country became so clean and cleanliness-loving overnight?'<sup>62</sup> A four-page explanation that includes a discussion of how Chinese people regarded keeping the nation clean as a personal responsibility, three 'small anecdotes' depicting workers and villagers who uphold hygiene in their neighbourhood and a comparison with 'Western democracies' and India finally lead to the argument that 'This miracle was realised only because hundreds of millions of people are behind it'.<sup>63</sup> While depicting a visit to a village near Beijing, Rai does not conceal his laughter when the village headman reported the number of flies killed by the villagers (a nationwide campaign launched by the communist party in the 1950s). But he soon turns this vignette into a mind-changing event that helps him appreciate the extraordinary popular mobilization and participation in the PRC's social movements:

I have to admit that at the beginning this sounded funny to me. But after a deeper thought I found it not laughable but remarkable. Obviously, the village head had not made the number up in his imagination. No matter how many flies people killed, they must have kept a record accordingly and reported regularly to the head. This is how statistics were gathered. Just think, developing such a serious political interest in people for matters like killing flies and mosquitoes can't have been a joke.<sup>64</sup>

Rai's attention to detail and practice, and his question here, are anthropological, and his language is often dialogic and reflective. He

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61 Rai, *Sūbah*, pp. 14–15.

62 Ibid., p. 15.

63 Ibid.

64 Rai, *Sūbah*, p. 17.

constantly pauses in the midst of a narration and invites the readers to think along with him. This observational and reflexive style produced an apparently objective account, which in fact aided his political aim of enhancing a sympathetic understanding of communist China among readers. This may explain why travelogues written by communist writers like Rai lack the ‘extravagant language and full-throated paean’ visible in some of those written by non-communist leftists like Karanjia.<sup>65</sup>

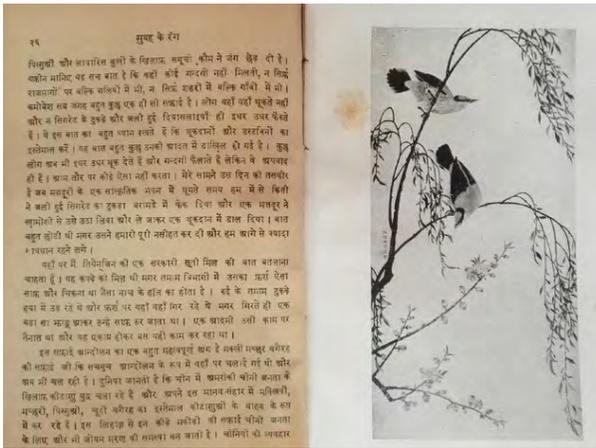


Fig. 2.5 Two pages from *Sūbah ke rang*: the left page discusses cleanliness in the PRC, the right reproduces a traditional Chinese painting depicting natural harmony. Source: Amrit Rai, *Sūbah ke rang*. © Alok Rai. All rights reserved.

Amrit Rai’s appreciation of the PRC’s achievements in *Sūbah ke rang* often appears alongside a dismal appraisal of conditions in India. That India should learn from China in terms of self-dependency, poverty elimination, mass education, gender equality, and cultural reconstruction comes across clearly in the travelogue. For example, in the chapter ‘Culture is a thing of the People’ (*Samskṛiti jantā kī chīz hai*) Rai compares the film industries of the two countries. In Rai’s view, the many films he saw during his tour in China, which portray the struggle of ordinary people for self-emancipation and national liberation, inspire one to pursue higher, more patriotic and humanitarian causes. On the contrary, ‘the explicit pictures in the name of entertainment’ produced in Mumbai—according to Rai under the influence of Hollywood—though

65 Tsui, ‘Bridging’, p. 310.

technologically more advanced, 'can only draw us towards degradation' rather than generate the 'vigour' of Chinese films.<sup>66</sup> Rai further turns the state regulation over cultural matters in the PRC into a critique of Congress governance: 'This situation will not be corrected unless our government takes it in hand. But at present, far from taking the industry in hand, the government does not even want to do anything to set right these tendencies.'<sup>67</sup>

Rai's negative appraisal of the Congress establishment becomes vehement when it comes to his position as a communist. In a chapter entitled 'Iron Curtain and Bamboo Fences' (*Lohe ke parde aur bāms kī taṭṭiyān*), Rai responded to the labels that Indian anti-communists often affixed to the Soviet Union and the PRC. He did not challenge their legitimacy, but posited the existence of a 'Khadi Curtain' that conservative Congressmen had erected to suppress communism in India. As proof he recounted how the district Congress authority had turned down his passport application to visit Beijing without good reason, just as they had formerly denied his application to go to Moscow. When Rai filed a complaint with the central government, he was considered 'not so dangerous' and eventually issued a passport.<sup>68</sup> Elsewhere in the travelogue Rai attacked the 'Congress Raj' for paying more attention to policing than to education and for jailing dissidents—Rai himself had been briefly imprisoned for his vocal criticism of the government suppression of the 1948 CPI-led peasant struggles.<sup>69</sup> Although, as we have seen, the CPC had no ties with these struggles and remained detached from the Indian communist movement in the 1950s, Rai's writings stress a kind of communist solidarity between Indian and China that operated mostly at the conceptual and affective levels.

## Conclusions

Out of shared needs for nation-building and international engagement, post-war China-India cultural diplomacy brought Chinese and Indian

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66 Rai, *Sūbah*, p. 119.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid., pp. 6–7.

69 See Talat Ahmed, *Literature and Politics in the Age of Nationalism: The Progressive Writers' Movement in South Asia, 1932–56* (London, New York, New Delhi: Routledge, 2009), pp. 157–61.

writers together on various new platforms. As politically sensitive, socially responsible, and publicly influential intellectuals, these writers navigated national and personal interests and enacted multiple roles—as writers, travellers, representatives of their newly-minted national cultures, observers of one another’s societal conditions, and commentators of China-India fraternity. These multiple roles meant that the writerly contacts facilitated by cultural diplomacy seldom focused on literature alone. This also holds true for other forms of cultural Cold War, whether the Asian/Afro-Asian writers’ conferences or those organized by the International Congress for Cultural Freedom.

Ideally, China-India cultural diplomacy was marked by reciprocity, egalitarianism, and peaceful coexistence (as per the 1954 Panchsheel Treaty), but this does not mean that cultural exchanges or mutual perceptions mirrored each other. The different political systems and cultural agendas produced stark contrasts and asymmetries, which become particularly visible through the lens of the fraternal travelogue. While state intervention pressed upon Chinese authors travelling to India the duty to present a positive image of their new nation, and they wrote almost unanimously about the hospitality and respect they received from Indian people, the more limited involvement of the government allowed Indian visitors to observe and present the PRC from a variety of angles. Their often very contrasting impressions and evaluations suggest that the China tour often worked to confirm their predetermined ideological stance, whether pro- or anti-communist.

Even within the form of the fraternal travelogue, ‘friendship’ was configured and articulated in different ways. Those written by Chinese writers like Bingxin combined a history-based understanding of India with passionate depictions of rapturous encounters, thus moulding a relationship that was at once temporally distanced and emotionally intimate. This configuration projected China-India friendship as everlasting and Indians as an amiable people without necessarily engaging with comparative evaluations of contemporary China and India and their systems. Although the knowledge about India produced by these travelogues was inevitably bound to the past, it nevertheless came across as accurate and enriching.

The fraternal travelogues written by Indian writers, by contrast, focused predominantly on current conditions within the PRC and their

immediate relevance to India. Friendship here was configured as a bridge across the ideological and systemic gap between post-revolution China and post-colonial India, refiguring the ideological and social differences between the two as opportunities for self-reflection and self-reform rather than as geopolitical threats. By adopting a non-statist, non-party political perspective as well as nuanced narrative strategies, communist writers like Amrit Rai produced a positive image of the PRC and, more importantly, a convincing explanation of why this image mattered. For these writers, the fraternal travelogue about China served, implicitly, as a manifesto of their faith in the communist ideology.

That both Bingxin and Rai put ordinary people as the centre of their fraternal travelogues challenges the portrayal of 'China-India friendship' as simply a rhetoric of the Chinese and Indian governments. This makes us think of 'Asian solidarity' not as a statist model but as an unfinished project formed by multiple relation-building processes. In this sense, this study of the fraternal travelogues contributes to China-India scholarship studies by suggesting we don't go *beyond* the 'bhai-bhai' rhetoric but *into* the rhetorical discourse, asking why it mattered to individual agents, how it was affectively and aesthetically configured, and what relationships it enabled, instead of following the geopolitical approach that simply calls it a 'failure' or a 'lie'.<sup>70</sup> Such an approach to the rhetoric of transnational friendship may speak to other contexts of Third World transnationalism in the Cold War period.

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70 See Tansen Sen, 'The Bhai-Bhai Lie: The False Narrative of Chinese-Indian Friendship', *Foreign Affairs*, 11 July 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/review-essay/2014-07-11/bhai-bhai-lie>

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# 3. Literary Activism

## Hindi Magazines, the Short Story and the World

Francesca Orsini

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If in January 1955 you had picked up the special new-year issue of the Hindi story magazine *Kahānī* (Story) (1954, Fig. 3.1), you would have been able to read S. H. Manto's Partition masterpiece 'Ṭobā Ṭek Singh'<sup>1</sup> and Ismat Chughtai's blood-curling domestic story 'Nanhī sī jān' (A Tiny Life), originally written in Urdu; two of Hindi's most famous stories, Krishna Sobti's brooding 'Bādalon ke ghere' (Gathering Clouds) and Kamleshwar 'Kasbe kā ādmī' (Small-Town Man), amidst twenty-odd stories by famous Hindi writers of the older generation (Ugra, Yashpal, Vrindavanlal Varma, Ashk, Agyeya) and upcoming ones (Bhisham and Balraj Sahni, Kamleshwar, Markandeya, Ramkumar, and so on). You could have sampled a dozen pieces by contemporary Bengali, Urdu, Marathi, and even Kashmiri writers. But you would also read translations of some of the best-known European stories—Theodor Storm's 'Immensee' (1848), Anton Chekhov's 'Gusev' (1890), Arthur Schnitzler's 'The dead are silent' (1907), Maxim Gorky's 'An Autumn Night' (1895), as well as the soon-to-be Nobel prize winner Halldór Laxness's 'Slaughterhouse' and a contemporary Chinese story.<sup>2</sup>

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- 1 Written in 1954 (Ayesha Jalal, *The Pity of Partition: Manto's life, times, and work across the India-Pakistan divide*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013, p. 122), 'Ṭoba Ṭek Singh' was published in book form in Urdu in 1955 (in *Phundne*, Lahore: Maktaba-e Jadid), the year Manto that died. The story therefore appeared in print at the same time in Urdu and Hindi and on both sides of the border.
  - 2 Chun Chuan Yeh's 'Dream' is a story about a young man who falls in with a family of performers in war-torn China; according to Jia Yan, this could be Chun-chan Yeh

Through just one 400-page bumper issue you would have gained a good sense of whether older Hindi writers were still producing interesting work, which new ones were worth following, who was writing what in other Indian languages, and how Indian stories compared to those by the European masters of the craft and by Chinese 'brothers'.<sup>3</sup>

**नववर्षाङ्क जनवरी १९५५**

**त्रिपथ सूची**

| क्र.सं. | विषय                            | लेखक | पृ.सं. |
|---------|---------------------------------|------|--------|
| १       | कहानी की बात                    | ...  | २१     |
| २       | कहानी की कला—प्रचारचन्द्र गुप्त | ...  | २५     |
| ३       | परिचय—विश्व शेषक शर्मा 'गंग'    | ...  | ३१     |
| ४       | परिचय कुंड—माधवेंकर राजकी कोठी  | ...  | ३५     |
| ५       | परिचय—सुरेश                     | ...  | ४१     |
| ६       | परिचय—सुरेश                     | ...  | ४५     |
| ७       | परिचय—सुरेश                     | ...  | ४९     |
| ८       | परिचय—सुरेश                     | ...  | ५३     |
| ९       | परिचय—सुरेश                     | ...  | ५७     |
| १०      | परिचय—सुरेश                     | ...  | ६१     |
| ११      | परिचय—सुरेश                     | ...  | ६५     |
| १२      | परिचय—सुरेश                     | ...  | ६९     |

**नववर्षांक, जनवरी १९५५**

**विषय सूची**

| क्र.सं. | विषय           | लेखक | पृ.सं. |
|---------|----------------|------|--------|
| २५      | साधने—के.के.ए. | ...  | १००    |
| २६      | साधने—के.के.ए. | ...  | १०५    |
| २७      | साधने—के.के.ए. | ...  | ११०    |
| २८      | साधने—के.के.ए. | ...  | ११५    |
| २९      | साधने—के.के.ए. | ...  | १२०    |
| ३०      | साधने—के.के.ए. | ...  | १२५    |
| ३१      | साधने—के.के.ए. | ...  | १३०    |
| ३२      | साधने—के.के.ए. | ...  | १३५    |
| ३३      | साधने—के.के.ए. | ...  | १४०    |
| ३४      | साधने—के.के.ए. | ...  | १४५    |
| ३५      | साधने—के.के.ए. | ...  | १५०    |
| ३६      | साधने—के.के.ए. | ...  | १५५    |
| ३७      | साधने—के.के.ए. | ...  | १६०    |
| ३८      | साधने—के.के.ए. | ...  | १६५    |
| ३९      | साधने—के.के.ए. | ...  | १७०    |
| ४०      | साधने—के.के.ए. | ...  | १७५    |
| ४१      | साधने—के.के.ए. | ...  | १८०    |
| ४२      | साधने—के.के.ए. | ...  | १८५    |
| ४३      | साधने—के.के.ए. | ...  | १९०    |
| ४४      | साधने—के.के.ए. | ...  | १९५    |
| ४५      | साधने—के.के.ए. | ...  | २००    |

Fig. 3.1 Table of contents for January 1955 special issue of *Kahānī*. Author's photograph, courtesy of Sara Rai.

Magazines have loomed large in Hindi literary lore. They were the arena in which critical debates about aesthetics and ideology were fought, and the main platform on which contemporary Hindi poets and fiction writers presented their new work and found readers and recognition. Publication in book form and academic consecration only cemented reputations first forged on the pages of magazines, which were oriented towards new talent and new material. Despite their ephemeral nature—particularly in the Hindi context, where old books and periodicals are sold in bulk as scrap paper—magazines embody, and capture for us eager after-readers, a lively critical and creative imagined community.

3 As Yan Jia's chapter in this volume shows, the rhetoric of '*Hindī-Chīnī bhāī bhāī*' (Indian and Chinese are brothers) was at its peak in the 1950s.

To borrow Amit Chaudhuri's phrase, magazines were sites of intense 'literary activism': an activism by editors *on behalf* of literature to champion new writers and encourage readers' tastes, but also a constant critical interrogation on the value and function of literature.<sup>4</sup>

But while magazine activism, particularly in US scholarship, is associated with 'little magazines' and the avantgarde, in the Hindi context magazines were simply the mainstay of literary publication, and in most cases they can hardly be called 'little'.<sup>5</sup> In the early twentieth century, for example, Hindi magazines were mostly hefty monthly miscellanies of over one hundred pages that dealt with all matters political, social, and literary.<sup>6</sup> In the 1950s to 1970s, the period this essay covers, magazines ranged from very literary small imprints, medium-sized enterprises, literary-political reviews, illustrated weekly broadsheets, 'middlebrow' miscellanies and downright commercial 'timepass' story magazines. Hindi magazine circulation ranged between 15,000 to 100,000, many times higher than the print run of any new literary book.<sup>7</sup>

Magazines thrive on short forms, and historically magazines worldwide have been linked to the success of the short story as a modern literary form.<sup>8</sup> 'The story is the oldest literary genre... and the newest', wrote the editor of another Hindi story magazine, *Sārikā* (Starling). The oldest, because tales (*kathās*) are found at the beginning of every culture; the 'newest' because the modern short story had developed only in the nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> In Hindi, the story (*kahānī*) first emerged

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4 Amit Chaudhuri, *Literary Activism: Perspectives* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017).

5 See Eric Bulson, *Little Magazine, World Form* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

6 See Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism, 1920–1940* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002).

7 See Aakriti Mandhwani, 'Everyday Reading: Commercial Magazines and Book Publishing in Post-Independence India' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, SOAS, University of London, 2018).

8 See also Dean Baldwin, *Art and Commerce in the British Short Story, 1880–1950* (London: Routledge, 2013); Sarah Whitehead, 'Edith Wharton and the Business of the Magazine Short Story' in *The New Edith Wharton Studies*, ed. by J. Haytock & L. Rattray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 48–62.

9 Chandragupta Vidyalkar, Editorial, *Sārikā*, November 1966, p. 93. See also Kamleshwar's essay, 'The journey of the world story: from deluge to atomic explosion' ('Viśva-kathā-yātrā: jal-pralay se aṇu-pralay tak'), *Sārikā*, January 1970, pp. 44–48, which traces the development of the story (more or less loosely, as fiction and as short story) from Gilgamesh to Beckett. The fact that stories are found at the beginning of every culture, whether in Egypt, Mesopotamia, China or India,

in magazines in the first decade of the twentieth century, and it was magazines that allowed Premchand (1884–1936), the most celebrated and popular Hindi-Urdu fiction writer of the 1910s to 1930s, to thrive as an independent writer. Already in the 1920s, the story emerged as a protean form, which could be a vehicle of aesthetic experimentation, social reform, political mobilization, entertainment, or romance—or several such goals at the same time.<sup>10</sup> In the 1950s, a number of Hindi magazines devoted themselves exclusively to stories. Some, with titles like ‘Juicy Stories’ and ‘Entertaining Stories’ (*Rasīlī Kahānīyān*, *Manohar Kahānīyān*), included mostly thrilling, melodramatic, or funny stories and were geared towards ‘timepass’ reading, as on train journeys.<sup>11</sup> Others were more serious and literary, like *Kahānī* (edited by Premchand’s son Shripat Rai with Bhairavprasad Gupta and Shyamu Sanyasi, 1954), *Naī Kahānīyān* (New Stories) (1959, ed. Bhairavprasad Gupta) and *Sārikā* (1960, ed. Chandragupta Vidyalkar and later Kamleshwar). Such diversification did not exclude overlaps, and it was not unusual to find stories by writers like Manto or Rajendra Yadav, or even Dostoevsky, packaged as thrilling ‘timepass’ reading.<sup>12</sup> Both writers and editors were after all on the lookout for publishing opportunities and printable material. *Kahānī*, *Naī Kahānīyān* and *Sārikā* form the archive of this essay. Hindi writer and editor Kamleshwar (1932–2007), who started out as writer and translator at *Kahānī* in the 1950s, and became editor of *Naī Kahānīyān* and then of *Sārikā* between the mid-1960s and the late 1970s, is one of the heroes of this story.

If they are now remembered in Hindi as platforms for *Hindi* literature and criticism, in the 1950s to 1970s Hindi magazines were remarkable sites of literary activism in other ways, too. As the January 1955 issue of *Kahānī* shows, magazines strove to regularly present readers with contemporary writing from other Indian languages, and also from an increasingly wide range of foreign literatures. In the case of Indian languages, this was clearly a nation-building effort: to create a national

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may have mitigated any anxiety about the modern short story being an imported ‘western’ form; I thank Neelam Srivastava for this suggestion.

10 See Premchand’s early discussion of the genre in ‘Kahānī-kalā’ (The Art of the Story), reprinted in Premchand, *Kuch vichār* (Some Thoughts) (Allahabad: Saraswati Press, 1965).

11 See Mandhwani, ‘Everyday Reading’.

12 Ibid.

literary field in which readers and writers would be familiar with what was going on in other regional literary fields.<sup>13</sup>

A different goal dictated the choice of foreign works: the desire to make world literature visible and familiar. But which world literature? As Laetitia Zecchini puts it, the ‘Cold War can be understood both as a form of “synchronization” of literatures across the globe, and conversely, as a form of disjunction, with world literatures and cultures partitioned along antithetical ideologies’.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, the magazines’ choice of foreign stories to translate often mapped directly onto Cold War political affiliations—which is why we see so many Chinese, Eastern European, and Russian stories regularly translated in 1950s Progressive Hindi magazines, while other magazines opted for European and American writers.<sup>15</sup>

In the 1960s, a growing interest in African decolonization and the emergent discourse of Third-Worldism made African, Latin American, and South-East Asian stories visible to Hindi magazine readers for the first time, creating new ‘significant geographies’.<sup>16</sup> But with a paradox: when in the 1950s and 1960s India under Nehru was politically non-aligned, Hindi magazines were largely politically aligned in their literary internationalisms. When Non-Alignment hollowed out politically in the early 1970s after Nehru’s death, a Hindi editor like Kamleshwar reframed Third-Worldism as a third way between the two Cold War literary fronts. In the *Sārikā* special issue expressly dedicated to the ‘Third World: ordinary people and writers as fellow travellers’ (in January 1973), Kamleshwar embraced the definition of Third World

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13 Whether translations from other Indian languages figured as prominently in magazines in other *bhasha* fields is an interesting question for Indian comparatists. Usually the main institutional actor in this regard is understood to have been the Indian Academy of Letters (Sahitya Akademi, 1957), which launched a translation programme (with English as the medium when no direct translator was available) and an English and a Hindi magazine (*Indian Literature* and *Samkālīn sāhitya* or Contemporary Literature). As this essay shows, Hindi magazines from the 1950s to 1970s were equally important actors.

14 Laetitia Zecchini, ‘What Filters Through the Curtain: Reconsidering Indian Modernisms, Travelling Literatures, and Little Magazines in a Cold War Context’, *Interventions*, 22.2 (2020), 172–94 (p. 177).

15 Russian stories by Tolstoy and Chekhov were already familiar to Hindi readers; Premchand himself had translated some Tolstoy stories in 1923 (reprinted as Premchand, *Ṭālstāy kī kahānīyān*, Allahabad: Saraswati Press, 1980).

16 See Karima Laachir, Sara Marzagora and Francesca Orsini, ‘Significant Geographies: In lieu of World Literature’, *Journal of World Literature*, 3.1 (2018), 290–310.

as the postcolonial condition of underdevelopment after centuries of colonial exploitation, a condition shared by the 'ordinary people' of Africa, Latin America, and South- and South-East Asia:

From a political viewpoint, the 'Third World' is the grouping of geographical units that have gathered on a single platform and accepted that name. But if we move away from that viewpoint and look and connect ourselves to the ordinary people [*jan-sāmānya*] dwelling in those different parts of the world we shall see that most of the Third World lives in Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia. In a way, the southern part of the globe is the Third World. Human beings from this world have been confronting similar inhuman conditions for centuries. Slavery, mistreatment [*anāchār*], exploitation, poverty, inhuman repression have been piled onto them, and this has been held to be their destiny [*niyati*]. The so-called civilized and educated world has done nothing beside milking it like a milch cow. What has been given in the name of spreading the light of civilization has been a mongrel [*doglī*] culture, the killing of the economic system and strangling of political institutions. Today, though, the Third World man is throwing the many lice off his collar and is taking the right [*adhikār*] of deciding his destiny in his own hands.<sup>17</sup>

The postcolonial subject—including both toiling worker and alienated intellectual—is shaking off a yoke that is both political and economic but also intellectual and creative (see Zecchini in this volume). Yet, as we shall see, despite this Marxist analytical language, Kamleshwar's choice of stories and his aesthetic credo moved resolutely away from an alignment with Leftist internationalism. Rather, as he had evocatively put it, riffing off Guimarães Rosa's story 'The Third Shore' (A Terceira Margem do Rio, 1962), the literature of the Third World was the voice of the fate of living midstream, tired of both shores.<sup>18</sup> Third World here stood in for non-European stories rather than for stories that embraced a postcolonial vision.

Making world literature visible is never just a geographical gesture, but also a temporal one. How are we to understand the choice of magazine editors to publish 'the latest', or else modern or earlier 'classics'—in

17 Kamleshwar, Editorial, *Sārikā*, January 1973, p. 6. He viewed this special issue as a direct continuation of two earlier issues dedicated to Indian stories about the inner and mental world of ordinary Indians (ibid.). All translations from Hindi are mine.

18 Kamleshwar, 'Donon taṭon se ūbkar' (Tired of both Shores), *Sārikā*, January 1969, p. 7.

other words, a temporal as well as spatial production of world literature? Building on Andrew Rubin's argument that 'the accelerated transmission' of texts across journals affiliated to the Congress for Cultural Freedom in the 1950s and 1960s 'respatialize[d] world literary time', Elizabeth Holt has proposed that this 'near-simultaneous publication of essays, interviews, and sometimes stories and poems in multiple [CCF] journals and affiliated publications engendered a *global simultaneity of literary aesthetics and discourses of political freedom and commitment*'.<sup>19</sup> While this is indeed the language that magazine editors often spoke in this period, what they publish tells a different story. As we shall see, multiple and competing visions of world literature could be found in the same magazine at the same time—tracing different 'significant geographies' and belying simple geopolitical polarities. Historical surveys and lessons from the 'masters of the story' tended to be Eurocentric and feature French, British, Russian, and American writers, whereas the decolonizing impulse and interest in the 'contemporary sensibility' of a 'world in transition' drew magazine editors to texts from Africa, Latin America, and South-East Asia—countries and literatures 'we know little or nothing about'.<sup>20</sup> In the process, older texts were 'transported' into the present. A great many authors and stories that we now consider foundational to Latin American, African, and postcolonial literatures—from Horacio Quiroga, Jorge Luis Borges, and Mario Benedetti to Juan Rulfo, José Donoso, Miguel Asturias, and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, from Chinua Achebe and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o to Cyprian Ekwensi and Alex LaGuma, from Mahmud Taimur to Laila Baalbaki, from Pramudya Ananta Toer to Mochtar Lubis and many, many others—were translated and read in a Hindi mainstream magazine like *Sārikā* as early as the 1960s and 1970s. As a result, Hindi readers and editors appear to us strikingly less parochial and much more internationalist than we may surmise when we think of Hindi as a 'regional' language or *bhasha*.

Form in this essay is therefore a genre (the story) and a platform or medium (the magazine). I am interested in how foreign stories in Hindi

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19 Elizabeth Holt, "'Bread or Freedom': The Congress for Cultural Freedom, the CIA and the Arabic Literary Journal *Hiwār* (1962–1967)", *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 44 (2013), 83–102 (p. 89), emphasis added, quoting Andrew Rubin, *Archives of Authority: Empire, Culture and the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 58.

20 Kamleshwar, 'Donon taṭon se ūbkar', p. 7.

magazines were framed, discussed, shaped, and read in the context of Cold War ideological debates and competing internationalisms, and how Hindi magazines created expansive ‘significant geographies’ of world literature that made this remarkable array of authors and texts not only *visible*, but readable, for ordinary Hindi readers. Roanne Kantor has called this kind of world literature a ‘fantasy of solidarity’, particularly if viewed from the current market-oriented perspective dominated by multinational book conglomerates, the Anglophone novel and its literary prizes.<sup>21</sup> I would agree with Kantor, but only if we consider fantasy not as the opposite of reality but as a world-making activity that helps to create reality.

Hindi magazine editors experimented with different formats for world literature: regular translation slots, broad surveys, dedicated columns and articles, or impressive special issues, producing ‘thick’ or ‘thin’ familiarity.<sup>22</sup> As I argue below, the bumper special issues that Kamleshwar devoted to world stories around different themes in particular produced a ‘spectacular internationalism’ that paralleled and even exceeded that of the Asian-African Writers’ Association’s magazine *Lotus*.<sup>23</sup> Such spectacular special issues made visible and palpable the richness and variety of African, Asian, and Latin American literatures, while the presence here and there of contemporary European and North American writers *as part* of this panoply only emphasized the non-centrality of the latter.

Yet however spectacular—and impressively *early*—this archive of world literature translations into Hindi makes us wonder about how the medium influences or determines our experience of world literature. Is the experience of reading world literature in the magazine different from that of reading a book, a book series, an anthology, or from studying texts as part of a world literature course, or seeing them canonized through prizes? Apart from one exception, celebrated

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21 Roanne Kantor, *South Asian Writers, Latin American Literature, and the Unexpected Journey to Global English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

22 See my webinar ‘Beyond the Two Shores: Indian Magazines and World Literature between Decolonization and the Cold War’, <https://modernlanguages.sas.ac.uk/events/event/23336>

23 For *Lotus*, see Hala Halim, ‘*Lotus*, the Afro-Asian Nexus, and Global South Comparatism’, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 32.3 (2012), 563–83; and Monica Popescu, *At Penpoint* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020).

writer Nirmal Varma's translations from Czech, stories translated in the magazines were never published in book form and left no trace in terms of the migration of books or 'bibliomigrancy' through libraries or publishers' catalogues.<sup>24</sup> Rather, they were often plucked out of other magazines, collections and anthologies to be translated as stand-alone pieces. Did these magazine translations leave a lasting impression on readers, did they create a *habitus* for world literature, and a lasting archive?

### The Hindi Print Ecology of the 1950s

Looking back at the 1950s and 1960s, we can see how the remarkable efflorescence and range of literary talent, from Dharmavir Bharati to Phanishwarnath Renu, Mohan Rakesh to Nirmal Varma, Krishna Sobti to Krishna Baldev Vaid, Shivaprasad Singh to Nagarjun, Mannu Bhandari to Kamleshwar and Rajendra Yadav, to name but the most famous, was sustained and supported by a large network of magazines that published their new work.

Working with magazines as one's archive requires us to look at each individual issue *and* each magazine as a self-contained text, but also at each magazine as a platform for different voices and agendas, as well as part of a wider ecology of print publications. The last point is nowhere clearer than in 1950s and 1960s India, where magazines proliferated and many readers acknowledged that they read more than one, in Hindi *and* English (Fig. 3.2).<sup>25</sup> Despite the fact that most magazines featured female beauties on their covers and stories and, in most cases, sought out a direct dialogue with readers, this was a highly populated and nuanced magazine space. In each case, the number and types of ads and illustrations, the more or less visible editorial line, and the presence or absence of political commentary gives us clues about their position in the field.

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24 For the term 'bibliomigrancy', see B. Venkat Mani, *Recoding World Literature: Libraries, Print Culture, and Germany's Pact with Books* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017). These stories did not become part of the *Index Translationum* and would not therefore register in studies like Gisèle Sapiro's *Traduire la littérature et les sciences humaines: Conditions et obstacles* (Paris: Ministère de la Culture – DEPS, 2012).

25 I am referring here to the Hindi and English literary spheres; accounts of other Indian regional language fields would feature different magazines and publishers.

The *Times of India* Group alone published six magazines: the Hindi illustrated weekly *Dharmayug* and English *Illustrated Weekly of India*; the English film weekly *Filmfare*, Hindi story monthly *Sārikā*, and children's monthly *Parāg* (Pollen), and English illustrated women's weekly *Femina*.<sup>26</sup> The Delhi Press published the 'middlebrow' English illustrated monthly *Caravan* (1940) and smaller-sized Hindi and Urdu *Sarītā* (respectively c.1945 and 1959). The story magazine *Nāī Kahāniyan* and the critical monthly *Ālochnā* (Criticism, 1951) were imprints of the leftist publisher Rajkamal Prakashan, while *Nayā Path* (New Path, 1953) was a smaller communist/Progressive activist enterprise coming out first from Bombay and then from Hindi writer Yashpal's publisher Viplav Prakashan in Lucknow. Another important Hindi monthly, *Kalpanā* (Imagination, 1949), with a broader coverage of the arts and striking covers by M. F. Husain, came out from Hyderabad. English magazines that published literature include the already-mentioned *Illustrated Weekly of India* and two ICCF-funded publications: the monthly *Quest* (1955), from Bombay, and the political broadsheet *Thought* (1949) from Delhi (see Zecchini in this volume).

Interestingly, Hindi and English magazines from this period reveal a smaller cultural and class distance between them, certainly compared to the situation today in which the two literary fields appear as quite separate, and very hierarchical, worlds. Translations and literary references in Hindi magazines reveal that many Hindi editors and readers read broadly in English, too. At the same time, English magazines like the *Illustrated Weekly* and *Quest* regularly featured and reviewed contemporary writing in Hindi and other regional languages. In the *Illustrated Weekly*, stories by Krishna Baldev Vaid, S. Subbulakshmi and others from Hindi, Bengali, Telugu, and other regional languages appeared frequently, side by side with stories in English, and the magazine even attempted a regular column on the Hindi literary world called 'A Window into Hindi Writing'.<sup>27</sup> In other words, while Hindi magazines are remembered for their role in fostering Hindi writing and debates, it pays to read together Hindi

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26 By far the most popular film magazine of the time was, however, the Urdu *Shamā'*, published from Delhi.

27 'Sahityakar' (i.e. 'Literato' in Hindi), 'A Window into Hindi Writing', *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 1 April 1962, p. 49.

and English magazines as part of an integrated, multilingual ecology of reading and publishing.

In Hindi literary histories, this period is remembered for the continued ideological-aesthetic struggle between Progressives and Experimentalists which had been going on since the late 1930s. The debate on the aesthetic and function of literature, hinging on ideas of aesthetic freedom versus social usefulness, morphed in the 1950s into a bitter dispute between the Progressives and the Experimentalists, largely grouped around Sacchidanand Hiranand Vatsyayan 'Agyeya' (1911–1987) and the Parimal group in Allahabad.<sup>28</sup> Experimentalists accused the Progressives of turning literature into political propaganda, while the Progressives accused Experimentalists of wallowing in individualist and formal concerns and turning their backs on the urgent needs of the country and of society.

Inevitably, these debates took on Cold War overtones. The Indian Council for Cultural Freedom (ICCF) and its magazine *Quest* paid close attention to the activities of the Parimal group, and the foremost Hindi Experimentalist 'Agyeya' was for a while closely involved in the ICCF. It was he who organized its first conference in India in 1951 (see Zecchini in this volume) and edited the weekly *Thought*.<sup>29</sup> Progressives scoffed at the ICCF's call for 'cultural freedom' for its 'infatuation with capitalist values' and for 'trying to destroy our artists' ethical stance with the poison of mistrust'.<sup>30</sup>

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28 For a brief account of these debates in English, see Karine Schomer, *Mahadevi Varma and the Chhayavad Age of Modern Hindi Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). There were several attempts at mediation: for example, poet and future *Dharmayug* editor Dharmavir Bharati tried to argue that Marxism itself was not a dogma but a sweeping 'experiment' of human civilization with progress, beneficial but and not without its weaknesses; Dharmavir Bharati, *Pragatīvād: ek samīkshā* (Progressivism: a review) (Prayag: Sahitya Bhavan, 1949), p. 2. I thank Xiaoke Ren for this reference.

29 As Zecchini shows, the Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom brought together both right and left critics of Nehru and of the Communists, so non-Communist Congress Socialists (JP Narayan, Narendra Dev, Minoo Masani) and the Congress Right (K.M. Munshi), who opposed both the Communist takeover of cultural and labour organizations and the 'one-party' rule of Nehru's Congress.

30 Amrit Rai, 'Sāṃskritik svādhīntā ke ye ālambardār' (These standard bearers of cultural freedom/independence), *Kahānī* (July 1957), p. 75. 'We are in favour of the writer's freedom-relative-to-society [*samāj-sāpeksh svādhīntā*] and consider any kind of socially unrelated solitary freedom [*samāj-nirpeksh, ekāntik svādhīntā*] a synonym of derangement [*uchrinkhālā*]; *ibid.*, p. 76.

At the same time, another struggle was going on in the early 1950s within the Progressives over control of the Progressive Writers' Association, between hardliners within the Communist Party of India and communists and sympathizers who supported a broader United Front (*samyukt morchā* in Hindi) of democratic forces. This was sometimes framed as a conflict between Soviet- and Chinese inspired literary ideologies.<sup>31</sup> Hindi Progressive writers and critics quoted Soviet theorists and Mao's Yunan Theses and took part in Peace Congresses, while Soviet and Chinese magazines and books flooded the Indian market.<sup>32</sup> As we shall see in the next section, these different aesthetic and ideological alignments translated into different geopolitical visions or 'significant geographies' of world literature.

It is useful to bear in mind, however, that harsh and uncompromising though these critical struggles were, particularly in print and at literary meetings and conferences, personal friendships crossed ideological faultlines. Moreover, the same critics and writers published articles and stories in magazines like *Kahānī*, *Kalpanā*, *Naī Kahānīyān* or *Sārikā*. And when modernist or progressive stories appeared in *Sarītā* or *Dharmyug*, particularly after former Parimal member and Modernist poet, playwright, and novelist Dharmavir Bharati became the latter's editor in 1959, they reached a broader public.<sup>33</sup>

Finally, the new generation of New Story (or Nai Kahani) writers like Mohan Rakesh, Nirmal Varma, Mannu Bhandari, Kamleshwar, and Rajendra Yadav that emerged in the mid-1950s and that would dominate the literary scene for the next decades sought a way out of the ideological impasse between Progressives and Experimentalists. They developed an aesthetics based on a commitment to 'the authenticity of

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31 See Xiaoke Ren, 'The Interface Between Literature and Ideology in Post-Independence India: Hindi Progressive Novels of the 1950s and 1960s' (unpublished doctoral thesis, SOAS, University of London, in progress).

32 For example, the Progressive/Communist magazine *Nayā Path* published, in lieu of feedback to budding writers, a three-part series 'About the story' (*Kahānī ke sambandh men*) by Soviet writer Sergei Antonov (*Nayā Path*, January 1954, pp. 281–287). *Nayā Path* also printed articles about Gorky, Nazim Hikmet, and one by Pablo Neruda condemning obscurity in poetry ('Kavitā aur aspashtā', *Nayā Path*, May 1954), pp. 466–468. For Chinese publications in India, and especially in Hindi, see Jia, 'Beyond the "Bhai-Bhai" Rhetoric': China-India Literary Relations, 1950–1990' (unpublished doctoral thesis, SOAS, University of London, 2019).

33 See Mandhwani, 'Everyday Reading'.

inner experience' and to the 'new conditions' of post-colonial India.<sup>34</sup> As already intimated, this aesthetics also produced its own internationalism and vision of world literature.

### The Magazine as World Literature

How do magazines produce world literature? Let us pause on this question, and on the magazine as a location, a site, and a means for world literature. Much of the recent debate around world literature has revolved around the curriculum, anthologies, publishers' series, or book prizes,<sup>35</sup> yet in India exposure to and discussion of literature from other parts of the world mainly took place in the pages of periodicals. But how is the medium part of the message: what kind of experience of world literature do magazines create? Does their reliance on short forms (the review, the short note, occasionally the poem or the short story) and on fragmentary, occasional, token offerings produce a particular experience of world literature, a kind of familiarity through repetition or even simple visibility? How is such an experience different from the more systematic ambition and relatively stable arrangement of the anthology, the book series, or the college course?

Three axes seem relevant to this question. The first axis is visibility: before a foreign literature can become familiar to readers and become part of world literature, it needs to be made visible. (By contrast, invisibility actively produces ignorance, a point that world literature discussions do not emphasize enough.)<sup>36</sup> How a magazine produces visibility, and with it familiarity, varies. The coverage and the 'textual presence' of an author or a literature may be 'thick' or 'thin'—the second axis—though often it is a combination of both. 'Thick coverage' includes repeated coverage over several issues, translations (what I call 'textual presence') accompanied or introduced by critical discussions, and comparative gestures that help make an author or a

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34 See Preetha Mani, 'What Was So New about the New Story? Modernist Realism in the Hindi *Nayī Kahānī*', *Comparative Literature*, 71.3 (2019), 226–51.

35 See e.g. *Teaching World Literature*, ed. by David Damrosch (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2009); Mani, *Recoding World Literature*.

36 See Shu-Mei Shih, 'Global literature and the technologies of recognition', *PMLA*, 119.1 (2004), 16–30.

text familiar.<sup>37</sup> ‘Thin’ coverage includes random, occasional, or poorly identified translations, name-dropping in surveys that produce no name recognition, and snippets of de-contextualized information. If thick coverage produces closeness for the reader, thin coverage can be seen as a form of distant reading (in Franco Moretti’s terms), though it does produce some visibility, something which we should appreciate. The third axis to be considered is world literary *time* as well as space: coverage of ancient literature from a region may suggest temporal depth and layers within a tradition, but it can also imply that no modern or contemporary literature exists or that, if it does, it cannot match the ancient one.<sup>38</sup> Conversely, emphasis on the latest contemporary writing may produce an exciting sense of coevalness and shared enterprise, or else it may suggest that a literature has no depth of tradition behind the contemporary.

In the early twentieth century, Indian periodicals like the *Modern Review* had presented world literature as a discovery of the plurality of the world beyond India and the British empire, and a redressal of the asymmetric balance and exchange between East and West.<sup>39</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s, almost all Hindi and English magazines tried to ‘do’ world literature in some form with whatever resources they had. But rather than sharing in a ‘global simultaneity of literary aesthetics’ (Holt), both temporally and aesthetically they chose different strategies that played out different meanings (and axes) of world literature, often at the same time: world literature as the classics; the best of (a particular genre); the latest or contemporary; and the politically like-minded.

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37 I differentiate here between textual presence (translation, i.e. when the literary text is there) and textual closeness, which usually includes translation with some apparatus. I understand that some readers (like Ann Morgan, *Reading the World: Confessions of a Literary Explorer*, London: Random House, 2015) find contextualization intrusive, while for other readers like myself it is necessary in the case of unfamiliar texts and literary traditions. While Franco Moretti has advocated ‘distant reading’ as a critical practice, i.e. reading patterns and secondary rather than primary texts, I use it here for magazines which provide information *about* texts and writers without the texts/translation themselves: as the examples below show, this information can be ‘thin’ (e.g. *Modern Review*) or ‘thick’ (e.g. *Kalpanā*). See Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London: Verso, 2013).

38 This is the impression one gets from world literature surveys that included Indian literature only among ancient literatures; see my ‘Present Absence: Book Circulation, Indian Vernaculars and World Literature in the Nineteenth Century’, *Interventions*, 22.3 (2020), 310–28.

39 See my ‘World literature, Indian views, 1920s–1940s’, *Journal of World Literature*, 4.1 (2019), 56–81, and Zecchini in this volume.

If we take spatial visibility (and recursivity), textual closeness/distance, and world literary time as axes, some magazines chose what one may call 'random systematicity', in other words they tried to be systematic about covering world literature but then filled a country's slot with random pieces, like *Caravan's* 'Stories from around the World'.<sup>40</sup> Other magazines chose 'textual distance': the monthly *Yugchetnā* (Consciousness of the Age, 1955), which saw its mission to 'introduce Hindi writers and readers to world literature of a developed level', did so only indirectly through critical articles, book reviews, and no translation; its contributors' preference for classical traditions and for English literature betrays their academic roots.<sup>41</sup> *Quest*, the ICCF journal, also chose textual distance—fresh literary 'news from Paris', book reviews, and articles on American, Western European, and non-Soviet Russian writers—while carefully calibrating literary time: only translations of classical Chinese literature were reviewed. Contemporary foreign writers affiliated to the international CCF contributed with thought-pieces rather than poems or stories, while for example Africa featured only as a 'problem'.<sup>42</sup>

The Hindi literary and art magazine *Kalpanā* also chose textual distance, and in 1958 tried to telescope the distance between Hindi readers and world literature by translating from the American magazine *Books Abroad* lengthy surveys of recent foreign literatures—Spanish, Spanish-American, Brazilian, Israeli, German, Austrian, Irish, Greek, Chinese, Israeli, and so on—written by distinguished academics at American universities. These dense and comprehensive pieces undoubtedly made these literatures visible and produced a sense of temporal depth and substance. For example, Enrique Anderson Imbert's piece 'Spanish American literature of the past 25 years' listed scores of Latin American literary trends and authors from the nineteenth century onwards, singling out a few like Gabriela Mistral, Alfonso Reyes, Jorge

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40 The Greek Lafcadio Hearn for China (*Caravan*, September 1950); American Konrad Bercovici for Arabia (November 1950); Canadian Charles Roberts for Turkey (May 1951).

41 The first issue of *Yugchetnā* (January 1955) included an article on 'China's cultural tradition' and another on Henry James, while the editorial quoted Toynbee and Spengler. Later issues featured articles on ancient Greek theatre, Sappho, modern Chinese poetry, Dante, Disraeli, Benjamin Constant, E. M. Forster on the novel, Existentialism, Herbert Read, T. S. Eliot, André Gide, etc.

42 E.g. *Quest*, 17 (April–June 1958); 38 (July–September 1963), 43 (October–December 1964).

Luis Borges, or Pablo Neruda, but mostly handing out brief one- or two-word assessments of the others (such as 'honest', or 'solipsistic').<sup>43</sup> What happens, we may ask, when you read long lists of literary movements and of writers' names (often garbled in transliteration) without any textual contact, in other words without reading any of their works? Only a familiar reader would pick out Horacio Quiroga, Rómulo Gallegos, or Miguel Angel Asturias.

By contrast, the story magazine *Kahānī* 'did' world literature through direct and regular 'textual presence', usually translating one foreign story per issue, occasionally more, as we saw in the special issue of January 1955 with which I started this chapter. Textual presence was also the strategy for contemporary literature from other Indian languages, which made up half of every issue of *Kahānī*. I explore the magazine's coverage of foreign literature in greater detail below. Here we may note that whereas Indian stories came with brief introductions to their authors that evoked a strong sense of literary community, foreign stories came mostly without any paratext, sometimes because the editors assumed these foreign writers to be so well known that they needed no introduction, at other times suggesting a 'thinner' coverage and a commitment that was only symbolic.<sup>44</sup>

The same strategy of textual presence held for Hindi story magazines of the 1960s like *Naī Kahānīyān* and *Sārikā*. They also began by featuring only one foreign story per issue, but Kamleshwar, who went from editing *Naī Kahānīyān* to *Sārikā* in 1965, was particularly keen on special issues and dramatically increased the presence, frequency, and geographical scope of foreign literature.<sup>45</sup> The annual bumper special issues (*visheshāṅk*) of foreign stories that Kamleshwar introduced comprised mostly contemporary African, Latin American, and Western,

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43 Enrique Anderson Imbert, 'Spanish-American Literature in the Last Twenty-Five Years', *Books Abroad*, 27.4 (1953), 341–58, translated in *Kalpanā*, April 1958, pp. 62–88.

44 Or reference to where they were taken from! *All* translations were from English.

45 As editor of *Naī Kahānīyān*, Kamleshwar also promoted new voices in Hindi with three special issues on 'New writers', see Ajit Pushkal, 'Kamleshwar: Chintan, patrakāritā aur sampādan ke sandarbh men' (Kamleshwar: in the context of editing, journalism and thought), in *Kamleshwar*, ed. by Madhukar Singh (Delhi: Shabdakar, 1977), p. 337.

South-Eastern, and East Asian texts (Tables 1 and 2)—producing a spectacular literary visibility for Third World internationalism, as we have seen.

Table 1 Contents of special issue on the Foreign Story, *Nāī Kahāniyān*, May 1964.

France: Marcel Pagnol, 'Jirah' (Cross-examination)  
 Bulgaria: Emilian Stenev, 'Pahlī nazar kā prem' (Love at first sight)  
 Japan: Hideyo Sachiko (?), 'Agar razāiyān bol saktīn' (If quilts could talk)  
 Tibet: Avinash Sarmandal, 'Prit kā gīt' (Love song)  
 Turkey: Cevdet Kudret, 'Mritak bhoj' (Funeral Feast)  
 Hong Kong: C.W. Lee, 'Mistar Wang kā ākhirī ḍālar' (Mr Wang's last Dollar)  
 Egypt: Yahya Haqqi, 'Mādare badnasīb kī mazhār' (The Shrine of the Mother of the Out of Lucks)  
 Thailand: Vaital, 'Varshā kī gavāhī' (Rain as Witness)  
 Canada: Hugh Hood, 'Rāt' (Night)  
 Uruguay: Horatio Quiroga, 'Tīn patr' (Three letters)  
 Korea: Pak Chiwōn, 'Hoseng'  
 Poland: Julian Kawulok (?), 'Main akelā' (Me, alone)  
 Ghana: Efwa Sunderland, 'Van-parī' (Forest Fairy)  
 Argentina: Jorge Luis Borges, 'Paristhitiyon kā jhūṭh' (Misleading Circumstances (Emma Zunz))  
 Ireland: Paul Smith, 'Ane'  
 Mexico: B. Traven, 'Gadhe kā vyāpārī' (Burro Trading)

Table 2 Contents of special international issue, *Sārikā*, January 1969.

|                                |                               |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Brazil: Joaō Guimaraes Rosa    | Thailand: Dhep Mahapaurya     |
| Germany: Heinrich Böll         | Uruguay: Mario Benedetti      |
| Russia: Vladimir Sangi (Nivkh) | Mauritius: Abhimanyu Unnath   |
| Russia: Viktor Kutetski (?)    | Egypt: Mahmud Taimur          |
| Ghana: Efwa Sunderland         | America: Henry Slazer         |
| Iran: Mohammad Hejazi          | Singapore: S. Rajaratna       |
| Pakistan: A. Hamid             | Sierra Leone: Abioseh Nicol   |
| Japan: Hayama Yoshiki          | N. Vietnam: Nguyen Vien Thong |
| Indonesia: Mukhtar Lubis       | Iraq: Fouad al-Tikerly        |
| Yugoslavia: Milovan Djilas     | Syria: Abdul-Salam Ojeili     |
| Hungary: Judith Fenekal        | France: A. Robbe-Grillet      |

In addition, soon after he became *Sārikā's* editor, Kamleshwar contributed a series of articles on the contemporary story in countries like Egypt, Iran, and Indonesia. Such articles made those literatures and their authors not just visible but also familiar to Hindi readers, as Kamleshwar consciously drew parallels with developments in Hindi, culminating with the Hindi *Nai Kahani*. 'Arabic New Story' Egyptian writers of the post-war generation like Yusuf Idris, Sofi Abdullah, Said Abdu, and Youssef El Sebai were involved in a 'search for new values' (*naye mūlyon kī khoj*), Kamleshwar wrote: 'Even there the emphasis lay on the authenticity of inner experience in the story' (*kahānī kī anubhūtiparak prāmāṅiktā par hī vahān bhī zor diyā gayā*); and 'just like the Hindi *Nai Kahani*, the story there first of all began its search in the field of language'.<sup>46</sup> Indonesia had gone through a similar quest for an indigenous national language; the story there had become established 'on an intellectual basis as a serious and responsible literary genre' with Idrus (spelt Indrus).<sup>47</sup> Mahmud Taimur and Pramoedya Ananta Toer became even more textually present in *Sārikā* and familiar to its readers once their stories were translated.

Yet this vision of world literature that made so visible the literatures of the Third World and encouraged parallels with contemporary Hindi writing was balanced by other ideals. *Sārikā's* regular column in 1965 on 'What is the story? In the view of the masters' featured curated extracts by Flaubert, Camus, Sartre, Chekhov, Dostoevsky, D. H. Lawrence, but also Aldous Huxley, Colin Wilson, Norman Mailer, and Jack Kerouac—a much more European and Atlantic canon. Another regular column in 1966 bred familiarity with contemporary writers (and other celebrities) through autobiographical selections: the column included Vincent Van Gogh, Simone de Beauvoir, Arthur Adamov, Hemingway, Henry Miller, Evtušenko... and Sophia Loren!

Before I turn to the specific question of whether this coverage maps onto Cold War affiliations, allow me one more detour on the question of the story as a genre and unit of world literature.

46 Kamleshwar, 'Misr kī samkālīn kahānī: bhūmadhyasāgarīy saṃskṛitī kī khoj' (The Contemporary Egyptian Story: in search of Mediterranean culture), *Sārikā*, January 1966, p. 35.

47 Kamleshwar, 'Manushya ke astitva aur jīvan-mūlyon kī khoj men indoneshiyā kī kahānī' (In search for human existence and life values: the Indonesian story), *Sārikā*, March 1966, p. 83.

## The Story (in the) Magazine

With the new generation of New Story (Nai Kahani) writers after Premchand and after Independence in 1947—Kamleshwar prominently among them—the story became the most theorized literary genre in Hindi, laden with multiple expectations.<sup>48</sup> A ‘democratic’ genre, the story was supposed to guide and accompany readers in their daily lives, and at the same time teach the craft of writing to budding writers. Story magazines were therefore both reader- and writer-centric, and editors addressed both. *Kahānī* for example encouraged readers and young writers to come together to form *Kahānī Clubs* where they would exchange their views on the stories published. The goal for stories published in ephemeral magazines was to be original and ‘unforgettable’, to challenge readers and budding writers without descending into obscurity or opacity. Progressive writer Amrit Rai’s letter to the editor of *Kahānī* (his younger brother Shripat) captures the sense of what the task of the magazine and of the short story was supposed to be:

I hope that *Kahānī* will free Hindi readers from the clutches of *Māyā* and *Manohar Kahānīyān* [low-brow story magazines]. Helping to pass the time on a railway journey is not the only goal of a story. A story helps understand the map of life; it prepares one to respond to every turn in life; it enters one’s heart and slowly begins to shape one’s mind in a new mould, which is the mould of a better, more compassionate, human, and sensitive person. A story takes up all aspects of life, all sides. It contains all kinds of characters, all kinds of circumstances in life, sweet and bitter truths. A reader educated through good stories finds herself stronger and better equipped to face life. It’s not by chance that Kalinin gave such importance to stories and novels in the education of the ideal communist.<sup>49</sup>

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48 Gordon Roadarmel’s pioneering study, ‘The theme of alienation in the modern Hindi short story’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California at Berkeley, 1969) identified ‘alienation’ as their key theme and drew up a rather rigid dichotomy between tradition and modernity. More recently, Preetha Mani has offered a more nuanced interpretation that views New Short Stories as engaged in nation-building through their emphasis on individuals and the ‘truth of inner experience’ (*anubhūti kā satya*), love, family and work relationships, and the commitment to register the ‘new circumstances’ (*naī paristhitiyān*) of post-1947 urban India; Mani, ‘What Was So New’.

49 Amrit Rai, letter, *Kahānī*, May 1954, pp. 52–53.

In the context of the fierce literary and ideological debates between Progressives and Experimentalists, stories were judged on the basis of craft, theme, characterization, but also of the values they propounded. One of the long-running themes for debate among readers (and writers) on the *Kahānī Club* page of *Kahānī* was, 'Is entertainment the aim of the story?', with respondents overwhelmingly writing that entertainment was important but could not be the *only* aim.<sup>50</sup>

But *Kahānī* combined 'soft progressivism' with an emphasis on aesthetics. If progressivism meant an emphasis on stories that shone a critical light on the problems of the present, like poverty or corruption,<sup>51</sup> 'soft progressivism' implied a democratic understanding of literature: the magazine aimed to provide good stories for readers with little money and leisure and tired at the end of the working day ('good stories at a good price', '1500 pages at Rs 15 pa').<sup>52</sup> *Kahānī Club* aimed to bring writers and readers closer to each other, but also to 'train' readers and young writers into developing critical standards of appreciation.<sup>53</sup>

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50 See *Kahānī*, September 1956, pp. 70–73.

51 For example, the romantic stories in *Kahānī* are interrupted by themes of poverty, homelessness, and unemployment: both Jilani Bano's 'A Thousand and one romance' (March 1954) and K. A. Abbas's 'Alif Lailā 1956' (October 1956) play with the *Thousand and One Nights* in their title: urged to write a romantic story, Jilani Bano's narrator starts imagining one but is interrupted by the racket made by refugees dwelling in the street under her window; under a downpour of rain, 'their unfinished huts are carried/flushed away, their things swamped in water, and children are wailing loudly in the cold. As usual women are cursing God and men are shouting, trying to quiet everyone down' (Bano, 'Ek hazār ek romans', *Kahānī*, March 1954, p. 12). Abbas' story is a humorous diary of a homeless man who slowly gets used to sleeping on the pavement; he eventually falls in love with another homeless young woman, but their tentative dream of starting a family and getting a home through a government housing scheme is shattered when she is killed by a callous car driver; K. A. Abbas's 'Alif Lailā 1956', *Kahānī*, October 1956, pp. 24–36.

52 Shital Pravinchandra notes the prominence of the story in teaching and anthologies, particularly when it comes to represent the world beyond Europe and North America, and its relative absence from theoretical models of world literature; Pravinchandra, 'Short story and peripheral production' in *The Cambridge Companion to World Literature*, ed. by B. Eherington and J. Zimble (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 197–210.

53 Other running themes were: 'an unforgettable story' and 'my favorite story and writer'. Readers often expressed their reactions in affective terms ('I was stunned', 'I was completely absorbed', 'I was moved', 'I laughed out loud') and retold their favorite story in their own words, something I am still puzzling about.

Translation was key to this vision, and Amrit Rai's suggestions for *Kahānī* capture what it was doing already:

1. Publish translations of the world masters (*ustad*) of the story: Tolstoy, Chekhov, Turgenev, Gorky, Maupassant, Balzac, O. Henry, Jack London, etc.<sup>54</sup> Their literature has been hardly translated into Hindi, and often very badly.
2. Translate the best stories from Indian languages: not just Urdu and Bengali, but also Marathi, Telugu, Tamil. Publish an Urdu and Bengali story in every issue. Not at random, but choosing the best ones.
3. Don't fall for the temptation of older and established writers in Hindi—look for new talent.
4. Publish humorous stories, one per issue. There is a strong tradition in Bengali, Urdu, English, yet hardly in Hindi.<sup>55</sup>

*Nāi Kahānīyān* and *Sārikā* also encouraged discussions of the story as a genre, through readers' letters in response to particular stories or special issues, and through columns presenting authors' views, like 'What is a story? In the eyes of a master'; and 'X: in their own eyes'.<sup>56</sup> Kamleshwar's short editorials emphasized the role of the story as running parallel (*samānāntar*) with readers' lives—not a reflection but an attempt to express the language of their dreams, aspirations, concerns, and desires. This made the form of the story a universal language:

If, between this whole progress [*pragati*] and stagnation [*agati*] and in the course of the immense journey of events and history, we want to pause for a moment and recognize what a human being [*manushya*] is, meet him/them, we can only meet their 'thoughts', and it is only very few who are able to express their thoughts... in other words whose thoughts we can encounter.

Apart from giving expression to their thoughts, most human beings think in the language of dreams, aspirations, concerns and desires. The script of that language may be English, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, Japanese and so on, *but the name of that language is story.*

54 In his opinion, the three best story writers were French (Maupassant), Russian (Chekhov) and American (O. Henry); Rai, Letter, p. 53.

55 Ibid., pp. 53–54.

56 E.g. *Sārikā*, February 1965, pp. 57–58, 83, on Camus's views about the story.

This *Sārikā* special issue on foreign literature is an attempt to offer a glimpse of the story searching for the experiences and desires of human beings going through this frightening period of history.<sup>57</sup>

Kamleshwar's call to writers to 'live the present to the full' (*vartamān ko pūrī tarah se jīnā*), and for the story to parallel life by 'engaging with context' (*parivesh se sambaddhatā*) and with life (*jīvan se sambaddhatā*) and to 'join the ordinary individual with full honesty' (*sādhāraṇ vyakti ke sāth gahrī imāndārī se jurnā*), bypassed political affiliation without forsaking the language of engagement. But whereas the Progressives had urged writers to write about urban and rural working classes, the *Nai Kahani*'s call to 'authenticity of inner experience' meant that urban, middle class *Nai Kahani* writers felt they could write only about urban middle- and lower-middle class characters like themselves.

Calling the story (*kahānī*) a 'universal language' made unfamiliar and very disparate texts—from Ngūgĩ's 'Deshbhakt' (1969, 'Martyr'), Marquez' 'Dopahar kī nīnd' (1973, 'Siesta del martes', 1962), Borges' 'Paristhitiyon kā sūtr' (1964, 'Emma Zunz', 1949) to Alain Robbe-Grillet's 'Samudra ke taṭ' (1969, 'La Plage', 1962)—not just *visible* but *readable* to Hindi readers. Intriguingly, this emphasis on the story as a universal form de-emphasized the interlinguistic process of translation, as well as the actual channels Hindi editors and translators (whose names barely appear) drew upon. English was—it must have been—the medium, and English-language publications the source of these translations, but they are not mentioned once. I return at the end to this silence about the process of translation and the invisibility of translators, contacts, and networks, which usually feature so prominently in discussions of literary internationalisms for magazines like *Lotus*, or the magazines connected with the Congress for Cultural Freedom, or the circulation of texts as part of world literature. Why are Hindi magazine editors so resolutely silent about them?

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57 Kamleshwar, Introduction to the International special issue (*Deshāntar aik*), *Sārikā*, January 1969, p. 7, emphasis added.

## The Cold War, Third World, and Magazine Activism

While in the 1950s India's Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru pursued a high-profile foreign policy of non-alignment—as one of the protagonists of Bandung and architects of its *Panchsheel* manifesto—the Indian print market was flooded with Soviet and Chinese books and magazines that translated Russian and Chinese literature, as already mentioned. On the other side of the Cold War divide, India was viewed as a lynchpin of the CCF counter-propaganda strategy to win over the 'Asian mind', i.e. Asian intellectuals, and to combat the spread of Communism over Asia.<sup>58</sup> Not only did the CCF sponsor the magazine *Quest*, it also sent books and magazines to the US cultural centres in India through USIS and the Books Abroad programmes.<sup>59</sup> Hindi editors never mention where they sourced their translations, but some detective work shows that it was magazines like *Soviet Literature* (for *Kahānī*) or the New-York based *Short Story International* (for *Nāī Kahānīyān* and *Sārikā*).<sup>60</sup>

In the 1950s, the choice of foreign literature translated, reviewed, and advertised could be taken as an index of the political affiliation of an Indian magazine. And yet, if we take into account visibility and recursivity, 'thick' and 'thin' coverage and temporality, the picture that emerges is more complex. Geopolitical orientation 'lifted' even older writers and texts into the horizon of the present, and appeals to craft trumped ideological and geopolitical affiliations. And by the mid-1960s and early 1970s, in place of the earlier polarization between the Western and Eastern blocs, literary and mainstream magazines like *Nāī Kahānīyān* and *Sārikā* shifted towards the Third World and lent unprecedented visibility to Latin American, African, and Asian literatures.

Though *Kahānī* in the 1950s did not only publish progressive Hindi or Indian writers, its choice of foreign stories definitely betrays a Leftist orientation. Geographically, *Kahānī* allotted most space to contemporary Chinese writers and writers from the Eastern bloc (see Table 3).

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58 See Zecchini, 'What Filters Through' and in this volume.

59 See Sarah Brouillette, 'US-Soviet Antagonism and the 'Indirect Propaganda' of Book Schemes in India in the 1950s', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 84.4 (2015), 170–188.

60 This is where Kamleshwar seems to have sourced stories for his *Nāī Kahānīyān* special issue of 1964.

Table 3 Foreign writers published in *Kahānī* between 1954 and 1958.

China (9): Lu Xun (2), Li Ke Yi, Chu Chan Yeh, Ku Yu [Gu Yu], Su Pa Sa, Chen Miyayo, folktales  
 Russia/USSR (8): A. Chekhov (4), M. Gorky, L. Sobolev, K. Paustovsky, D. Havarov  
 Eastern Europe (6): A. Sahiya (?) (Romania); Z. Móricz, A. Hules (Hungary); J. Fučík (Czech); I. Čankar, I. Andrič (Yugoslavia)  
 Western Europe: A. France, E. Zola, Maupassant, A. Chamson (France); A. Schnitzler; Th. Storm, H. Laxness; D.H. Lawrence, W. Somerset Maugham, A. Huxley  
 USA: O. Henry (3), W. Saroyan, Jack London, W. Maxwell  
 Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya); Khalil Gibran; Morris Woods, B.D.L. Adam, Gerald Karsh

*Temporally*, however, many of the latter belonged to pre-Communist times, like Chekhov or Ivan Čankar. Or Zsigmond Móricz (1879–1942), a Hungarian writer—so part of the Eastern Bloc—but from the pre-Communist generation, a contemporary of Premchand. His story ‘Seven Pennies’ combines a depiction of poverty with humour and centres on an ‘unforgettable’ character, which may be why it was selected. The narrator recalls his remarkable mother, so poor that she did not even own a table, yet always cheerful. One day she needs seven pennies to buy soap and wash her husband’s clothes. While turning the barren house upside down to find them, she manages to make the search riotously funny by giving each penny a personality—one likes hiding, the other has run away—though the reader can perceive the strain. At the end, it is a man who comes begging who gives her the last penny she needs: the poor helping the poor.<sup>61</sup>

Or take Jomo Kenyatta’s parable ‘The Gentlemen of the Jungle’ (translated as ‘The Elephant and the Man’), possibly the first African literary text published in Hindi.<sup>62</sup> Kenyatta wrote it in 1938, but to Hindi readers he is introduced in clear terms of anticolonial solidarity:

61 Zsigmond Móricz, ‘Seven Pennies’ (Sāt peniyān), trans. by Bhairavprasad Gupta, *Kahānī*, March 1954, pp. 38–41.

62 Jomo Kenyatta, ‘Elephant and Man’ (Hāthī aur ādmī), trans. by Jagatbahadur Joshi, *Kahānī*, May 1955, pp. 56–57.

Who in the world is unfamiliar with Jomo Kenyatta, the writer of the story ‘The Elephant and the Man’, written in the guise of a folktale. Nobody will be unaware of the mass movement that this popular revolutionary leader of Kenya has been leading to free his country from British foreign rule. He has been the victim of British violence several times. Once a famous British judge was beaten up for defending him in a trial. The British press is giving Kenyatta a bad name by calling him a Mau Mau. Surprisingly, Kenyatta, who is an African scholar who knows six languages, is unfamiliar with the word Mau Mau.<sup>63</sup>

Even among Soviet and Chinese stories, the more stridently propagandist—like the progressive wedding in Ku-Yu’s ‘Nayā Yug’ (New Age), are comparatively few in comparison with those dealing with politics in a more oblique way.<sup>64</sup> Lu Xun’s ‘Havā kā rūkh’ (Where the wind blows), for example, focuses on a local trader, the bearer of news from the wider world to his village, who is unsure whether or not to welcome the re-instatement of China’s last emperor.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, consistent with its pedagogical impulse, *Kahānī* also translated older stories by ‘masters of the craft’ like Maupassant, Chekhov, O. Henry, William Saroyan, or Jack London—whose ‘To Build a Fire’ is an ambitious and chilling account of a man freezing to death, told in the first person.<sup>66</sup> What are notably absent are European modernist stories by Kafka, Joyce, Woolf, and so on.

The different aims of *Kahānī*—to look for and showcase new talent in Hindi, to keep abreast of literary developments in other Indian languages, to make visible authors and texts from China, Russia, and Eastern Europe, but also to publish model stories by masters of the craft — translated into different temporalities. Hindi and other Indian stories were overwhelmingly contemporary and experimented with different narrative strategies. By contrast, foreign stories were often older, chosen for their political message or their ‘mastery’. In terms of the ‘literary time’, therefore, Indian stories appear *more* modern than

63 ‘Kahānī kī bāt’, *Kahānī*, May 1955, p. 4. This long introduction is exceptional for a foreign story in the magazine.

64 Ku-Yu’s ‘Nayā Yug’, *Kahānī*, October 1955, pp. 65–69; in Pingyin the author’s name is Gu Yu, and the original title of story, first published in 1953, is ‘Xinshi Xin Ban’ (New Cases, New Methods); I am grateful to Jia Yan for the information.

65 Lu Xun’s ‘Havā kā rūkh’, *Kahānī* March 1954, pp. 27–32, trans. by Kamleshwar.

66 Jack London, ‘Āg’, *Kahānī*, July 1956, pp. 63–71, trans. by Vishvamohan Sinha; it was originally published in 1908.

foreign ones, and only with Chinese stories there seems to be a gesture toward simultaneity.

As for *Sārikā*, before Kamleshwar took over as editor sometime in 1967, the previous editor Chandragupta Vidyalankar had pursued a similar line to that of *Kahānī* in the 1950s: half of the stories published were by contemporary Hindi writers, half by contemporary writers in other Indian languages, and one was a foreign story—in his case a mixture of old masters and contemporary European and American authors, including the Italian Alberto Moravia and Mario Tobino, Yiddish-American Sholem Aleichem and Abraham Reisen, Czech Jaroslav Hašek and Ernst Lustig, as well as Carson McCullers (her philosophical 1942 story ‘A Tree. A Rock. A Cloud’).<sup>67</sup> While Kamleshwar continued to showcase the European ‘masters’ of the story, he dramatically broadened the field of vision. As I have already suggested, the decision to bunch together foreign texts into bumper special issues rather than dispensing them individually each month, and to include so many more authors and texts from Latin America, Africa, West as well as South-East and East Asia, produced a spectacularly more diverse world literature.

As with *Kahānī*, geographical (and geopolitical) orientation presented foreign stories from earlier periods as part of the commitment to the present world.<sup>68</sup> Already in the ‘Foreign Story Special Issue’ of *Nāī Kahāniyān* (see Table 1), Kamleshwar wrote that he wanted to ‘offer a selection of contemporary stories from nearby and distant countries that could present [readers] with an emotive picture [*bhāvātmaś tasvīr*] of today’s new world’.<sup>69</sup> These were specially commissioned translations, he stressed, aimed at filling a knowledge gap, since these were stories from countries ‘we get little or no opportunity to find out about’. Although in fact about a third of the stories (by Quiroga, Borges, Traven) were several decades old, Kamleshwar stressed their contemporaneity:

67 Carson McCullers, ‘Ek vriksh, ek chaṭṭān, bādāl kā ṭukṛā’, trans. by Vimla Ramkumar, *Sārikā*, February 1965, pp. 84–87.

68 By contrast, Kamleshwar’s historical survey of the story as genre takes a much longer view, from Gilgamesh and early myths and with India as the first site of the story (*vishva kā pahlā kathāpīṭh*), to its modern crystallization in three ‘story sites’ (*kathāpīṭh*) in Russia, North America, and France in the nineteenth century; Kamleshwar, ‘Vishva-kathā-yātrā: jal-pralay se aṇu-pralay tak’ (The world journey of the story: from the deluge to the atom bomb), *Sārikā*, January 1970, pp. 44–47. The stories included in this special issue are more canonical and include also European modernists like Kafka and Joyce.

69 Kamleshwar, ‘Kuch bāten’ (A few words), *Nāī Kahāniyān*, May 1964, n.p.

Most of the stories in this issue are from this decade—they embrace the contemporary sensibility, the sensibility of today's new world which is showing itself most forcefully through the medium of the short story. In every country something is dying quickly and something is emerging. To recognize the right values in this fast transition and to make them part of one's art is not easy.<sup>70</sup>

That this 'new world' was the decolonizing world is clear from Kamleshwar's editorials.<sup>71</sup> But instead of choosing between blocs, the magazine included stories from both blocs, and more. The January 1969 issue, for example—whose cover shows a marching multitude (Fig. 3.2, Table 2)—included stories by the American Henry Slaser, the Russian Viktor Kutezky and North Vietnam's Nguyen Vien Thong, but also by the German Henrich Böll, France's Alain Robbe-Grillet, the Indonesian Mochtar Lubis, the Iranian Mohammad Hijazi, and so on.

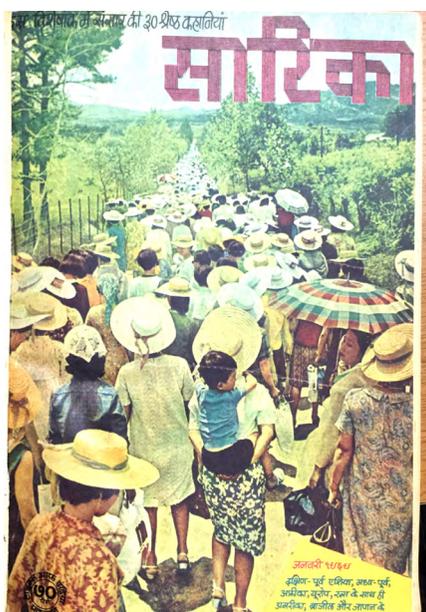


Fig. 3.2 Cover of *Sārikā*, January 1969 special issue on the world story. Courtesy of the Times of India Archives. All rights reserved.

70 Ibid.

71 Pushkal ('Kamleshwar', p. 335) recalls that earlier, as editor of the weekly *Īgit*, Kamleshwar had written articles on the political and economic situation/political economy of African, Latin American, and South East Asian countries.

In his editorial, as already mentioned, Kamleshwar borrows the title of João Guimarães Rosa's story 'The Third Bank of the River' to suggest a *literary* way out of the ideological polarization and Cold War blocs. While he effectively makes a case for the 'Global South', he also uses Rosa's story to point to the common uncertainty of the human predicament in the contemporary world (I stick to the masculine subject of the original):

In this issue we find the voice [*svar*] of almost three quarters of the population of the world. There is a clear difference between the voice of developed and of undeveloped countries — the 'experience' of the countries of the *whole southern half of the globe* differs from that of the developed countries. In the former, in the struggle for economic freedom man [*ādmī*] has become prey to disintegration [*vighaṭan*], despondency [*badhavāsī*], lack of values [*mūlyahīntā*], and cold cruelty. He is smoldering in the fire of history—that others have bestowed on him. And he is aspiring to the chance to start everything anew. He doesn't like this world. Every country's face is distorted... every body is growing ulcers.

Meanwhile, whatever the political voice of the great powers—there man is dejected and alone after suffering from the terrors of the War.

These are superficial and bi-dimensional matters, there is a third dimension, extremely delicate and abstract. And very concrete and deep, like the 'third bank of the river' in Rosa's story in this issue. This is the common fundamental voice of all the stories. The voice of the fate of living midstream, *tired of both shores*.<sup>72</sup>

As already suggested, while the articulation of colonial difference and commonality among colonized countries aligns Kamleshwar and *Sārikā* with Third-Worldism, the tenor of the stories and his choice of authors differ considerably from the emphasis on political struggle and the exploitation of labour, and the voices of revolutionaries and committed Leftists in the pages of *Lotus*. The 1964 special issue of *Nai Kahāniyān* edited by Kamleshwar, for example, included a titillating story by Horacio Quiroga ('Three Letters and Footnote', 1925), Jorge Louis Borges's philosophical revenge story 'Emma Zunz' (1948), and B. Traven's ironic contemplation of subaltern cleverness 'Burro Trading' (originally written in German in 1929). The January 1969 special issue of *Sārikā*, as we have seen (Table 2), went even further in making Asia, Africa, and the Middle East visible and creating familiarity through

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72 Kamleshwar, 'Donon taṭon se ūbkar', p. 7, emphases added.

paratexts.<sup>73</sup> It included stories from political hotspots like Indonesia and North Vietnam, and several from the Arab world, Africa, and Latin America. Yet the stories themselves veered between Ngūgī's famous meditation on the limit of liberal paternalism in 'The Martyr' (translated as 'Deshbhakt', patriot) and Mahmud Taimur's sensational first-person narrative of an ordinary man disgusted by his anonymity who courts fame by claiming to be the murderer of a famous actress; João Guimarães Rosa's deeply philosophical 'Third Bank of the River'; Mario Benedetti's office satire—which could have been written in Hindi by Bhisham Sahni or Amarkant—and Alain Robbe-Grillet's exercise in description, perception, and surface meaning ('La Plage', 1962). The works showcased bely a single definition of Third World literature.

The effect of this spectacular visibility of world literature on readers was tremendous: 'unique', 'very useful and collectible', 'the best of all previous special issues'. Readers particularly liked 'The Third Bank of the River' ('a wonderful accomplishment of world literature'), Mochtar Lubis' story of a farmer tricked out of his fields, and Mahmud Taimur's piece.<sup>74</sup>

The January 1973 special issue of *Sārikā*—rechristened a 'complete magazine of stories and of the story-world' (*kahāniyon aur kathā-jagat kī sampūrṇ patrikā*)—was expressly dedicated to the 'Third World: ordinary people and writers as fellow travellers' (*tīsri duniyā: sāmānya jan aur sahyātrī lekhak*) and again combined a definition of Third World in terms of postcolonial underdevelopment with an emphasis on decolonization as an intellectual and creative, as well as political and economic, struggle (see editorial above).<sup>75</sup> The list of names and texts—thirteen stories (and four folktales) from Africa, eleven from Latin America, a handful of stories from the Middle East and South East Asia, and one from India,

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73 E.g. 'The eldest among the writers of this issue, Mahmud Taimur is the most famous writer from the Arabic region [*arabi pradesh*]. Hindi readers, especially *Sārikā*'s, are very familiar with his works. He was born in Cairo. He is considered the Arabic Premchand. 'Long live fame in death' is among his best stories. The story is apparently average but raised high by its inner irony, which is its ordinary tone of voice [*sarvajaniy*, lit. public, belonging to all]'; Kamleshwar, 'The Contemporary Egyptian Story', p. 63.

74 Readers' letters, *Sārikā*, March 1969, pp. 6–7.

75 See Kamleshwar's editorial quoted above; this world literature special issue was a direct continuation of two dedicated to writings about the inner and intellectual world of ordinary people in India, he wrote; Kamleshwar, Editorial, *Sārikā*, January 1973, p. 6.

by Mohan Rakesh—includes some of the most celebrated names of Latin American and postcolonial literature: Juan Rulfo, Miguel Angel Asturias, José Donoso and Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ, Alex Le Guma, Cyprian Ekwensi, and Pramoedya Ananta Toer (Table 4).<sup>76</sup>

Table 4 Contents of special issue on the Third World story, *Sārikā*, January 1973.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Alex LeGuma (South Africa), 'For Coffee'           | Yasher Kemal (Turkey), 'Green Onion'                           |
| James Agree (South Africa), 'Swan'                 | Armando Arias (Chile), 'Pilgrimage'                            |
| Mabel Segun (Nigeria), 'Feast'                     | Gabriel Garcia Marquez (Colombia), 'Siesta' [Siesta de Marte]  |
| S.J. Agyon (Israel), 'The Doctor's Divorce'        | Mario Benedetti (Uruguay), 'Miss Iriarte'                      |
| Can Themba (South Africa), 'The Dube Train'        | Horacio Quiroga (Uruguay), 'Son'                               |
| Rómulo Gallego (Venezuela), 'Valley Fish'          | Hwang Sun Chon [Hong Sung-won?] (Korea), 'Rain'                |
| Mohammad Halim Abdullah (Saudi Arabia), 'Echo'     | Layla Baalbaki (Syria), 'Come, let's go to the Moon'           |
| James Matthews (South Africa), 'Park'              | Casey Motsisi (South Africa), 'If a Bedbug...'                 |
| Cyprian Ekwensi (Nigeria), 'A Stranger from Lagos' | Abiyoseh Nicol (Sierra Leon), 'The Judge's Son'                |
| Calvert Casey (Cuba), 'Sentence'                   | Pramoedya Ananta Toer (Indonesia), 'Inem'                      |
| Ahmed Abdel Wali (Yemen), 'The Colour of Rain'     | Eldred Durosimi Jones (Sierra Leone), 'Effort' [A Man Can Try] |
| Harun Rashid (Pakistan), 'Column'                  | Juan Rulfo (Mexico), 'Hill'                                    |
| David Owoyele (Nigeria), 'The Will of Allah'       | Roy Henry (West Indies), 'Fig Tree'                            |
| James Ngugi (Kenya), 'Meeting in the Dark'         | Ellis Komey (Ghana), 'I Can Face You'                          |
| Jose Donoso (Chile), 'Anna Maria'                  | Ciro Alegria (Peru), 'Iron Cross'                              |

76 The African stories seem all drawn from the collection *Modern African Stories* edited by Ghanaian writer and poet Ellis Ayitey Komey and South African writer, poet, and critic Es'kia Mphahlele and published in London by Faber and Faber in 1964.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Miguel Angel Asturias<br>(Guatemala), 'Employment'                                     | Mohan Rakesh (India), 'Slump'                     |
| Nguyen Vien Thong (North<br>Vietnam), 'Song'   | Chu Yusup (Malaysia), 'My New<br>Uncle'           |
| Juan Bosch (Dominican Republic),<br>'Don Damian' [The Beautiful Soul<br>of Don Damian] | Adelaide Casely-Hayford, 'Mista<br>Courifer'      |
| Chinua Achebe (Nigeria), 'Death of<br>a Boy'   | Kim Lan (North Vietnam), 'The<br>First to Arrive' |
| Abd Al-Malik Nuri (Iraq), 'Fatuma'   | Tayeb Salih (Sudan), 'Handful of<br>Dates'        |

Yet not all the stories are about exploitation or colonization or even postcolonial alienation: Mario Benedetti's 'Miss Iriarte' imagines a secretary falling in love with the voice and imagined identity of a woman rather than the person herself; Donoso's 'Anna Maria' is about the tender friendship between a poor gardener and a little girl. Once again, geographical and geopolitical orientations transmute temporality and bring the stories within the common historical and political perspective of the present.

## Conclusions

Magazines play a crucial role in literary world-making, this chapter has argued. And often it is the story, a supremely portable genre that can be easily called upon to 'represent' a country or a trend, is its currency and unit of exchange. In the context of the Cold War, competing internationalisms—competing 'significant geographies' that overlaid ideological fault lines within the Hindi literary field—brought an abundance of stories in translation, and an unprecedented investment on the part of Hindi magazine editors in translating them for their Hindi readers.

How do magazines—ephemeral print objects—produce world literature? Isn't the considerable investment needed for sourcing and translating texts incommensurate to the time it takes to read and discard a magazine? (And a reason why such intensive bouts of translational activism usually do not last beyond five years.) This chapter has

suggested visibility, recursivity, and temporality as categories of analysis, and assessed different kinds of ‘thick’ or ‘thin’ coverage. We saw that the ‘spectacular internationalism’ and textual presence of special issues made world literature (or the literature of the ‘new world’, as Kamleshwar put it) much more visible than having a regular monthly slot. For that, Hindi magazine editors cheerfully sourced material from an abundant print archive provided by competing propaganda programmes. Editors did not dwell on their sources or on translation, but their spectacular internationalism was predicated on the availability of English-language translations produced by China and the Soviet Union as well as American and British magazines, publishers, and state programmes. Nor were the hurdles of translation ever mentioned—and usually nor were the translators, though in some cases they included established Hindi writers like Dharmavir Bharati, Nirmal Varma, or Kamleshwar himself. Rather, the story *was* a common idiom, and the different languages merely its scripts.

Literary ‘significant geographies’ mapped onto political ones. Editors made some geographies more visible, and some writers and regions recur more often than others. When the scope was extended to include Latin American, African, Middle Eastern, and South East Asian stories, they needed to foster familiarity through helpful paratexts and framing discourses. By contrast, when it came to talk of the ‘masters’ of the story craft—Chekhov or Maupassant, Gorky or Saroyan—familiarity could be assumed and the canon was pretty stable across the ideological checkerboard.

At one level temporality folded within geopolitics—*Quest* reviewed books on classical Chinese literature and ignored the post-1950 literature of Communist China, making it invisible. But there were grey areas and exceptions in both camps: Lu Xun was universally valued in Hindi magazines of the 1950s, while *Kahānī* largely published non-political or pre-Communist stories from the Eastern bloc. In the 1970s, in place of the East-West frame of the two blocs, Third-Worldism became a way to broaden and realign the literary gaze, introducing contemporary African, Latin American, and South-East Asian literatures into Hindi to an unprecedented degree. That such a wealth of translated stories became mainstream in a commercial magazine belonging to the Times of India group is even more remarkable. In some cases, as we have

seen, the temporal choice seems very deliberate. In others—perhaps unlike magazines such as *Soviet Literature* or *Chinese Literature*—a *spatial* political affiliation expanded across historical periods (Móricz' story in *Kahānī*, the earlier Latin American stories in *Sārikā*). The result could be a mismatch between political orientation and aesthetic choices: for example when Progressive writer K. A. Abbas was asked what Soviet literature he read and he replied, none, because he preferred leftist *American* writers. When pressed, Abbas speculated that Soviet fiction was less interesting because Soviet society had eliminated all its contradictions!<sup>77</sup> In this respect, to argue that magazines in the Cold War era produced a 'global simultaneity of literary time' overlooks the phenomenon of the geopolitical transmutation of literary time.

The wide-ranging and stylistically eclectic world literary activism of the special issues of the Hindi magazines *Kahānī*, *Nai Kahānīyān* and *Sārikā* is very impressive—I don't see a parallel in European magazines, or even those oriented towards the world like *Sur* or *The Paris Review*.<sup>78</sup> Arguably, the propaganda and counter-propaganda efforts of the Cold War produced an expanded literary internationalism and showed interest in, translated, and made available vast repertoires of literary texts. But it was the literary activism of Hindi editors like Kamleshwar that increasingly made them pick out stories from Third World literatures from that archive and translate them into Hindi. This literary Third-Worldism, if we call it that, was different and more aesthetically eclectic than the idea of progressive literature in Hindi. It spoke rather to a reorientation away from the Western and Eastern blocs and a curiosity to discover what literatures lay behind the term Third World. From our current perspective in the age of global Anglophone, it is ironic that the decline of 'magazine activism' in search of stories to translate may well be one of the unintended consequences of the end of the Cold War.

Is the experience of world literature in an ephemeral medium like the magazine different from that of the book series, the anthology, the course, or canonization through prizes? Did the magazine issues that brought

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77 K. A. Abbas, 'Abbās: vyaktitva aur kalā' (Abbas: personality and art), in *Mujhe kuchh kalnā hai*, ed. by Zoya Zaidi (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2017), p. 25.

78 For *Sur*, see Louisa Rose Bradford, 'The agency of the poets and the impact of their translations: *Sur*, *Poesía Buenos Aires*, and *Diario de Poesía*' in *Agents of Translation*, ed. by John Milton and Paul Bandia (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2009), pp. 229–56.

Ngūgī, Achebe, Le Guma, Guimarães Rosa, Rulfo, Garcia Marquez, Ananta Toer, and many others to Hindi readers in the 1960s and 1970s leave a lasting impression? Particularly since, unlike original stories in Hindi, translated stories only very rarely got a second, more extended life in book form? Terms like ‘collectible’ issue or ‘unforgettable’ story suggest that stories in magazines could leave a mark. When I read in Hindi author Gyanranjan’s memoir of studying in Allahabad in the 1950s that he read Osamu Dazai, I imagined he had done so in English. But coming across two stories by Dazai in *Nai Kahāniyān* and *Sārikā*, I now wonder.

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# 4. Publishing the Resistance

## Third-Worldist Writing in Cold War Italy

*Neelam Srivastava*

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### Introduction

Italy emerged out of World War II in a particular position vis-à-vis the Cold War alignments of NATO and the Soviet bloc. It had experienced a civil war after the fall of Mussolini's government on 8 September 1943, due to the development of a sizeable anti-fascist resistance that spread across the national territory and fought against the remaining Italian fascist forces and the German occupying army. In the post-war period, Italy became a member of NATO, but it also possessed one of the biggest and most influential communist parties in Europe, the Italian Communist Party (PCI), which rapidly became a mass party after the war, and was closely aligned with Soviet political directives. The PCI assumed an important role in directing the development of Italian public culture post-1945, and it also indirectly wielded its political influence over the work of two important Italian publishers, Giulio Einaudi Editore and Giangiacomo Feltrinelli Editore. Concurrently, however, many Italians, especially the younger generation born around the end of the war and coming of age in the late 1960s—the so-called '1968 generation'—were becoming increasingly sympathetic to Third World struggles and wars of national liberation. Algeria and Vietnam were intensely evocative buzzwords in the 1960s, symbolizing internationalist sentiment and a consciousness that decolonization mirrored their own battles against reactionary forces at home. Non-alignment was a position being adopted

by many political activists who were fed up with the Soviet-influenced line of the PCI and who realized that the future of Marxist revolution was outside of Europe. The flamboyant and mercurial Giangiacomo Feltrinelli,<sup>1</sup> founder of the eponymous publishing house, and the anti-fascist intellectual Giovanni Pirelli, who worked as an editor for Einaudi and would later get involved with the Algerian *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN), were key exponents of the Italian new left that sought to renovate its ideological principles by looking to the Third World, and to the development of political and cultural thought beyond Cold War polarities.

Italy thus emerged at the forefront of cultural initiatives that disseminated Third-Worldist writing to a wider European public, alongside the publisher François Maspero and the journal *Présence Africaine* in France. Einaudi and Feltrinelli, in publishing (and translating) the work of Frantz Fanon, Fidel Castro, Ernesto Che Guevara, Mao Tse-Tung, Ho Chi Minh, and other anticolonial intellectuals, responded to a real hunger for new political alternatives among younger readers—what could also be defined as an emerging market for such texts. When Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* was first published in Italian in 1962, it sold upwards of 100,000 copies, making it one of the bestselling books of that year.<sup>2</sup> The first issue of *Tricontinental*, a bimonthly publication produced in Havana, whose Italian edition was curated by Feltrinelli, featured on the inside of its front cover a phrase by Ernesto Che Guevara: 'The duty of every revolutionary is to make the revolution' (*Il dovere di ogni rivoluzionario è fare la rivoluzione*), each word of the internationalist slogan interspersed with the image of a bullet (Fig. 4.1).<sup>3</sup>

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- 1 The extremely wealthy Feltrinelli took umbrage at those who considered his publishing venture a 'hobby'; he was capable of storming out of meetings if his projects weren't taken seriously (see Carlo Feltrinelli, *Senior Service* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1999, p. 93). He was a charismatic and controversial figure at the centre of both Milanese high society and radical circles, and became close to revolutionaries and celebrities alike.
  - 2 For a detailed account of Fanon's publication in Italian by Einaudi, see Neelam Srivastava, 'Translating Resistance: Fanon and Radical Italy, 1960–1970' in *Translating Frantz Fanon Across Continents and Languages*, ed. by Kathryn Batchelor and Sue-Ann Harding (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 17–39.
  - 3 For a history of the Tricontinental movement's print culture dissemination, see Robert Young, 'Disseminating the Tricontinental' in *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-Building*, ed. by Chen Jian, Martin Klimke, Masha Kirasirova, Mary Nolan, Marilyn Young, and Joanna Waley-Cohen (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 517–47. For a comprehensive account of Tricontinentalism's



Fig. 4.1 Unknown artist, *Tricontinental*, n.1, year 1 (1967), inside of front cover. 'The duty of every revolutionary is to make the revolution. We remind the Latin American oligarchies that OLAS [which stood for Latin American Solidarity Organization] expresses our ideas.'

Over time, both publishers developed specific series comprising cheap, thin paperbacks that were accessible to students and younger readers, about political issues of the day, which often included works by Third-Worldist authors: the Edizioni della Libreria (Feltrinelli) and the Serie Politica (Einaudi). In this essay, I examine editors' correspondence, publishing lists, and publishing ventures by Einaudi and Feltrinelli in order to examine more closely how these publishers were instrumental in introducing Third-Worldist texts to an Italian readership and thus shaped their reception in the public sphere. The dissemination of these works ultimately had a far-reaching influence on political ideas that emerged out of the 1968 movement. Examining the cultural work of publishing and the forms of print culture it produced reverses the direction of travel relating to the exchange of ideas between colony and metropole, as it is conventionally understood. Arguably, anticolonial

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cultural production, political history, and relationship to Global South theories, see Anne Garland Mahler, *From the Tricontinental to the Global South: Race, Radicalism, and Transnational Solidarity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

movements were instrumental in presenting new possibilities for political revolution in Europe, and print culture—especially publishing initiatives and magazines—was key to its publicization, as Feltrinelli and Einaudi well knew.

At the same time, however, what this account reveals is that both publishers privileged the political writing coming from Third World movements, but did not undertake more ‘literary’ projects by Global South writers. My analysis bears a connection with the work of Laura Pennacchietti, who has analyzed Italian publishers’ archives relating to the reception of Windrush writers in Italy in the post-war era, to show how major writers and editors like Elio Vittorini opposed publishing authors whose literary writing was considered too strongly ideological in terms of its antiracist and anticolonial stances, rather privileging the exoticist vein of local colour and light humour represented by the writing of Edgar Mittelholzer and V.S. Naipaul’s early novels (like *A House for Mr Biswas*).<sup>4</sup> These preliminary findings suggest that ‘literary writing’ from the decolonizing world was being evaluated by Italian editors and publishers in quite different ways from ‘political writing’ coming from the same regions. While political writing was promoted and published, creative writing was viewed more cautiously and more critically. Cultural gatekeeping and implicit notions of aesthetic taste operated strongly in the assessment of creative work, as I show in my reading of an editorial memo by the Einaudi editor Laura Gonzalez at the end of this essay.

But why revisit Third-Worldism now? It might seem, at first, that to re-read decades-old documents and texts relating to Italian intellectuals’ interest in revolutionary Cuba and Algeria is a very dated activity—the First, Second and Third World no longer exist in the same form as they did in the 1960s. But judging by recent scholarship, the term ‘Third World’ seems to have come back in fashion, especially in the realms of aesthetics and politics; requiring different conceptual and analytical tools from the ‘postcolonial’ and offering alternative geographies of knowledge exchange.<sup>5</sup> We have come a long way from Aijaz Ahmad’s

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4 Laura Pennacchietti, “‘Books Written by the So-called Colonials or Half-bloods’: Italian Publishers’ Reception of Novels by the Windrush Writers in the 1950s and 1960s”, *Modern Italy*, 23.4 (2018), 411–28.

5 Mahler argues that Tricontinentalism offers a bridge between 1960s Third-Worldism and contemporary theorizations of the Global South. She distinguishes

fierce (and at some level justified) criticism of Fredric Jameson's formulation of 'Third World' literature in 1986. I wish to recount briefly this famous argument between the American and the Indian Marxist critics, and then suggest a different way for recuperating the term 'Third World' for a theory of resistance.

Jameson understands Third World Literature as relating to the countries that do not belong either to the First or the Second World, subjugated by foreign capital and imperialism, and suffering from the effects of underdevelopment; by extension, he argues, literature produced by intellectuals in these countries would bear the allegorical marks of this anti-imperialist struggle, thus producing what to western readers appear as crudely politicized narratives, with a rudimentary and instrumental use of realism.<sup>6</sup> Ahmad, in his riposte to Jameson's essay, strongly contests his undifferentiated application of the term Third World to all countries outside of the western and socialist blocs, and again by extension, argues for the 'epistemological impossibility' of such a nebulous entity as Third World literature, which comprises a dizzying array of diverse languages, cultures, and political-economic orders.<sup>7</sup> What neither critic fully considers in this specific debate—and this may be symptomatic of the amnesiac 1980s vis-à-vis the decolonization struggles of the 1960s—is the possibility that the Third World was actually a political project, rather than a shorthand for underdevelopment.<sup>8</sup> In his essay, Jameson does mention Cuba and

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the Tricontinental and the Global South political traditions from postcolonial studies, which 'has tended to emphasize an experience of colonization rather than a horizontalist ideological project' (see Mahler, *From the Tricontinental*, p. 17).

6 Fredric Jameson, 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multi-National Capitalism', *Social Text*, 15 (Autumn, 1986), 65–88 (p. 67).

7 Aijaz Ahmad, 'Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the "National Allegory"', *Social Text*, 17 (Autumn, 1987), 3–25 (p. 5).

8 Elsewhere Ahmad elaborates on the notion of the 'Third World' and his issues with this category; see his essay 'Three Worlds Theory' in Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 287–319. As Neil Lazarus and Timothy Brennan have argued, the 1980s seem to usher in a period of forgetfulness in critical thought vis-à-vis the ideological energy of Third-Worldism; the focus shifts to the study of the postcolonial neo-liberal order, and theoretical frameworks also adopt a wider range of positions beyond that of Marxism. Postcolonial theory develops in the 1980s, drawing on post-structuralism and postmodernism as conceptual building blocks. Often the genealogy of the field, and its relationship to what Hala Halim calls the 'pre-postcolonial moment', gets lost in retrospective accounts. See Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) and Timothy Brennan, *Wars of Position: The Cultural Politics*

its tradition of studying 'cultural revolution' via global Third World thinkers such as Ho Chi Minh and Augustino Nieto, though he does not return to this more positive affirmation of the 'Third-World' as an intellectual formation later on in the essay.<sup>9</sup>

If we situate it as a political project, Third World(ist) thought and literature should not be understood from the perspective of readers shaped by, and located in, western capitalist societies. Rather than being a product 'for' the West, Third World writing operated along South-South reading circuits. Anne Garland Mahler eloquently argues for an understanding of Global South locations as independent of territoriality.<sup>10</sup> My interpretation of 'Third World writing' in the context of this essay is closely aligned with Mahler's idea of the 'Tricontinentalist text'. This conception of the text refers to 'any cultural product that engages explicitly with the aesthetics and especially the discourse of Tricontinentalism, meaning it reflects a deterritorialized vision of imperial power and a recognition of imperialism and racial oppression as interlinked'.<sup>11</sup> It merges an anti-capitalist stance with an anti-racist commitment. Further below, I discuss Tricontinentalism as a global revolutionary strategy that developed in Cuba in 1966.

Third World writing was a literature of protest, but not necessarily aimed at a western reader, who is the implicit reader of Jameson's idea of 'Third World literature', as for example when he says that 'as western readers whose tastes (and much else) have been formed by our own modernisms, a popular or socially realistic Third World novel tends to come before us, not immediately, but as though already-read'.<sup>12</sup> The 'Third World novel' became such only when read by a First World reader; thus, on the one hand, it should be understood as a mode of reading, relating to the geo-political positionality of the reader, and on the other, as a mode of writing, namely as a kind of novel that comes out of the political experience of Third-Worldism. It is not coincidental that one of

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*of Left and Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). Lazarus and Brennan seek to downplay the theoretical innovations of postcolonial studies by locating its intellectual origins within Marxism. Robert Young offers perhaps the fullest and most convincing account of postcolonialism's relationship with Third World Marxism in his *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).

9 See Jameson, 'Third-World Literature', p. 75.

10 Mahler, *From the Tricontinental*, p. 6.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

12 Jameson, 'Third-World Literature', p. 66.

the authors Jameson discusses in the essay is Sembène Ousmane, whose filmic and literary work explicitly references anticolonial liberation and reflects on postcolonial relationships between blacks and whites in the aftermath of decolonization.

Jameson's national allegory model deeply informed the emerging field of postcolonial literary studies, and its presence is clearly felt in some of its seminal works such as *The Empire Writes Back*.<sup>13</sup> But as Hala Halim says, 'the literature of riposte' and of 'the empire writing back,' which is 'one dominant model in Western postcolonial criticism, with its attendant anglophone and francophone literatures, while it commands a measure of descriptive purchase, retains for the empire a centrality that in reality was contested in the solidarities of Bandung and associated movements'.<sup>14</sup> Third-Worldist publications like *Lotus* and *Tricontinental* 'instantiate the impetus to reorient intercultural dialogue, as no longer primarily between metropole and colony but between former colonies'. In other words, recuperating the Third World as a political project that drew its force from Non-Alignment, through the analysis of sympathetic editorial initiatives such as those conceived by Einaudi and Feltrinelli, can help reconstruct a cultural history of South-South exchanges, and also map the influence of Southern ideas of emancipation and human progress on Northern public spheres. Italian publishing initiatives helped to disseminate Third-Worldist ideas to national audiences, with the aim of educating their political consciousness and building transnational solidarity. As Mahler and

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13 There is, of course, a rich critical debate on Jameson and Ahmad's famous exchange. Over the past few years, there have been positive re-evaluations of Jameson's position from scholars working within the 'combined and uneven development' approach to world literature; see for example Auritro Majumder, *Insurgent Imaginations: World Literature and the Periphery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 28–35. Lazarus dedicates a long discussion to the debate in *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, where he argues that Ahmad's essay has been construed as the 'unanswerable' riposte of postcolonial studies to Jameson's supposedly Orientalist and essentializing concepts of national allegory and Third World literature. Lazarus spends much of the essay defending Jameson against Ahmad's critique and emphasizing the need to retrieve the Third-Worldist moment that helped to inspire Jameson's theorization. Lazarus's main aim here is to contextualize Third-Worldism within a global history of resistance to the capitalist world order. See Neil Lazarus, 'Jameson on Third-World Literature: A Defence', *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, pp. 89–113.

14 Hala Halim, 'Lotus, the Afro-Asian Nexus, and Global South Comparatism', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 32.3 (2012), 563–83 (p. 571).

Young have both emphasized in their studies of Tricontinentalism and its cultural production emanating from Cuba, print culture was seen as instrumental in creating a Third World Left.<sup>15</sup> However, at the same time, this political alignment did not match a corresponding aesthetic alignment; Italian publishers, even avant-garde ones like Feltrinelli and Einaudi, remained resistant to creative and literary work emerging from the (post)colonial world.

Third-Worldism also influenced a renewal of aesthetic taste gradually taking hold in the metropole. Arguably, Italian culture and literature after the second world war were informed by an internationalist outlook on Third World struggles, mediated and experienced through the memory of anti-fascist resistance.

In what follows, I analyze the dissemination of Third-Worldist texts in Italy thanks to the activities of Einaudi and Feltrinelli publishers. In the first section, I explore how Italian 'resistance literature' took shape in those years across anti-fascist and anticolonial contexts, through a look at publications in the Einaudi catalogue and discussing the key role played by Giovanni Pirelli in disseminating the message of the Algerian revolution via his edited collections of testimonies. In my discussion, 'testimony' is identified as a key form for anticolonial and anti-fascist narratives. In the second section, I discuss the extraordinary figure of Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, the 'millionaire publisher' who became close to Fidel Castro and whose sympathy for liberation struggles led him to produce an Italian version of *Tricontinental*, the publication coming out of revolutionary Cuba, key for understanding the articulation of Third-Worldist thought as an internationalist project and as distinctly non-aligned.

## Giulio Einaudi and Giovanni Pirelli

### Einaudi and Resistance Literature Across Antifascism and Anticolonialism

Publishing houses and other cultural firms were key players in shaping the Italian cultural sphere after 1945. They also focused public attention

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15 See Mahler, *From the Tricontinental*, p. 7; Young, 'Disseminating the Tricontinental', pp. 522–23.

on anticolonial liberation struggles by translating works by Fanon, Cabral, Guevara, and other major Third-Worldists for Italian audiences. The editor Giulio Einaudi was particularly instrumental in helping to reconstruct Italian culture after the end of fascism, and was a highly committed and politicized publisher, with links to the Italian Communist Party and the more radical section of the Italian left; so much so that throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s (and beyond), the Einaudi book was perceived as 'explicitly militant'.<sup>16</sup> Einaudi editors such as Italo Calvino, Giovanni Pirelli, and Raniero Panzieri were instrumental in creating a literary canon, later called *Letteratura della Resistenza*, that took on a multi-generic form. Narratives of the Resistance, relying as they did on testimony and documentary, traversed the categories of 'saggistica' (non-fiction) and 'narrativa' (fiction). But if we consider Einaudi's publication of what would become anti-fascist literary classics, such as Primo Levi's *If This is A Man* (1958) and Carlo Levi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (1945), alongside anticolonial/Third-Worldist writing about Algeria and Cuba, a more expansive canon of resistance writing emerges, authored by Italian intellectuals and artists who had fought in the Resistance and who now turned to anticolonial writing as an ideal continuation of their cause. Such 'resistance aesthetics', which draws on literary and artistic currents of the Italian post-war period like realism and neorealism, played a central role in re-imagining the Italian nation both in anti-fascist and in internationalist, anticolonial terms, and also widens the concept of resistance beyond Italy to encompass a shared solidarity with anticolonial struggle.

Even today, Einaudi remains a key force at the heart of Italian culture, wielding an immeasurably important influence on the literary tastes and political orientations of its readers. Giulio Einaudi founded the publishing house in 1933, and its first home was in the same building that housed Antonio Gramsci's journal, *L'Ordine Nuovo*, which helped to define Italian Communism and the future direction of the Italian Communist Party. Records of discussions among Einaudi editors just after the war reveal the enduring influence of Gramsci on the kind of role the publishing house saw itself as playing. Taking their cue from Gramsci's acclaimed text *Letteratura e vita nazionale* (Literature and

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16 Francesca Lolli, 'La Resistenza di un editore: Einaudi' in *Letteratura e Resistenza*, ed. by Andrea Bianchini and Francesca Lolli (Bologna: Clueb, 1997), 59–93 (p. 71).

National Life),<sup>17</sup> editors such as Carlo Muscetta argued for the need of a ‘more homogenous general direction which had as its inspirational criterion the concept of a national and popular culture’.<sup>18</sup> And indeed Einaudi did take up this call to shape Italian post-war identity through the publication of key texts that attempted to respond to Gramsci’s call for a literature that was marked by its ‘going to the people’ (*andata al popolo*). Not least among these editorial choices was the gradual publication of Gramsci’s entire oeuvre.

A common thread in Einaudi’s contribution to the construction of a national-popular culture after the war is a focus on ‘civic commitment’ and the ethical-political function of testimony with reference to the memory of anti-fascist struggle and resistance. Einaudi started several series in the immediate post-war period, including the ‘Testimonianze’ (Testimonies), which came from a perceived need to ‘highlight in a specific series memories and writings on fascism, the war, and the partisan struggle [the Italian resistance]’.<sup>19</sup> The creation of the category of ‘resistance literature’ by Einaudi was part of the editors’ aims to create a ‘popular literature’ for Italy.

Reading the editorial correspondence of the 1950s and 1960s, which featured the interventions of some of the most important Italian intellectuals of the twentieth century—Calvino, Pavese, Einaudi, Panzieri, Pirelli, and many others—reveals the *process* through which these editors saw themselves as actively involved in the development of culture. This is a role that today we might consider to be that of universities or cultural institutions, but in the Italy of those years, Einaudi took on this mandate, which was very Gramscian in its focus on civil society and on the books that could influence it.

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17 Gramsci’s *Letteratura e vita nazionale* first came out in 1950 with Einaudi. Einaudi had a dedicated series for Gramsci works, called *Opere di Antonio Gramsci*. The first book by Gramsci to come out in Italy were the *Lettere dal carcere*, published by Einaudi in 1947, inaugurating the Einaudi Gramsci series. Einaudi eventually published the authoritative and full version of Gramsci’s *Quaderni del carcere* in 1975, edited by Valentino Gerratana.

18 Carlo Muscetta quoted in Luisa Mangoni, *Pensare i libri. La casa editrice Einaudi dagli anni trenta agli anni sessanta* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999), p. 607.

19 *Le edizioni Einaudi negli anni 1933–1998* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999), p. 785.

## Einaudi and Resistance Literature

Einaudi in the early post-war years built up publishing lists that focused on stories and themes from the Italian Resistance, texts that subsequently became classics of Italian literature and were taught widely in schools (by Italo Calvino, Cesare Pavese, Beppe Fenoglio, Renata Viganò among many others). The *Resistenza's* historical and political meanings for post-war Italy were still being debated in the 1950s–1960s; but the publication of memorials and testimonies, as well as fictional texts about the Resistance by *ex-partigiani*, in many ways contributed to its construction. One of the main aims of Resistance testimony was to create an anti-fascist political consciousness; more broadly, the kinds of testimony that Einaudi published, and which spanned anti-fascist and anticolonial narratives, were intended to produce political change among their readership.

Einaudi's cultural work in those years helped to give shape to a literary canon, *letteratura della Resistenza*, which took on a multi-generic, indeed multi-disciplinary nature. A look at the Einaudi catalogue of the 1940s and 1950s shows that narratives of the Resistance were not easily placed in a single series.<sup>20</sup> Einaudi had a series called 'Saggi', literally 'essays', whose very name obviously evoked what publishers today call 'non-fiction', and another one called 'Coralli' (Corals), defined as 'narrativa', which in English would be translated as 'fiction'. Both Carlo Levi's *Christ Stopped at Eboli* and Primo Levi's *If This is a Man* (second edition, published in 1958) came out in the Saggi. The latter was first published by Einaudi in 1958 (the first 1947 edition had come out with a different publisher) and was a huge commercial and critical success. It was subsequently re-published in the Coralli series, signalling its interchangeability across the historical, essayistic and fictional genres.

All four of Giovanni Pirelli's anthologies of letters about resistance struggles came out in the Saggi. There was an emphasis on truthful, unadorned, and anti-rhetorical testimonies, which can be connected to neo-realism as an aesthetic that rejected fascist stylistic pompousness and triumphalism in favour of a re-invigorated, as in re-politicized, recourse to realism. Two of these anthologies collected letters by resistance fighters in the war against fascism, namely, *Lettere di*

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20 Ibid.

*condannati a morte della resistenza italiana* (Letters of Italian resistance fighters sentenced to death, 1952), and *Lettere dei condannati a morte della resistenza europea* (Letters of European resistance fighters sentenced to death, 1954), and the other two collected letters and testimonies from resistance fighters and children involved in the Algerian revolution against French colonial occupation, namely *Lettere della rivoluzione algerina* (Letters of the Algerian Revolution, 1963), and *Racconti di bambini di Algeria* (Stories of Children from Algeria, 1962). *The Diary of Anne Frank* was published in the Saggi in 1954, and Nuto Revelli's grassroots history of the Italian Resistance, *La guerra dei poveri* (The War of the Poor) in 1962 (the same year Einaudi published Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*).<sup>21</sup>

The Saggi list gives us a snapshot of the educational function assigned to this series, and the series description conveys the felt need to educate and acculturate the Italian public: 'The Saggi have indicated and developed a series of cultural pathways always underpinned by a strong civic commitment. In addition to literature and philosophical essays, architecture, music, figurative art, cinema, music, etc. figure prominently in the Series'. It is further defined as a 'cultural library'.<sup>22</sup>

The mixture of documentary and narrative/fictional elements meant their genre shifted between the essayistic and the literary; choosing which Einaudi series to assign a book to took on a status that was analogous to defining its literary genre. For example, Calvino's great first novel, a work set during the partisan struggle, *Path of the Spiders' Nests* (1947) was published in the Coralli, the fiction line. Einaudi's editorial process illustrates a national literature in the making through the work of publishing and canon-formation. Literature of and about the Resistance assumed an educational function, with the aim to teach future generations about ethical resistance against fascism. This ethical impulse was connected to the central role played by testimonial literature.

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21 All of Carlo Levi's works, including *Paura della libertà* and *L'orologio* that dealt with Resistance themes, were first published in the Saggi. Other significant texts include Sergei Eisenstein's *Tecnica del cinema*, György Lukács's *Saggi sul realismo*, Adorno's *Minima Moralia*, and later Mario Tronti's *Operai e capitale*, a defining text of the Italian workerist movement. See *Le edizioni Einaudi negli anni 1933–1998*, p. 245.

22 *Le edizioni Einaudi negli anni 1933–1998*.

### Einaudi as Publisher of Texts on the Algerian Resistance

In these same years, Einaudi published a series of books on decolonization struggles and Third World thought. An especial focus was the Algerian war of liberation against colonial France.<sup>23</sup> Titles published by Einaudi in this area include the journalist Raffaello Ubaldi's *Servizio proibito* (Forbidden Reporting, 1957), the first Italian report on wartime Algeria, Henri Alleg's *La Question* (*The Question*, published as *La tortura* in 1958 in the Libri Bianchi series), André Mandouze's *La révolution algérienne par les textes* (*The Texts of the Algerian Revolution*, 1961, published in Italian with the title *La rivoluzione algerina nei suoi documenti*, translated by Giovanni Pirelli), Pirelli's two books of testimonies about the Algerian war (which I discuss further below) and, most importantly, most of Frantz Fanon's published work. Einaudi was probably the first editor in the world to publish a translation of *Les damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*): this came out in Italian as *I dannati della terra* in 1962, in the Libri Bianchi series. *A Dying Colonialism* was published in Italian as *Sociologia della rivoluzione algerina* in 1963, again in the Libri Bianchi series.<sup>24</sup> Most of the editors in the publishing house, especially Einaudi himself, were very supportive of the Algerian cause.

Pirelli played a key role in publishing texts about the Algerian revolution. He and Einaudi worked closely with Maspero in France, and often these texts appeared simultaneously, or a few months apart, with Einaudi and with Maspero.<sup>25</sup> Laura Gonzalez, who also worked for

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23 Mariamargherita Scotti compares the concerted effort on the part of Italian editors to publish texts on revolutionary Algeria with the '*guerre des éditeurs*' (war of the editors) that took place in France, where politically committed editors like François Maspero and others attempted to bypass censorship of Algerian issues during the war with France by disseminating books and journals via underground channels; Scotti, *Vita di Giovanni Pirelli. Tra cultura e impegno militante* (Rome: Donzelli, 2018), p. 140.

24 For a full account of the publication of Fanon's oeuvre in Italian, see my essay 'Translating Resistance'.

25 These include much of Fanon's oeuvre and Pirelli's collections of Algerian testimonies mentioned earlier. I discuss the editorial history connecting Einaudi, Pirelli and Fanon with reference to archival correspondence, in my essay 'Translating Resistance'.

the publishing house, was an important translator of Fanon, and also edited and translated a collection of Ernesto Che Guevara's writings for Einaudi.<sup>26</sup>

The focus on Algeria was partly due to the special status in the numerous anticolonial struggles that characterized the era of decolonization between the 1950s and 1960s. It was widely considered a model for other anticolonial revolutions taking place across the African continent, and in the 1960s and early 1970s, Algiers became known as capital of the Third World (and of course was prominent among the non-aligned nations).

In Italy, the Algerian war 'had an extraordinary moral and civil echo'.<sup>27</sup> This solidarity for Algeria cut across the political spectrum; the Democrazia Cristiana, the party in power, supported a pro-Arab policy more generally, and the Italian Communist Party was the most proactive of all European communist parties in providing both ideological and concrete support to the Algerian *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) that led the country to independence.<sup>28</sup> The FLN was provided with offices in the PCI headquarters in Via delle Botteghe Oscure in Rome.

Cultural manifestations in support of the war were profoundly linked to Italy's strong sympathy towards Algeria. In the progressive press of the time, Algeria came to take on the role of a 'pre-Vietnam' moment, with headlines in a November 1961 issue of the Communist paper *L'Unità* announcing a demonstration through the centre of Rome students and activists supporting the Algerian cause (Fig. 4.2).<sup>29</sup>

This sympathy can be linked to Italy's 're-discovery' of its Mediterranean vocation in the post-war period, as part of a politics of power and sphere of influence in the region.<sup>30</sup> According to Giulio

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26 See Ernesto Che Guevara, *Diari, scritti e discorsi di guerriglia. 1959–1967*, ed. by Laura Gonzalez (Turin: Einaudi, 1969).

27 Sergio Romano, 'Osservazioni in margine a un libro' in *Italia e Algeria: Aspetti storici di un'amicizia mediterranea*, ed. by Romain Rainero (Milan: Marzorati, 1982), pp. 9–22 (17).

28 Stéphane Mourlane, radio interview 'La Fabrique de l'Histoire: Histoire de la guerre d'Algérie 4' (2010), <http://www.fabriquedesens.net/La-Fabrique-de-l-Histoire-Histoire,414>

29 'Corteo di giovani manifesta per la libertà dell'Algeria', *L'Unità* (November 4, 1961), p. 2.

30 The Italian entrepreneur Enrico Mattei, head of ENI, the Italian national energy company, played an important role in establishing Italy's influence across the decolonizing Mediterranean, especially in countries like Algeria. ENI presented

Attraverso le strade del centro

## Corteo di giovani manifesta per la libertà dell'Algeria



La bandiera dell'Algeria alla testa del corteo

Bandiere del F.L.N. e cartelli di condanna dei massacri francesi

Centinaia di giovani hanno partecipato ieri con entusiasmo alla manifestazione di solidarietà con il popolo algerino che era stata indetta dalla Unione gollardica italiana. Studenti, lavoratori, ragazze hanno ricordato a migliaia di cittadini la tragedia che da sette anni sta vivendo un popolo intero. Il grido - Algeria, Algeria - le bandiere bianche e verdi del F.L.N., i cartelli di condanna per le atrocità commesse dal «paris» e dalla polizia francese, hanno rappresentato il simbolo dello spirito internazionalista della parte migliore della gioventù romana.

Prima di manifestare nelle strade, i giovani si sono riuniti in assemblea nel salone di Palazzo Marignoli dove il presidente nazionale dell'Ug.I.A. Andrea Margheri, ha parlato a nome di tutti gli universitari e democratici. L'oratore ha sottolineato con forza la connessione tra la repressione colonialista e il declino della democrazia in Francia. Ha il rafforzamento degli «ultras» e la maggior tracollata in Europa del «partito della guerra».

Al termine della riunione si è formato il corteo. I giovani, gridando la loro appassionata condanna per la «sporca guerra» hanno attraversato il Corso e via del Tritone raggiungendo piazza Barberini, sono poi tornati sul loro passo ed infine si sono diretti verso piazza di Spagna. Non si sono avuti incidenti perché una volta tanto la polizia ha preferito non disturbare la manifestazione.

La manifestazione si è chiusa al canto degli inn della Resistenza.

### Celebrazione del 4 novembre

Quest'anno il 4 novembre, anniversario della Vittoria, avrà una particolare solennità coincidendo con la manifestazione

### Sciopero dei tassisti dipendenti

I tassisti dipendenti dalle aziende industriali (circa 500) hanno effettuato ieri un compatto sciopero contro due arbitrari licenziamenti disposti dalle ditte Salati e Piccini. Attraverso le Commissioni interne e i sindacati hanno chiesto la revoca di tali licenziamenti, ma i concessionari hanno opposto un secco rifiuto. Pertanto l'azione sindacale sarà insospirata nei prossimi giorni.

### Il testone affisso sui muri

Il testone musulmano è ricomparso da alcuni giorni sui muri di molte strade. Il manifesto, che cita un altro immaturo uso «storico pensiero» sulla Cina non reca alcuna firma. Chi lo ha fatto stampare? Chi lo ha distribuito? A chi giova la macabra recitazione? Il mistero serpeggia orobabilmente e copre le salite etiolologiche endemiche. In una sola casa si sa: il manifesto è stato incollato sui

### Le borgate nel piano regolatore

Una delegazione di rappresentanti dei Consorzi (piano regolatore) accompagnati dael. sovoreviti Canev e Venturini, dai consiglieri comunali Franchellucci e Licata, e dal segretario dell'Unione Consorzi, Vito Melandri, si sono recati al ministero dei Lavori Pubblici.

Una delegazione dei lottisti è stata ricevuta dal capo di Gabinetto e dall'ing. Valle, presiedente del Consiglio sincretico

Fig. 4.2 Unknown photographer, *L'Unità* (4 November 1961), p. 2. 'A procession of young people marches for the freedom of Algeria.'

Valabrega, from 1958 onwards, the Italian left began to take a real interest in the Algerian liberation struggle, and towards the end of the 1950s the war began to be seen as a Mediterranean, not just a European, issue. This interest coincided with the strengthened importance given to the public memory of anti-fascist struggle, that opposed reactionary tendencies, and called for an international anticolonial solidarity.<sup>31</sup> Italy's support

itself as an equal trading partner, supposedly replacing the paternalistic attitude of colonizers with a fraternal one, and explicitly distancing itself from neo-colonialism. Highlighting this kind of involvement allows us to complicate and enrich schematic narratives of decolonization with the intricate discourses of aid and cooperation that emerged from Italy. For an excellent discussion of ENI and Mattei, see Erica Bellia, 'Industrial Writing and Anticolonial Discourse in Italy, 1955-1965' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 2021), pp. 39-45.

31 Giulio Valabrega, 'La questione algerina a Milano', *Italia e Algeria: Aspetti storici di un'amicizia mediterranea*, ed. by Romain Rainero (Milan: Marzorati, 1982), 313-29 (pp. 314-15).

for Algeria markedly distinguished it from France, where the ex-colony played an ambivalent, often negative role in the collective memory, and among the NATO countries, Italy was one of the closest to the group of non-aligned nations that had participated in the Bandung conference in 1955. However, Italian anticolonialism was not accompanied by a critical reflection on Italy's own colonial past.<sup>32</sup>

Echoing their nations' attitudes towards the war, the Italian Communist Party strongly supported the Algerian FLN, unlike the French Communist Party, which displayed an ambivalent and at times hostile attitude to the FLN's aims and objectives. The PCI was praised by the FLN at the conference of Algiers in 1963 (after independence) for having given it the strongest support among the European left parties and the biggest contribution to helping it define the 'Algerian path to socialism'.<sup>33</sup> The Italian left represented by the PCI did indeed support Algerian independence on quite an exceptional level.<sup>34</sup>

### Giovanni Pirelli's Algerian Testimonies

The anti-fascist partisan and anticolonial/Third-Worldist activist, Giovanni Pirelli, who refused to take over one of Italy's great industrial complexes from his father Alberto, was a major presence within the editorial team at Einaudi.<sup>35</sup> He was a shareholder of the Giulio Einaudi publishing house and his opinion was highly respected. Pirelli became interested in the Algerian war of liberation against the French in the late 1950s, and played a central role in setting up an FLN support network in Italy.<sup>36</sup> He subsequently became close friends with Fanon between 1960

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32 See Nicola Labanca, *Oltremare* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2005) on this point.

33 Paolo Borruso, *Il PCI e l'Africa indipendente. Apogeo e crisi di un'utopia socialista (1956–1989)* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2009), p. 81.

34 See Giulio Valabrega for an account of the many cultural and political initiatives that arose throughout Italy, but especially in Milan, in support of the Algerian cause. Among these, he mentions the work of Pirelli and the informal network of support that he and many other prominent left intellectuals created for the people of Algeria; Valabrega, 'La questione algerina a Milano', p. 321.

35 See Alberto Pirelli, Giovanni Pirelli, and Elena Brambilla, *Legami e conflitti. Lettere 1931–1965* (Milan: Archinto, 2002).

36 See Tullio Ottolini, 'Giovanni Pirelli e la guerra d'indipendenza algerina: tra attivismo intellettuale e *soutien* concreto' in *Giovanni Pirelli intellettuale del Novecento*, ed. by Mariamargherita Scotti (Milan, Mimesis, 2016), pp. 94–95; and Scotti, *Vita di Giovanni Pirelli*, pp. 132–33.

and 1961 during a series of encounters in Tunis, where the Martinican psychiatrist was in exile.

Pirelli's third collection of letters, *Lettere della rivoluzione algerina* (Letters of the Algerian Revolution, 1963), edited with Patrick Kessel, consisted mainly of testimonies about the repression and torture of Algerians during the war (it was published in French at the same time with Maspero under the title *Le peuple algérien et la guerre: lettres et témoignages 1954–1961*).<sup>37</sup> In planning his *Letters of the Algerian Revolution*, Pirelli wanted it to become a chapter of Algerian history, rather than merely part of a French account, sympathetic and self-critical though it might be. The war of liberation had to be narrated by the Algerians themselves, and hence could not include French testimony.

In Pirelli's research and in his collections of testimonies, the concept of Resistance gradually expands from Italy out to Europe, and ultimately encompasses Algeria's liberation struggle from French colonial rule. The Resistance loses its initially 'national' scope and is universalized so as to include the condition of man in any situation of oppression. Pirelli's three collections of letters, all written in the first person, constitute an example of a new conception of literature and history, which privileges testimony and the first-hand experiences of those directly involved in the conflicts. All three books are not memoirs but rather document a very recent past. His first book of *Letters* by the Italian *partigiani* condemned to death is involved in constructing an idea of the Resistance for the Italian public, barely seven years after the end of the war, when the meanings of this event were not yet stable and fixed, and indeed were still contested.

This concept of writing flows into Pirelli's aesthetic and historical project of the *Lettere della rivoluzione algerina*, again published just after the end of the Algerian war, in 1963. His aim here was to hear from the Algerians themselves. What emerges is a history of the war where the Algerians are protagonists. In their introduction, Kessel and Pirelli note that almost all the documentation relative to the war was from French sources, and they are trying to provide an alternative account through Algerian testimonies and letters, which would attempt to equate it with the 'experience of the European resistance' rather than from the perspective of a liberal paternalism in which Algeria appeared as the

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37 *Lettere della Rivoluzione algerina*, ed. by Patrick Kessel and Giovanni Pirelli (Turin: Einaudi, 1963).

victim, rather than the protagonist, of a war of liberation.<sup>38</sup> In Pirelli's *Letters of the Algerian Revolution*, we read accounts of torture, suppression, violence, murder. But the intentions of the editors, as expressed in the preface, made it very clear that the kind of testimonies they chose to include were not there to evoke pity or affect, and indeed they suggested a specific pathway of reading:

The letters present us for the first time with a mass of Algerian texts, born out of the struggle and the suffering of an entire people. To read them with a sentimental and passionate attitude—with horror, anger, outrage—would mean to misconstrue [*svisare*] the sense and rationale of this collection. A careful reading, on the other hand, allows us to identify in the letters certain original aspects of the Algerian experience.<sup>39</sup>

Though the collection's title contains the word 'letters', in fact the documents included in it presented a wide range of texts, most of them never before published. Many were letters written to newspapers or lawyers denouncing the various forms of colonial violence that had been perpetrated against their authors, and some were collective letters written by inhabitants of a village or community that had been attacked by French colonial forces. Others were sort of political autobiographies of Algerian militants. The texts were chosen for their ability to demonstrate the coming to political consciousness of Algerian prisoners and victims of torture through their own description of their ordeals. As Kessel and Pirelli explain in their Editors' Note, 'the common element of these letters is their personal character. That is, they originated in situations that directly concern their author or of which he is the direct interpreter, and they have a practical and immediate aim, even where the author is not addressing an individual, but rather intends to reach a large audience with their testimony'.<sup>40</sup> For this reason, they excluded letters that, though they were testimonies, could be seen as journalistic or literary, or as 'official' writing.<sup>41</sup> Testimony as a *form* here is clearly delineated: it is personal, direct, communication, in which the presentation of atrocity and trauma is left to the reader to process without explicit authorial

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38 Patrick Kessel and Giovanni Pirelli, 'Prefazione', *Lettere della rivoluzione algerina*, p. xxv.

39 *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.

40 Kessel and Pirelli, 'Nota dei curatori', p. xxxi.

41 *Ibid.*

mediation. The intention behind the fashioning of these distressing accounts is clearly political and not literary or emotional.

The language of the letters tends towards representational transparency, and the power of denunciation lies in the factual exposition of horrific violence, in the way a legal testimony might be. An example is the letter written by Gilberte Salem-Alleg, the wife of the well-known anticolonialist campaigner Henry Alleg, editor of the pro-Algerian newspaper *Alger Républicain* and author of a famous text denouncing the use of torture against Algerians in the course of the war of independence, *La Question* (the Italian translation of this text, as mentioned earlier, had been published by Einaudi in 1958). Salem-Alleg presents her own experience of being interrogated by a French officer about the whereabouts of her husband in simple, chilling language, that immediately establishes Salem-Alleg's intention, namely to communicate her husband's imminent peril:

If my husband is still alive, today he is in mortal danger! [...] Several times a day I've been interrogated by officials and by a non-commissioned officer (who spent five years in Indochina) who for an entire afternoon gave an erotic-political speech filled with questions and threats. I didn't immediately grasp it was an interrogation. 'You should think about your children, it's hard, you know, to lose one's mother when one is young; I know this by experience...' In the meantime he played with a revolver, he would drop the bullets onto the table, he would put them back in the gun and he would make me realize that there was always a loaded bullet in it.<sup>42</sup>

Gilberte's is a contained account compared to the letter from her husband Henri, which she includes as part of her testimony. Henri, in his letter, describes in detail the personal tortures he underwent at the hand of French paras and officers, and offers a political context for their actions. One officer begins to strangle him with his necktie, all the while slapping him violently in the face. At the same time, he says: 'What we do here we will do in France. What we do to you we'll do to Mitterrand, to Duclos! This is the Gestapo! [...] No one knows you've been arrested, you'll croak, and we'll also fuck that whore of your [French] Republic'.<sup>43</sup> Henri is presenting his own individual ordeals as the expression of

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42 Gilberte Salem-Alleg, 'Lettera aperta di Gilberte Salem-Alleg' in *Lettere della rivoluzione algerina*, p. 172.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 176.

French colonialist fascist views held by his torturers, bitterly antagonistic of the perceived reformism towards the Algerian question symbolized by the politician François Mitterrand and one of the leaders of the French Communist party, Jacques Duclos.

Not all the letters share this descriptive-factual mode. The prominent FLN activist and freedom fighter Zohra Drif, in a letter to her lawyer, presents an acute political analysis of the liberation struggle, exemplifying the consciousness of Algerian nationalism that Kessel and Pirelli were keen on retrieving from the Letters. Addressing the French metaphorically, she exclaims: 'You say you have suffered under the German occupation? You have certainly experienced atrocities, but we, we have been suffering, morally, materially, for 127 years! You have taken away from us the most wonderful thing a people can have, our personality, the consciousness of our personality! What are we? Neither European nor Arab, a bad copy of the European, a shadow of the Arab. Our past? Non-existent!'<sup>44</sup>

The locations of the letters vary, testifying to the international and transnational dimensions of the war: Algeria (both rural and urban), and France are the two main locations; but a very prominent role is played by letters coming from the Algerian internment camps.<sup>45</sup> For European readers, this was an obvious reminder of the concentrationary universe of the Nazi extermination camps, and indeed this analogy was used by the FLN and French anticolonialists for propaganda purposes. The intertextual link with Pirelli's Italian and European letters emerges in this interest to recuperate the human diversity of the Resistance: young, old, educated, uneducated, male, female. Members of the Algerian Resistance came from all strata of society, much like the European one to fascism—Resistance was the expression of a *people*, and yet composed of distinct individuals each with their own story. Pirelli's books aim to highlight the common basis of the anti-fascist and anticolonial project, and his intention to recover an untold and subaltern archive of voices and subjects involved in this Resistance.

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44 Zohra Drif, 'Lettera di Zohra Drif all'avvocato Pierre Gautherat del foro di Parigi' in *Lettere della rivoluzione algerina*, p. 189.

45 A section entitled 'Mondo concentrationario in Algeria, 1957' (Concentrationary world in Algeria, 1957) includes collective letters from the interned people in these camps; *ibid.*

The size of the book—over 770 pages—and the variety of the testimonies enclosed within it suggest that even more than an anthology, the book could be considered an emerging historical archive of the Algerian revolution. The narration of events in the war through Algerian eyes offer an alternative history in the absence of official Algerian accounts, a sourcebook, as it were, for future historians of the war.<sup>46</sup> Pirelli also believed that publishing these documents would contribute to greater international support for the Algerian cause. He considered this attention to Third World political struggle as part of a growing interest of Italian historiography in the Resistance and the workers' movement.

Yet For Pirelli, this type of scholarship, far from being a 'subaltern history' (namely subordinated to more mainstream narratives—thus recalling Gramsci's prevalent use of this term in the *Prison Notebooks*), was 'now being considered as a component of general historical problems', as Pirelli wrote to his father in 1956.<sup>47</sup> Reading the letters is a non-linear experience, given the various and discontinuous forms that testimony takes here. This method of compilation seems to follow Gramsci's idea that subaltern histories are by definition more fragmentary than retrievable via a systematic approach. As in the case of Pirelli's Letters from the Italian and European Resistance, his subalternist history in *Letters of Algerians* strove to establish a counter-discourse around the meanings pertaining to the Algerian war, which were highly contested in the French public sphere, though they found more traction among the Italian public.

The *Letters* were sure to appeal and strike the sensibility of a European reader, however they were not aimed at evoking pathos, but rather at developing political militancy among its readers; in other words, the editors focused on creating a sense of solidarity with the Algerians who had written the letters.

Pirelli's other book about the Algerian war was a collection of children's testimonies and drawings about the conflict, *Racconti di bambini d'Algeria* (Stories of Algerian children). These were Algerian

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46 See Scotti, *Vita di Giovanni Pirelli*, p. 136. Pirelli in 1961 noted that what distinguished the Algerian revolution from previous anticolonial struggles was its will to create a national historical archive of its process; this demonstrated its political maturity and made it an exemplary anticolonial movement.

47 Pirelli, Pirelli, and Brambilla, *Legami e conflitti*, p. 188.

child refugees that Pirelli and Jacques Charby interviewed. The children could express their response both verbally and through drawings. The dust jacket blurb mentions that the book was coming out at a time in which the Algerian people were finally able to return to their liberated homeland, adding: 'If the most decisive denunciation of Nazism came from a young city girl, Anne Frank, these country children... express the same definitive denunciation of colonialism. With them, begins the Nuremberg of Algeria' (Fig. 4.3).<sup>48</sup>



Fig. 4.3 Dustjacket, *Lettere dei bambini d'Algeria*, ed. by Giovanni Pirelli (Turin: Einaudi, 1962).

The editorial packaging of this book clearly aimed at highlighting analogies between the experiences of the Algerian people and those of the Jews, with the explicit parallel between these testimonies of Algerian children and Anne Frank's *Diary*. The book was published in 1962, in the very months in which Algeria was forming an independent government after the Evian accords. The repeated evocation of the Nazi persecution against Jews was used by the Einaudi editors (and especially Pirelli) to frame the Algerian experience for their Italian readers, through instantly recognizable analogies with the experience of the Holocaust. It was published in the Einaudi Saggi Collection, a series that privileged historical and political testimony, as mentioned earlier.

<sup>48</sup> *Racconti di bambini d'Algeria*, ed. by Giovanni Pirelli (Turin: Einaudi, 1962), dust jacket cover.

This collection was quite different from the previous *Letters from the Algerian Revolution*. The testimonies of the children are generally much briefer, much more evocative in the gaps and elisions of the narrative of trauma being expressed. Most crucially, unlike the *Letters*, some of which were bald chronicles or even lists at times, they read as *stories* (presumably also due to the structure of the interview format). The written or recorded testimonies are interspersed with striking drawings and paintings by the children themselves, which include depictions of tortures, fighting, killings, and dead bodies.<sup>49</sup> As with his other anthology, Pirelli was keen to avoid sentimentalism: in his preface, he explained that his aim was to 'provide a collection of significant and truthful testimonies'. For this reason, he and his collaborators had discarded the stories in which it was felt that children were trying to 'force reality' to garner sympathy or pity.<sup>50</sup> Instead, we find several examples of stories where the children offer short but acute analyses of the French-Algerian conflict and the reasons behind it, as for example Abdelhamid Yousfi's story, which ends with the following statement: 'France says we will not know how to govern Algeria. I am sure we will know how to govern it'.<sup>51</sup>

The idea of resistance aesthetics as it emerges in the publications and correspondence of the publisher Einaudi in the years after decolonization, demonstrates a series of recurring features: art as testimony, history, education, collective narrative, and subalternist perspective. An opening of Italian literature to the world, which also means to different world aesthetics, happens through a commitment to Third-Worldism, though not to a rapprochement to Third World literature, which, as I have been arguing, needs to be understood as a politically oriented literary genre, rather than as an indicator of geographical provenance. The representation of African decolonization in the work of Pirelli, also through his careful curating of Fanon's oeuvre for an Italian public, is intimately connected to his 'resistance aesthetics': the expression of a particular conjunctural moment in Italian culture

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49 Pirelli financed the project almost entirely on his own, and supplied all the art material that the children used for the drawings; see Scotti, *Vita di Giovanni Pirelli*, p. 142.

50 Preface, *Racconti di bambini d'Algeria*, p. 11.

51 Abdelhamid Yousfi, in *Racconti di bambini d'Algeria*, p. 137.

which transforms this work into an internationalist text that aspires to transcend their European perspective, and in doing so become ‘world’ texts. The voice and image of the colonized, and the ethical questions implicit in this representation, are at the centre of the poetic reflection in each of these narratives.

It might be objected that such a reading of Pirelli’s works of Algerian testimony unduly privileges his European subject-position over the Algerian voice, given that the selection process was performed by him and his European collaborators. However, it also explores how a radical and effective anticolonial politics, respectful of the Algerian ownership of the historical record, can be conducted from metropolitan locations. Art assumes a privileged role in this politics, because ‘art manifests a radical hospitality to what Adorno calls the singular and non-identical’.<sup>52</sup> Estrangement and empathy, rather than a Eurocentric assimilation, are key features of this resistance aesthetics. Despite the fact that the children’s stories were marketed to a European audience as akin to the *Diary of Anne Frank*, Pirelli resolutely rejected any facile analogies. Giulio Valabrega had proposed to Pirelli to do a joint collection of stories of Jewish children under Nazism and Arab children during the Algerian war. But Pirelli refused, explaining in a letter to Valabrega that such a project would risk becoming a mere appeal to a generic anti-fascist liberal conscience among its European public, rather than allowing for specific political demands to emerge out of the publication of these testimonies.<sup>53</sup> He felt that an indiscriminate grouping together of the Jewish and Algerian experiences meant depoliticizing and diluting the impact of the Revolution on international public opinion.

As I have discussed in this section, Einaudi’s privileging of political testimony and writing from and about the Third World meant that *literature* from the Third World was less relevant to their editorial vision. In the following section, I examine Feltrinelli’s editorial project around Third-Worldism, which took different forms from that of Pirelli and Einaudi, but which nevertheless reveals the profound influence that anticolonial theories and practices emanating from the Third World had on Italian intellectual culture: anticolonial revolution had

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52 Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-siècle Radicalism, and The Politics of Friendship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 173.

53 See Scotti, *Vita di Giovanni Pirelli*, p. 143.

a transformative, though under-appreciated impact on European left thought. There were, of course, limits to this influence—but the point here is not so much to decry the obvious shortcomings of Italian Third-Worldism (which was characterized by a strong colour-blindness, among other things), but rather to uncover and valorize a tradition of Italian thought that engaged in a dialogue with, and built on, Third-Worldist ideas.

### Giangiaco­mo Feltrinelli and Tricontinentalism

As discussed above, Pirelli was heavily involved in initiatives showcasing the Algerian cause to the Italian public. In June 1962, soon after Algeria became independent, he helped to set up a large exhibition in Milan entitled 'La nazione Algeria. Mostra di fotografie e documenti sulla lotta di liberazione del popolo algerino' (Nation Algeria: an exhibition of photographs and documents on the liberation struggle of the Algerian people). According to Pirelli's biographer Mariamargherita Scotti, many anti-fascist intellectuals acted as patrons, including the left-wing and fabulously wealthy Milanese editor Giangiacomo Feltrinelli.<sup>54</sup> Despite some supposed disagreements between them, when we examine Feltrinelli's editorial projects around Third-Worldism we discover a remarkably similar intellectual journey to that of Pirelli in terms of his lifetime commitment to anticolonial causes.

Feltrinelli's publishing house, founded in 1955, remains one of the most influential and widely known in Italy even today. Early on, Feltrinelli had conceived of creating a publishing house that combined distribution with editing; the Feltrinelli bookshops quickly became an iconic presence in many Italian cities. Carlo Feltrinelli mentions in his biography of his father that Giangiacomo both founded some bookshops in Milan and also took over some existing bookshops in Pisa, Rome, Milan and Genoa.<sup>55</sup> This holistic approach to book production surely helped to ensure the outstanding success of Feltrinelli Editore over the years. The idea was to create books that were cheap and pocket-size, not elite products, reflecting the progressive views of the

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134. Dr Scotti has also very kindly shared with me the brochure of the exhibition on Algeria which mentions Feltrinelli's name as one of the organizers.

<sup>55</sup> See Feltrinelli, *Senior Service*, p. 95.

publisher. Feltrinelli's business vision was shaped by his interest in internationalist causes, which showed in his editorial choices from the start. One of the first two books he published in 1955 was Jawaharlal Nehru's *Autobiography* (originally published in 1936 by Bodley Head); the other was Langley Russell's *The Scourge of the Swastika: A Short History of Nazi War Crimes* (originally published by Cassell 1954). Both books were linked to the guiding principles behind the founding of the publishing house: a 'consequential and consistent anti-fascism' and the search for a co-existence among different social and political structures that also meant support for self-determination of Third World and postcolonial countries coming to independence in those years (1950s and 1960s).<sup>56</sup>

As was the case with Einaudi, the early years of Feltrinelli's publishing activities participated in the general post-war push to renovate Italian society and culture and were strongly supported by the Italian Communist Party (PCI). Palmiro Togliatti, the Secretary of the PCI, endorsed the founding of Feltrinelli Editore, by taking part in the initial planning discussions in the mid-1950s.<sup>57</sup> Feltrinelli was therefore taking advantage of the changing cultural atmosphere in Italy, the opening to progressive ideas, to internationalism and Third-Worldism.

Like Einaudi, Feltrinelli published several books about the Algerian struggle. These included *Algeria fuorilegge* (Outlaw Algeria, 1956) by Colette and Francis Jeanson, who would head the famous Jeanson network, a group of Europe-based militants sympathetic to and supportive of the Algerian cause (Pirelli was also part of this network and contributed financially to it).<sup>58</sup> Feltrinelli also published a photo-reportage, *Algerini in guerra* (The Algerians at war, 1961) by two French journalists, Dominique Darbois and Philippe Vigneu, with numerous photographs illustrating the struggle of the FLN. The words 'partisan' and 'resistance' recur in all these anticolonial publications and make an explicit reference to the memories of the European anti-fascist resistance: 'Photographs of battles, stories of ambushes, scenes of partisan life that we have already lived through [...] did we really have

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56 Ibid., p. 80.

57 Ibid., p. 81.

58 See Scotti, *Vita di Giovanni Pirelli*, pp. 132–33.

to start again with all of this less than ten years after the end of the war? Was it for this that we fought?'.<sup>59</sup> The 'we' of this remark addresses ex- anti-fascist partisans, registering the consciousness of shared ideals across anti-fascism and anticolonialism. Many prominent Italian ex-partisans (*partigiani*) both theoretically and practically supported the decolonization movements of the 1950s and 1960s. This support had much to do with a disillusionment with the rigid polarities of Cold War ideologies, and a growing sense that the most exciting revolutionaries were coming from outside Europe.

Even more than in Algeria, though, Feltrinelli became extremely involved in the Cuban Revolution. He visited Havana several times, getting close to Fidel Castro, and sponsored several projects, including a planned memoir of Castro; his son Carlo recounts amusing anecdotes of his father visiting Havana, waiting for hours for an audience, and then sharing epic dinners of 'spaghetti alla Fidel Castro' and long discussions with the Cuban leader well into the Caribbean night.<sup>60</sup>

1967 is a key year for tracking the Third-Worldist orientation of the Feltrinelli publications. That year, the publishing house came out with a new, cheap series, called 'Edizioni della Libreria', produced in their Milan bookshop: 'political pamphlets of significant interest [...] These are documents and texts that are necessary for the political formation of militants'.<sup>61</sup> The first pamphlets were about Italy, but then the Third World took centre stage. Feltrinelli began producing a sub-series within the Edizioni della libreria called 'Documenti della rivoluzione dell'America Latina' (Documents of the Latin American Revolution), which published 49 titles and featured classics such as Ernesto Che Guevara's *Two, Three, Many Vietnams* (1967) and Régis Debray's *Rivoluzione nella rivoluzione? (Revolution within a Revolution?, 1967)*, as well as many other texts by Castro, the collected speeches pronounced at the Cultural Congress of Havana in 1968, and the revolutionary Carlos Marighella's works on urban guerrilla war in Brazil.

1967 was also the year that the bi-monthly *Tricontinental* was founded. This extraordinary journal, published out of Havana, was the

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59 Dominique Darbois and Philippe Vigneau, *Gli algerini in guerra* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1961), n.p.

60 See Feltrinelli, *Senior Service*, pp. 297–98.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 277.

official 'media outlet' of OSPAAAL.<sup>62</sup> OSPAAAL was the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, created in 1966 in Havana at the First Tricontinental Conference. It had originated from an earlier organization, the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organization (AAPSO), created at the 1955 Bandung Conference, and marked the extension of AAPSO into the Americas. As Mahler argues, 'the Bandung and Tricontinental moments might be taken as two major cornerstones of Cold War anticolonialisms'.<sup>63</sup> Under the direct sponsorship of revolutionary Cuba, *Tricontinental* proclaimed the birth of tricontinentalism as a 'global revolutionary strategy' that could counteract global imperialism, and it was produced in Spanish, English, French, and Italian (as *Tricontinentale*). Feltrinelli, who was already working with Castro and the revolutionary leadership in Cuba, produced the Italian edition of *Tricontinental* from its first issue in 1967 until issue 23 (March–April 1971), a year before he died (March 1972).<sup>64</sup>

*Tricontinental*, together with the *Tricontinental Bulletin*, were the print products of Cuba's tricontinental strategy, which was designed as a 'third way' for international socialism beyond the Soviet and Chinese blocs. As Young observes, the *Tricontinental* was the first organization to attempt a global revolutionary alliance against imperialism since the early days of the Comintern.<sup>65</sup> But unlike the Comintern, it was not directed by European communists. It merged two separate spheres of 'subaltern struggle', namely Asia and Africa on the one hand, and Latin America on the other.<sup>66</sup> *Tricontinental* did not include any creative writing, but rather political and cultural essays. As the Italian journalist and Third-Worldist militant Saverio Tutino, who also worked for the Italian edition of *Tricontinental*, recalled in his 1968 history of the Cuban revolution, already in 1964 Cubans 'were beginning to present a line that could translate into a global strategy, taking as its point of departure the existence of actual anti-imperialist movements in the Third World'.<sup>67</sup>

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62 See Lucia Moro, 'La *Tricontinental*, una rivista per la rivoluzione' (unpublished MA Dissertation, 2010–2011, University of Padua), p. 5, <http://tesi.cab.unipd.it/36482/1/LUCIA.MORO.pdf>

63 Mahler, *From the Tricontinental*, p. 23.

64 Moro, 'La *Tricontinental*', p. 11.

65 See Young, 'Disseminating the Tricontinental', p. 520.

66 See Mahler, *From the Tricontinental*, p. 27; see also Young, *Postcolonialism*, p. 17.

67 Saverio Tutino, *L'ottobre cubano. Lineamenti di una storia della rivoluzione castrista* (Turin: Einaudi, 1968), p. 381.

Cuba and Algeria were the leaders of this movement, and were urging other under-developed nations to lead the way in the struggle against imperialism. They were proposing a new global unity that would supersede the Cold War bloc: the unity of the three continents of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The 1966 Havana Conference of the OSPAAAL, the Asia, Africa, and Latin America Solidarity Organization, inaugurated the Tricontinental, and as Tutino remarks, 'after the Tricontinental conference, Havana became the capital of the restless, troubled, not yet unified, but active, world of the small countries and peoples in some way oppressed or attacked by imperialism'.<sup>68</sup>

Ernesto Che Guevara could be said to be the ideological architect of Third-Worldist internationalism, with his famous slogan 'two, three, many Vietnams', with which he ended his message directed at the Tricontinental in 1966, though he wasn't present in Havana at the inaugural conference.<sup>69</sup> The tricontinental strategy, in many ways, was a way of re-interpreting globalization 'from below', taking stock of the inter-connectedness of the world economy and the concurrent marginalization of certain groups and populations within it. In a speech published in the fifth issue of *Tricontinental* in 1968, Castro underlined how imperialism touched every continent, not just the so-called Third World. He also deconstructed the term 'under-developed', distinguishing between social and political development on the one hand, and economic development on the other. Speaking on behalf of his fellow Cubans, 'we are not at all offended if they include us among the under-developed countries, because the development of consciousness, our social development, and our general cultural development is becoming the fundamental pre-condition for our economic-industrial development'.<sup>70</sup> This sentiment was also voiced by the German playwright Peter Weiss in his essay, 'The Most Important World of our Era', published in a 1967 issue of the journal. He felt that Cuba, Vietnam, Algeria and North Korea were much more developed than the so-called developed countries, since they had been able to free themselves of the ruling classes of their countries and had 're-established the dignity of man', whereas western nations, which were still based on class differences

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68 *Ibid.*, p. 390.

69 See Young, 'Disseminating the Tricontinental', p. 519.

70 Fidel Castro, 'Discorso di Fidel Castro alla chiusura del congresso culturale dell'Havana', *Tricontinentale*, 2.5 (April–May 1968), p. 33.

and exploitation, were actually under-developed.<sup>71</sup> Mahler notes that the Tricontinental was markedly different from the Bandung principles because it eschewed the development rhetoric and non-violence at the heart of the previous conference's vision, and embraced a commitment to armed resistance.<sup>72</sup>

The journal is an extraordinary collection of internationalist Third-Worldist thought, assembling the writings of the major anticolonial thinkers of the Third World, and of black leaders such as Stokely Carmichael and LeRoi Jones. It included very few pieces by western authors (with the odd exception, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Régis Debray, known intellectual supporters of Third-Worldism). The early issues read like anthologies of non-European revolutionary thought and culture: Frantz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral, Agostinho Neto, Roque Dalton, Carlos Marighella, Fidel Castro, Ho Chi Minh, Ahmed Sékou Touré, Ernesto Che Guevara, are but some of the more famous names of the vast tricontinental canon generated by the journal. Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas's celebrated essay on third cinema, which advocated a culture 'from and for the revolution', was first published in a 1969 issue of *Tricontinental*.<sup>73</sup> Scholarly interpretations vary with regard to the significance of this body of writing. As Young notes, *Tricontinental* established for the first time a syncretic corpus that would provide the theoretical and political foundations of what he calls Marxist postcolonialism.<sup>74</sup> For Mahler, on the other hand, the journal's outputs form the intellectual origins of Global South theory; 'the Tricontinental's more fluid notion of power and resistance is parallel to a shift currently taking place in academic scholarship from postcolonial theory to the Global South'.<sup>75</sup>

As the first issue's editorial declares:

The *Tricontinental* Journal proposes to host the contributions of the most important leaders of the Third World and those of revolutionary intellectuals whose work is intimately linked to the cultural production

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71 Peter Weiss, 'Il mondo più importante della nostra era', *Tricontinentale*, 1.2 (October–November 1967), p. 160.

72 See Mahler, *From the Tricontinental*, p. 74.

73 Octavio Solanas and Fernando Getino, 'Verso un terzo cinema', *Tricontinental*, 3.13–14–15 (July–December 1969), pp. 153–72.

74 See Young, 'Disseminating the Tricontinental', pp. 534–35.

75 Mahler, *From the Tricontinental*, p. 8.

of under-developed countries. The importance of *Tricontinental's* publication lies in the fact that it will serve as a medium for stirring up, dissemination, and exchange of revolutionary experiences, and also for the most noble ideas of men who fight, feel and think in favour of the complete liberation of humanity.<sup>76</sup>

The address to the reader presented *Tricontinental* as a 'tribuna di idee in cui verranno dibattuti i problemi essenziali dei tre continenti' (a platform of ideas on which the essential problems of the three continents will be discussed), and claimed it would allow readers, wherever in the world they were located, to know and understand how the 'man of the Third World' lives, acts, and thinks.<sup>77</sup> It promised to offer both theoretical analysis and praxis. Here, the Third World is more than a physical location; it is a political project that spans most of the globe, and thus the journal addresses a global (though not universal) reader. *Tricontinental* was clearly aiming to produce a global ideological framework for tricontinentalism. Halim's call to reorient cultural dialogue along a South-South axis, and indeed the widespread proliferation of Global South studies, is historically rooted in the intellectual work produced by *Tricontinental* as a platform for global thought inspired by anticolonial revolutions.

The first issue of *Tricontinental* featured Fanon's celebrated obituary for Patrice Lumumba, the Congolese liberation leader assassinated by the Belgian secret police, 'The Death of Lumumba: Could We Do Otherwise?', and a piece by the Black Panthers leader Stokely Carmichael, entitled 'The Third World is Our World'.<sup>78</sup> Carmichael offers a compelling argument for an alliance between African Americans and the people of the Third World, 'because we consider ourselves—and indeed we are—a colony within the United States itself. The same power structure that exploits and oppresses you oppresses us too; it loots our resources in the colony we live in, in the same way that it loots your resources in the external colonies'.<sup>79</sup> Carmichael's extension of the Third World as the space of the oppressed *and* a space for revolution blurs

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76 'Editoriale', *Tricontinentale*, 1.1 (August–September 1967), p. 2.

77 'Al lettore', *ibid.*, p. 3.

78 Fanon's essay was re-published in *Towards the African Revolution* (New York: Grove Books, 1967), pp. 191–97.

79 Stokely Carmichael, 'Il terzo mondo è il nostro mondo', *Tricontinentale*, 1.1 (August–September 1967), p. 17.

geo-political borders between western and so-called under-developed countries.

As mentioned, Feltrinelli edited the Italian version of *Tricontinental* for five years, and the archives of the publisher, located in the Fondazione Feltrinelli in Milan, contain the photocopied and typewritten Spanish versions in foolscap of all the articles that would then be translated in Italian for simultaneous publication. There was a team of translators who worked for the magazine, including Saverio Tutino, Savino D'Amico, Maria Rossi, Ettore Desideri, and others. *Tricontinental* cannily utilized the glamorous appeal of Third World revolutionaries to publicize its covers, and Ernesto Che Guevara's image appeared on many of the issues, thus helping to establishing the popular iconography of Che as a visual symbol of revolution and radicalism. Ho Chi Minh, the Black Panther leaders, and of course Castro himself adorn the pages of the journal. The graphic design of the publication helped to establish its global appeal, thanks to the work of its artistic director, Alfredo Rostgaard.<sup>80</sup>



Fig. 4.4 Cover of *Tricontinental Bulletin*, 25 (April 1968).

<sup>80</sup> See Young, 'Disseminating the Tricontinental', p. 537.

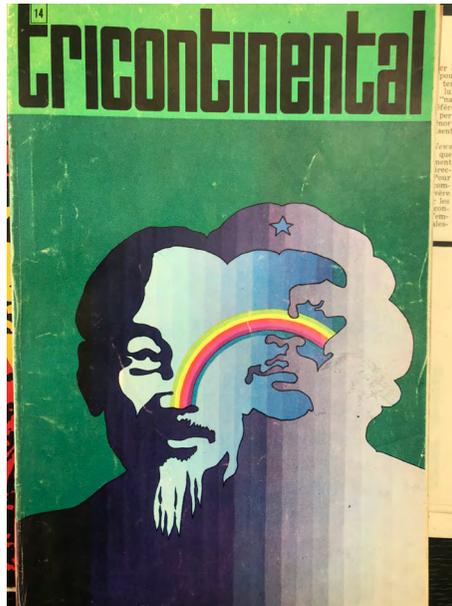


Fig. 4.5 Cover of *Tricontinental*, 14 (September–October 1969).



Fig. 4.6 Satirical advertisement for Air Congo. The caption reads: 'His innocent gaze cannot see the future. The Intercontinental Boeing—the Flying Coffin—has a military version: the Stratford B-52, which drops 10 tons of bombs on Vietnam every day. Today in Vietnam, tomorrow in his country.'  
From *Tricontinental*, 1 (August–September 1967).



Fig. 4.7 Satirical advertisement for Ford. The caption on top reads: 'The United States are looting the Third World and Ford has the best idea'. From *Tricontinentale*, 5 (April–May 1968). The ad points out the various materials that go into the production of a Ford vehicle. Next to each material (iron, steel, aluminium, copper, petrol, rubber), it lists the names of the Third-World countries from where these materials are extracted and the revenue in US dollars generated for the Ford corporation.

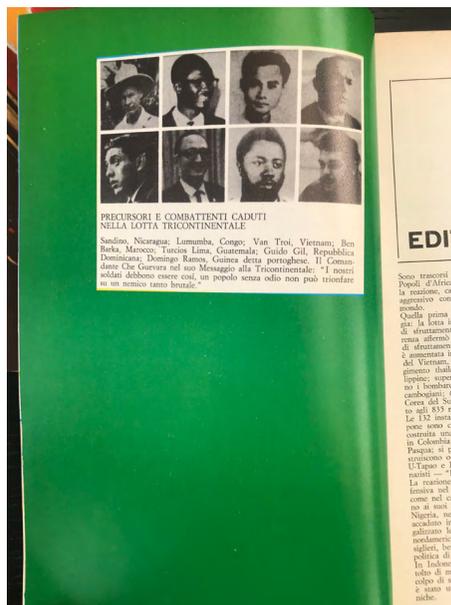


Fig. 4.8 From *Tricontinentale*, n. 3–4, December 1967–March 1968.

The journal carried no advertisements; in their stead, it featured ironic sendups of ads for global companies and corporations, such as the ones for Air Congo and Ford. Throughout, *Tricontinental* endorsed the message that armed struggle was the only way to achieve liberation from imperialism. Issue 3–4 showed had a composite photo on the inside of its front cover showing ‘Combatants and Fallen of the Tricontinental Struggle’, including Lumumba Guevara, and Ben Barka. It was accompanied by a caption listing their names and ending with a quote from Guevara’s message to the Tricontinental Conference: ‘Our soldiers must be like this, a people without hatred cannot triumph against such a brutal enemy’ (see Figure 4.8).

Feltrinelli truly took the Tricontinental message to heart, namely that armed struggle was the only effective way to conduct a revolution, and his subsequent involvement in clandestine radical movements in Italy owes much to his absorption of tricontinental thought. In November 1967, Feltrinelli gave an address to the San Saba association in Rome. According to a report filed by Italian secret police, in this speech Feltrinelli advocated the points made at the Tricontinental Conference in Havana, which promoted armed struggle and ‘Cuban empiricism’ as a better revolutionary method than Soviet-style Marxist political parties. Feltrinelli felt that political guerrilla war was a valuable tool not only for Latin America, but for many capitalist countries as well. Feltrinelli in later life joined the armed struggle political group the Red Brigades, and died in March 1972 while trying to plant a bomb on an electricity pole in the city of Milan, as part of a planned subversive action with his companions.<sup>81</sup>

## Conclusion

I would like to end this account of Italian Third-Worldist publication projects by returning to the question of Third World literature and its audiences. Feltrinelli and Einaudi were actively committed publishers, and their editors and collaborators included many ex-partisans and

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81 See Feltrinelli, *Senior Service*, pp. 422–25. For a detailed account of the mysteries surrounding his death, see Silvia Morosi e Paolo Rastelli, ‘La tragica morte di Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, l’autore Innamorato della Revolucìon’, *Corriere della Sera*, 14 March 2018, <http://pochestorie.corriere.it/2018/03/14/la-misteriosa-morte-di-giangiacomo-feltrinelli-editore-borghese-innamorato-della-revolucion/>

left-wing intellectuals who were instinctively sympathetic to anticolonial movements. However, it remains an open question as to whether political support for decolonization struggles extended to cultural and literary affinities between First World sympathizers and partisans and Third World writers. The decades I have examined in this essay, namely the 1950s up to the early 1970s, show that Einaudi and Feltrinelli published many political writings by African, Asian, and Latin American authors. They also published a few literary and cultural writings from the Global South, mainly Latin American authors, like Gabriel García Marquez (Feltrinelli published the first translation in the world of *A Hundred Years of Solitude* in 1968), though their number was small compared to the Third World political texts they published. Sembène Ousmane's works were not published in book form in Italian until 1978, when the Catholic publisher Jaca Book published his novel *Il Vaglia* (*Money Order*, originally published in French as *Le Mandat* in 1966). As far as can be ascertained from its historical catalogue, despite its extraordinarily progressive list of titles, in the 1960s Feltrinelli only published two African novels, Mongo Beti's *Il re miracolato* (*King Lazarus*) in 1960, and Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard* in 1961.<sup>82</sup>

These absences make us reflect on the so-called limitations of 'Third World literature' as defined through a European aesthetic. It is worth remembering, in this context, the figure of Laura Gonzalez, the great forgotten translator of Fanon and one of his finest and most penetrating interpreters in Italy, who also edited Che Guevara's writings for Einaudi (helpful, she felt, for class struggle in Italy). Gonzalez was a very capable and ideologically sophisticated translator, and was actively involved in frontline left-wing politics and Third-Worldism; she spent a good amount of time in Cuba and knew many Algerian militants of the FLN. Luca Baranelli, her colleague at Einaudi, remembers her as fascinating, extraordinary and refined, with an excellent literary culture and equally versed in French and Spanish. He recalls an episode of her Third-Worldist militancy: when Moïse Kapenda Tshombé, a Congolese politician who had been involved in the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, visited Rome, she threw rotten eggs in his face.<sup>83</sup> In a letter written during the

82 *Feltrinelli 60, 1955–2015: Catalogo storico* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2015), pp. 7, 11.

83 Luca Baranelli 'Sulla Serie Politica Einaudi', Interview by Luca Zanette, *L'ospite ingrato*, 15 November 2007, <http://www.ospiteingrato.unisi.it/sulla-serie-politica-einaudi/>

student occupation of the Faculty of Letters at the University of Rome in 1966, Gonzalez outlined her interest for the Vietnamese and Senegalese fiction she had recently read, shot through with patronizing remarks. Her remarks on Sembène Ousmane recall those of Jameson on 'Third World literature':

The novel *L'Harmattan* is very far from my own interests and tastes, he's a sort of Senegalese Sciascia, if you see what I mean. The African pays his own tribute to realism. Ideologically, Ousmane is Fanonian and the novel is the story about the 1958 referendum in an African country. The world he describes is a world that interests us, like everything that comes from Africa: the feticheurs, polygamy, the revolutionary militants, passionate and filled with crude Marxism, the Muslims, the mission converts, the corrupt African bourgeoisie, the Europeanized intellectual. All in all, a well-constructed fresco, but always too intentional, too explicit, with stock characters, programmatic discussions that aren't always convincing. Moreover, one gets the sense Ousmane is writing to explain to Europeans how things are [in Africa]. With Africans this is always a problem, basically it's our fault if their first forays into the novel are along lines that no longer interest us. But if we continue to publish Sciascia, Cassola, Bassani, etc., why not follow their long and difficult journey and foster some relationships with them (while waiting for some better work), and make a short 'Corallo' [fiction title] which can't be any worse than many others?<sup>84</sup>

Gonzalez knew and sympathized deeply with Third-Worldist perspectives and struggles. And yet her aesthetic sympathies clearly do not lie with Sembene in this passage (nor with acclaimed Italian realist writers such as Leonardo Sciascia, Carlo Cassola and Giorgio Bassani, whom she considers old hat). In many ways, Gonzalez's remarks on the need to 'develop' the literary quality of African literature recall Jameson's comment that 'the 'Third World novel' does not offer the same satisfactions as Proust or Joyce', possibly because of 'its tendency to remind us of outmoded stages of our own First World cultural development and to cause us to conclude that 'they are still writing novels like Dreiser or Sherwood Anderson'.<sup>85</sup> Gonzalez's misreading

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84 Laura Gonzalez, 'Letter' to Guido Davico Bonino, editor at Einaudi, dated 1 May 1966, from the student-occupied Faculty of Letters, University of Rome, Archivio Giulio Einaudi Editore, Corrispondenza con autori e collaboratori italiani, Folder 99, Gonzalez Laura. 25/7/1961-18/12/1980, File 1501, pp. 87-88.

85 Jameson, 'Third-World Literature', p. 65.

of Vietnamese and Senegalese realisms seems due to her confusing 'our' (European) forms of realism with 'theirs', and with the radically different valences in terms of context and reception. The lesson here, and one to be carefully examined through the archival material relating to Third-Worldist debates on aesthetics, is what Jameson cautions us against:

If the purpose of the canon is to restrict our aesthetic sympathies, to develop a range of rich and subtle perceptions which can be exercised only on the occasion of a small but choice body of texts, to discourage us from reading anything else or from reading those things in different ways, then it is humanly impoverishing.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

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# 5. The Meanings, Forms and Exercise of ‘Freedom’

## The Indian PEN and the Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom (1930s–1960s)<sup>1</sup>

Laetitia Zecchini

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*Again and again, that question: to be free. What did it mean?*

Nissim Ezekiel

### Introduction

This chapter focuses on two organizations many Indian and world writers have been associated with over the years: the PEN All-India Centre, founded in 1933 in Bombay as the Indian branch of International PEN (the ‘world association of poets-playwrights-editors-essayists-novelists’ started in London in 1921), and the Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom (ICCF), founded in 1951 in the aftermath of the first Asian conference convened in Bombay by the Congress for Cultural Freedom (an organization established a year earlier in Berlin to put forward ‘a rival ideology to Communism’).<sup>2</sup> Although started in very different contexts, these organizations belong to a similar ideological

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1 This chapter is an output of the “writers and free expression” project, funded by the AHRC. I thank Ranjit Hoskote for facilitating access to the archives of the PEN at Theosophy Hall, Mumbai.

2 Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: New Press, 2013 [1999]), p. 49.

constellation and highlight the need to recover the largely overlooked lineage of liberalism both for anticolonial and post-colonial struggles, and for an understanding of modernisms in India.

The PEN All-India Centre and the ICCF have been largely subsumed under more mainstream narratives of South Asian literary history, decolonization and the Cold War, yet they offer fascinating examples of the interconnectedness of local and international print cultures, and of *particular* histories that were world histories as well.<sup>3</sup> As Indian branches of two international organizations, they both championed internationalism and acted as platforms where specific concerns were articulated and where many Indian writers wrestled with the meanings, the forms and the practice of ‘freedom’.

Drawing on the conference proceedings of these two organizations, on their journals (especially *Quest* and *The Indian PEN*), and on the form of the critical essay through which Indian writers exercised their critical and creative freedom and cultivated their individuality, this chapter attempts to excavate alternative lineages of decolonization, and of struggles for cultural freedom in India which intersected with the anticolonial freedom struggle in the 1930s and 1940s; with a liberalism that was partially defined by the anti-communist cultural front in the 1950s, and with modernist ventures in the 1950s–1960s and beyond. If modernism is an important part of this history, it is in part because the struggles over the implications of the notion of ‘freedom’, which became the central catchword enlisted by the United States to rally against communism, were also struggles over the meanings and forms of ‘modernism’ (turned into a political weapon by the ‘free world’ in a campaign against ‘social realism’). The interplay between the liberal

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3 On the PEN All-India Centre, see Emma Bird, ‘A Platform for Poetry: the PEN All-India Centre and a Bombay Poetry Scene’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 53.1–2 (2017), 207–20, and my ‘Practices, Constructions and Deconstructions of “World Literature” and “Indian Literature” from the PEN All-India Centre to Arvind Krishna Mehrotra’, *Journal of World Literature*, 4.1 (2019), 81–105. There are a few insightful pages on the PEN in Rosemary Marangoly George, *Indian English and the Fiction of a National Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 32–36). The ICCF and *Quest* have been the object of insightful studies by the historian Eric Pullin, but literary scholars have largely ignored the journal. The only exception is Margary Sabin, to whom I am indebted for her remarkable chapter ‘The Politics of Cultural Freedom: India in the 1950s’ in *Dissenters and Mavericks: Writings about India in English, 1765–2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 139–56.

and modernist lineages is perhaps best embodied in a writer like Nissim Ezekiel, modernist Bombay poet par excellence, prolific critic,<sup>4</sup> prominent figure of the PEN All-India Centre and the ICCF, and editor of a constellation of literary and cultural magazines after Independence, including *The Indian PEN* (henceforth *TIP*), and two ICCF-sponsored journals, *Quest* and *Freedom First*.

'Again and again, that question: to be free. What did it mean?', wrote Nissim Ezekiel trying to recollect his state of mind in 1947.<sup>5</sup> Since Ezekiel tirelessly explored the meanings or possibilities of (political, cultural, literary and critical) 'freedom', and championed it against its many (local and international) opponents, I often return to him in the following pages. His question is also the one I want to raise here. Like Ezekiel, who was a strikingly complex voice, weary of 'closed systems' (his words) and predictable alignments, many of the figures I discuss below, whose (at times sinuous) cultural, ideological and political trajectories spanned more than 40 years of a tumultuous Indian political history, are difficult to pigeonhole. Some were anticolonial conservatives, like the founder of the Indian PEN, Sophia Wadia; others were liberal Third-Worldists or ex-Marxists who became anti-communists; freedom fighters who viewed their anti-communism as continuous with their anticolonialism (like Jayaprakash Narayan, Socialist *and* prominent member of the ICCF); or modernists who can barely be defined as experimentalists, like Nissim Ezekiel.

While acknowledging the fluidity of a term that took on many hues, from the Freedom Struggle to the post-colonial period where 'freedom' also became a liberal credo and a modernist anthem, I would like to examine what freedom meant for the writers engaged in the PEN and the ICCF. In his seminal text 'The Essay as Form', Adorno takes advantage of the generic hybridity of the essay (which is both creative and scholarly, in the sense that its form cannot be dissociated from its content) to argue that the essay does not obey the rules of objective discipline, but reflects a 'childlike freedom' in mirroring what is loved and hated.<sup>6</sup> Essayists try out their likes and dislikes, and shy away from the violence

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4 Although considered as a canonical figure of Indian poetry in English, Ezekiel's role as a cultural critic is mostly ignored.

5 'Poetry in the Time of Tempests' (*Times of India*, 1997) in *Nissim Ezekiel Remembered*, ed. by Havovi Anklaseria (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2008), p. 222.

6 Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', *New German Critique*, 32 (1984), 151-71.

of dogma. That's also why Adorno equates the essay, by virtue of being the experimental *and* the critical form par excellence, with the 'critique of ideology'. Many of the essays (understood comprehensively to include editorials and reviews) that I discuss below illustrate this unapologetically subjective, experimental and anti-dogmatic (even anti-ideological) disposition. They not only reflect the variety of the debates that were happening at the time, but offered writers a forum for critical dialogue with other writers and readers; a platform to articulate their concerns, their anxieties, and sometimes their 'uncertain certainties' (to take up the title of a column by Nissim Ezekiel);<sup>7</sup> and a form to exercise their freedom, and tease out its varied meanings.

For the PEN All-India Centre, literature was a means of political independence, and 'freedom' was defined as freedom from colonial servitude. In its publications, political freedom and cultural/literary freedom are seen as inseparable, and the 'forms' of freedom were also the forms of a unified, institutionalized and easily identifiable 'Indian literature'. But what did 'freedom' imply and what forms did it take, once India's Independence had been attained? The question, in the 1950s and 1960s, was a pressing one—both in the immediate post-colonial context marked by widespread disillusionment with the promises of independence, and in a more global context at the height of the Cold War, when the significance and implications of 'freedom' (and the rights over it) were intensely scrutinized and debated, and India, like many other parts of the world, was subjected to the 'competitive courtship' (Margary Sabin) of the United States and the Soviet Union. The Hindi writer Mohan Rakesh could even talk about his country as a chessboard between United States and USSR's ideologists.<sup>8</sup>

A specific illustration of this struggle over the definition, ownership and boundaries of 'freedom' in the 1950s may be useful here. At the inaugural 1951 ICCF conference in Bombay, Denis de Rougemont argued that the only way to defend intellectual freedom and liberty of thought was to become 'vigilant watchmen and guardians of the true meaning of words'.<sup>9</sup> He also recounted a simplistic parable involving

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7 Ezekiel, 'Uncertain Certainties' in *Selected Prose* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 105–38.

8 Sabin, *Dissenters and Mavericks*, p. 139. Also see 'Interview with Mohan Rakesh', *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 9. 2–3 (1973), 15–45.

9 See *Indian Congress for Cultural Freedom Proceedings, March 28–31 1951* (Bombay: Kannada Press for the Indian Congress for Cultural Freedom, 1951), p. 19.

three characters: the 'shepherd' (the United States); the wolf (the Communists), and the 'lamb' (India), who could—providing it did not 'refuse to take sides'—be saved from the predator's appetite. Not only was Rougemont's speech a clear indictment of (India's) neutrality, but it constructed 'freedom' as the property of the liberal West, and claimed the right both to teach the non-West the road to 'freedom' and to define who was free and who wasn't.

Yet, if 'cultural freedom' was no doubt a rallying cry of the CCF and its affiliated organizations, in India it was never limited to an anti-communist or anti-Soviet slogan—nor were Indian writers who participated in some of these liberal ventures mere pawns of the Americans.<sup>10</sup> As the publications of the ICCF demonstrate, not only did many Indian intellectuals refuse to be taught the road to a 'freedom' they had not defined, but they identified many enemies of cultural freedom other than communism. These variously included the neo-imperialism of the 'free world'; the so-called 'indigenous' traditions of inequality and authoritarianism, which the Kannada writer D. V. Gundappa identified in 1945 with an 'enormous mass of social conservatism';<sup>11</sup> dependence on foreign ideologies or models, including aesthetic ones; the regimentation of culture by an over-powering central state, or the absence of a vibrant, plural, even irreverent critical culture, and of publishing spaces where this culture could flourish. Hence, while the Indian PEN emphasized 'unity', many intellectuals affiliated with the ICCF emphasized difference or disagreement.

In his article 'Poetry in the Time of Tempests', Nissim Ezekiel acknowledged that part of the answer to his pressing question (To be free: 'what did it mean?') came to him during the National Emergency (1975–1977) imposed by Indira Gandhi, which taught him that freedom was never to be taken for granted: 'Even in Independent India, we would always have to be on the alert for the insidious ways in which those in power try to suppress the inconvenient voices from the margin, the angry voices of the dispossessed and even the quiet voice of poetry'.<sup>12</sup> Although

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10 A point that, following Peter Coleman, Eric Pullin and Margaret Sabin (as well as Peter Kalliney, in the African context), I make in 'What Filters Through the Curtain: Rethinking Indian Modernisms, Travelling Literatures and Little Magazines in a Cold War Context', *Interventions*, 22.2 (2020), 172–94.

11 *Indian Writers in Council: Proceedings of the First All-India Writers' Conference*, ed. by Srinivas Iyengar (Bombay: PEN All-India Centre, 1947), p. 248.

12 Ezekiel, 'Poetry in the Times of Tempests', p. 222.

both the Emergency and current threats to cultural freedom in India fall outside the scope of this chapter, they nonetheless provide the backdrop against which it must be read. Limits to free speech and censorship are, as I suggest below, important concerns of the two organizations, and some of the struggles for cultural freedom waged from the 1930s up to the 1960s throw light or foreshadow the present struggles by Indian writers and activists to resist the ‘chill on India’s public sphere’.<sup>13</sup> That is also why, following Amanda Anderson, it is indeed possible to reconsider liberalism as ‘a situated response to historical challenges’, such as communism and Nazism in a global context, along with all the other forces of fascism, repression and authoritarianism in India itself, including of course colonialism before independence.<sup>14</sup>

The articulation between politics and literature will be another guiding thread. To a certain extent, the ‘dilemma’ of many of the writers involved in these two organizations was how to liberate forms from ideologies and reconcile political and cultural activism while preserving literature *from* politics, at a time when both ‘literature’ and ‘freedom’ were deeply politicized. This may also be one of the central questions of post-colonial modernisms: restoring the poetics of freedom against ideological or political instrumentalizations, but *without* upholding an ‘illusion of the literary world outside of politics’.<sup>15</sup> In postcolonial India, this could also mean freeing the project and practice of modernism from recuperation by the West, in order to craft forms and idioms one could recognize as one’s ‘own’.

## Literature in the Freedom Struggle: The PEN All-India Centre

Born in the international interwar culture of pacifism, PEN championed the ‘ideal of one humanity living in peace in one world’ and considered

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- 13 See International PEN’s reports on India, including *Fearful Silence: the Chill on India’s Public Sphere* (2016), <https://pen-international.org/defending-free-expression/policy-advocacy/reports>.
- 14 Amanda Anderson, *Bleak Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016, p. 21). While making a case for the complexity of liberalism, Amanda Anderson also argues for its necessary ‘unmooring’ from neoliberalism.
- 15 Words Andrew Rubin uses to define the agenda of the CCF (*Archives of Authority: Empire, Culture and the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 17.

that the unhampered circulation of literature and the promotion of mutual understanding between world writers served the cause of world peace: 'literature knows no frontiers' and must remain 'common currency' in spite of political upheavals, its Charter states.<sup>16</sup> The Indian PEN, whose All-India branch was founded by the Colombian-born Theosophist Sophia Wadia, with Rabindranath Tagore as its first president and Sarojini Naidu and S. Radhakrishnan as vice-presidents, was officially created to bridge divisions between Indian literatures, and between India and the world. 'How many among the litterateurs of different vernaculars know each other?' and 'What does the world know of the work?'<sup>17</sup>—this dual agenda was always translational, with translation promoted both as a means of nation-building and a means of internationalism. Redressing the invisibility of India (and of 'Indian literature') on the world stage was also meant to assert India's eminence *on a par* with other world cultures and literatures. Hence, to the question raised by the title of the editorial ('Why a Pen Club in India?') a defiant rejoinder is provided: 'Why not? Are Indian writers not good enough to take their place in the fellowship of the world's creative minds?'<sup>18</sup>

Although PEN asserted that it stood above state or party politics, it was premised on the agency of literature, both on the international and the 'national' stages, and one of its foremost concerns in the 1920s and 1930s was to prevent another world war: 'The writers of a country wield greater power than its lawmakers [...] our PEN organization is an instrument better fitted to achieve where the League of Nations has failed' claimed Sophia Wadia in a speech delivered on 'PEN's Ideals and Aims'.<sup>19</sup> In a 1940 issue of *TIP* which carried 'Great Indians' Messages' to the International Congress scheduled in Stockholm (and subsequently cancelled by the outbreak of the war), Gandhi called upon writers to 'combine to make war an impossibility' (See Fig. 5.1), while Tagore urged

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16 Pen Charter. Resolution passed at the PEN Congress in 1927: <https://pen-international.org/who-we-are/the-pen-charter>

17 *TIP*, March 1934, p. 1.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 1. See also my 'Practices, Constructions and Deconstructions', for the Indian PEN's claims to equality, reciprocity and a more balanced world order.

19 *TIP*, August 1936, p. 40. Another of Sophia Wadia's idealist editorials proclaims: 'World-leadership must soon pass from the hands of the politician and the legislator to those of the creative writer... The pen can break every weapon of enmity, of hatred, of vanity and of pride, in the home, in society, in the nation and in the international world' (*TIP*, January 1955, p. 1).

writers to transcend national barriers and realize that the 'problems of human freedom [...] which stir in all our lands are at bottom the same'.<sup>20</sup>

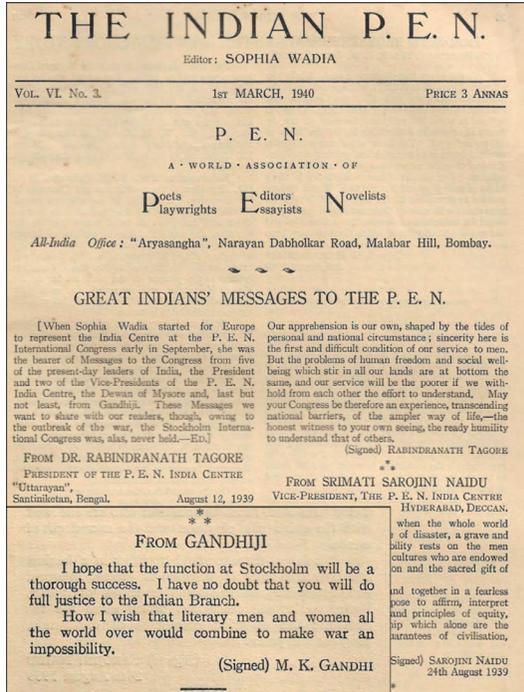


Fig. 5.1 Great Indians Message to the PEN (*TIP*, March 1940). Courtesy of the PEN All-India Centre.

But if the problems of human freedom were the same everywhere, India was obviously waging its own freedom struggle. Anticolonialism was in fact the backdrop for many of PEN's activities in the 1930s and 1940s. Exalting the worth of Indian literature, which was time and again described as the 'mirror' or the 'pulse' of national life, was meant to serve the cause of political independence. Since, in the words of Sophia Wadia herself, 'swaraj' could not be attained through political action alone, writers were called upon as the builders and architects of the nation-to-be.<sup>21</sup> The Indian PEN's first objective was to *establish* an 'Indian literature' that was both recognizable and indivisible. Political freedom, many editorials suggested, could never be granted to a

<sup>20</sup> *TIP*, March 1940, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> *TIP*, August 1936, p. 40.

country that did not speak in a single voice, that was divided, inchoate, or 'inarticulate'. Strong cultural unity was 'a categorical imperative for India if our national aspirations are ever realized'.<sup>22</sup> Several literary forms, genres and programmes were established to articulate these aspirations, and bridge barriers between Indian writers, readers and publics: *The Indian PEN* monthly; the All-India Writers' Conferences organized periodically in different parts of India; the anthologies of translated regional literatures whose forewords written by Sophia Wadia opened with the line 'India's ruling passion is for freedom from foreign domination';<sup>23</sup> projects for an all-India encyclopedia and for an Indian academy of letters (later institutionalized with the founding of the Sahitya Akademi in 1954); and literary awards in India. All these different proposals are seen (and each word is significant) as 'potent forces for the establishment on a firm footing of modern India's claims to eminence'.<sup>24</sup> If the 'Development of the Indian literatures as a Uniting Force' was the theme chosen by the Indian PEN to convene the first All-India Writers' Conference in 1945, 'uniting force' and 'national force' could therefore be used interchangeably: 'In literature everything depends on how much freedom there is to function. [...] Lack of political freedom comes in the way of all progress', proclaimed Jawaharlal Nehru, also one of the vice-presidents of the Indian PEN at the time.<sup>25</sup> And in a telling reference to the French resistance, Mulk Raj Anand acknowledged: 'as intensely as the resistance movement in France [...] we do hunger for and suffer for freedom'.<sup>26</sup> The fight for liberty appeared as worthy—and as imperative—in India, as it did in France under Nazi rule. In the eyes of Mulk Raj Anand, fascist repression and colonial repression commanded the same *resistance*. It

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22 *TIP*, editorial on the 'Unification of Vernacular Cultures', April 1936, p. 19.

23 B.K. Barua, *Assamese Literature* (Bombay: P.E.N. All-India Centre, 1941), p. 1.

24 *TIP*, Editorial, 'Literary Awards for India', March 1936, p. 9. For a discussion of the intertextual fabric of *The Indian PEN*, with its notes, reviews, summaries, and features like 'From Everywhere in India' showcasing the achievements in the country's vernacular literary cultures, see my 'Practices, Constructions and Deconstructions'.

25 *Indian Writers in Council*, p. 41.

26 *Indian Writers in Council*, p. 160. An exhibition of books about the Resistance was arranged in Jaipur, with readings of poems by Louis Aragon (who was initially scheduled to travel to India), including 'Ballade de celui qui chanta sous les supplices', published under pseudonym in 1943 as a tribute to a tortured communist resistant.

is a parallel he had actually drawn with uncompromising vigour in an influential earlier essay on 'The Progressive Writers' Movement' (1939) of which he was a foundational member:

We, the writers of India, know how the forces of repression and censorship have thwarted the development of a great modern tradition in the literatures of our country; we saw the ugly face of Fascism [...] earlier than the writers of the European countries, for it was British Imperialism which perfected the method of the concentration camp, torture and bombing for police purposes which Hitler, Mussolini and the Japanese militarists have used so effectively later on.<sup>27</sup>

The Progressive Writers' Association, which was the only other pan-Indian writers' organization at the time, championed a much 'more revolutionary ideology in all spheres'<sup>28</sup> than Wadia's organization, and attacked the spiritualism, idealism and elitism of culture and literature—which are inescapable features of the Indian PEN.<sup>29</sup> The PWA was founded in the aftermath of the storm created by the collection *Angare* (banned for obscenity in 1933) by a group of writers who refused to 'submit to gagging', and challenging literary censorship (both from colonial authorities and religious conservatives) was an explicit part of its agenda.<sup>30</sup> Yet, if the PEN was a more conservative organization in terms of class, caste, and literary and political sensibility<sup>31</sup> (social justice, for instance, was never one of its concerns), the two writers' collectives shared prominent members (such as Mulk Raj Anand, Premchand, Ahmed Ali and even Agyeya who was briefly associated

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27 *Marxist Cultural Movement in India: Chronicles and Documents (1936–1947)*, ed. by Sudhi Pradhan (Calcutta: National Book Agency, 1979), p. 17.

28 Mulk Raj Anand, 'On the Progressive Writers' Movement' in *Marxist Cultural Movement*, p. 3.

29 On the exclusive and hierarchical nature of the Indian PEN, see Zecchini, 'Practices'. The language of the All-India PEN Center in the 1930s and 1940s, was inflected by Sophia Wadia's close association with Theosophy (she and her husband B.P. Wadia founded the Bombay branch of the United Lodge of Theosophists in 1929).

30 *Angare*, lit. *Burning Coals*, was a collection of short stories written in Urdu by Ahmed Ali, Sajjad Zaheer, Rashid Jehan and Mahmuduzzafar. 'In Defense of *Angare*, Shall we Submit to Gagging' is the title of a statement drafted by Mahmuduzzafar in *The Leader* (Allahabad) in 1933.

31 If Ahmed Ali's championed a 'literature brutal even in its ruggedness, without embellishments' (cited in *Marxist Cultural Movement*, p. 82), many of the editorials of *TIP* in the 1930s and 1940s deplore the 'licence' of modern literature ('trashy' and 'filthy' are recurrent terms to define that writing: precisely the terms that were used to ban *Angare*).

with the PWA in the 1930s and 1940s) and also significant objectives.<sup>32</sup> Like the PEN, the PWA stressed the fundamental role of literature in furthering the cause of Indian freedom, and envisaged itself as a pan-Indian organization that aimed at the unification of the country with a strong translational agenda and international(ist) outlook. Redressing the asymmetric recognition of nations and literatures on the world stage and the denigration of non-Western cultures were also paramount concerns for both organizations. And although Sophia Wadia's speech at the International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture held in Paris (and largely supported by the Soviet Union) in 1935 was criticized by PWA founder, Sajjad Zaheer, for what he considered to be its reactionary undertones and its 'Hinduization' of India,<sup>33</sup> it was suffused by the rhetoric of anticolonialism.

PEN's anticolonialism, however, was always sustained by ideals of cosmopolitanism and universality. Take for example an editorial like 'the PEN Stands for Free Speech' (see Fig. 5.2), in which the Indian PEN registered its protest against the British government's sentencing of Nehru to four years of imprisonment in impassioned and personal terms, while also incisively highlighting the hypocrisy of an organization that upheld the ideal of Free Speech internationally, but stayed silent to the encroachments of Liberty (by PEN members) in non-Western parts of the world. Curbing the freedom of those who, like Nehru, were both fighting Hitlerism *and* 'fighting their own battles of Liberty' injured the 'cause of Liberty' and the 'Principle of Freedom': 'And who can blame those who point to such unfair action as being a species of Hitlerism?'<sup>34</sup> By re-asserting at the outset that 'the P.E.N. is entirely non-political', the editorial was careful to show that its protest was not motivated by contingent or particular considerations, and should not be interpreted as taking sides in a political, East versus West, or even colonial versus anticolonial battle. In other words, local struggles are not waged in the name of 'sex and age, of race and creed, of cultural backgrounds and

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32 The PWA is cited as one of the affiliated organizations of the 1945 All-India Writers conference in Jaipur.

33 Carlo Coppola, in his otherwise groundbreaking book, is dismissive of Sophia Wadia, whose 'Indianness' acquired by 'marriage rather than by heritage' he also questions (*Urdu Poetry, 1935–1970, The Progressive Episode*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 101).

34 *TIP*, December 1940, p. 157.

political leanings',<sup>35</sup> but are variants of world struggles. This explains why the Indian PEN often correlated India's freedom struggle with the war against Hitlerism and fascist tyranny in the 1930s and 1940s.

'The weakening of Liberty in one place weakens it in every corner of the world' could, in many ways, represent the motto of an organization which asserted India's independence as much as its *interdependence*, stood for a freedom based 'on the oneness of humanity',<sup>36</sup> and claimed that 'Cosmopolitan and Liberal Internationalism [was] the only salvation for mankind'.<sup>37</sup>

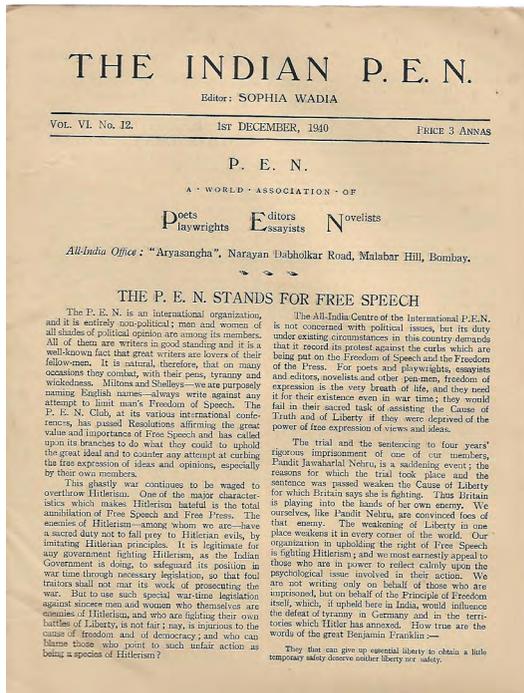


Fig. 5.2 'The PEN Stands for Free Speech' (*TIP*, December 1940). Courtesy of the PEN All-India Centre.

35 *TIP*, June 1937, p. 46.

36 *Ibid.*

37 *TIP*, August 1936, p. 41.

## (Cultural) Freedom in the Cold War, the Indian PEN and the ICCF

This 'oneness' was severely tested during the Cold War, when the proximity of the Indian PEN and the ICCF also showed that the 'Principle of Freedom' was not free from ideological struggles. The ICCF and the Indian PEN regularly collaborated, and many writers belonged to both organizations. Sophia Wadia and Nissim Ezekiel, for instance, were at the same time foundational figures of the PEN and prominent members of the ICCF. Ezekiel, who was the first editor of *Quest*, started getting involved in the Indian PEN in the early 1950s and became its secretary for more than 30 years, while Sophia Wadia was a signatory of the 'Sponsor's Appeal' and a delegate to the 1951 CCF Bombay Conference aimed at bringing together Indian intellectuals in 'their joint resolve to uphold and extend the liberties they have inherited or created'.<sup>38</sup>

Within minutes of his 'welcome address' at the same conference Minoo Masani referred to International PEN as 'the organisation of the *writers of the free world*', thereby conflating, in one sweeping formula, International PEN with anti-communism, and by the same token jeopardizing PEN's supposed apolitical or supra-political stance:

This (totalitarian) threat is not one that is confined in India but is universal and at its recent Congress in Edinburgh, the International PEN — the organisation of the writers of the free world — went on record "for liberty of expression throughout the world and viewed with apprehension the continual attempts to encroach upon that liberty in the name of social security and international strategy".<sup>39</sup>

International PEN, however, had never been the organization of the writers of *the free world*—but the organization of world writers committed to uphold freedom of expression. The nuance, of course, was crucial, though clearly difficult to maintain at the time.<sup>40</sup> This was apparent in

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<sup>38</sup> *ICCF Proceedings*, p. 284.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> As Megan Doherty suggested, it is precisely because of PEN's championing of the a-politicality of literature, that the organization could be manipulated by the CIA which deployed the idea of artistic 'autonomy' as a token of ideological independence, and anti-totalitarianism; © Megan Doherty, "A Guardian to Literature and its Cousins: The Early Politics of the PEN", *Nederlandse Letterkunde* 16 (2011), 132–51; see also Giles Scott-Smith, *The Politics of Apolitical Culture* (London: Routledge, 2002).

1955 when the then President of International PEN Charles Morgan gave a speech entitled 'The Dilemma of Writers' at the International PEN Congress in Vienna. The 'dilemma' of an organization like the PEN was how to reconcile the two principles on which it was founded: on the one hand, PEN was *not* a political assembly and did not engage in state or party politics, and on the other hand, it pledged to 'oppose any form of suppression of freedom of expression'.<sup>41</sup> Although International PEN had tirelessly sought to bring together writers from opposite sides of the curtain, Morgan concluded that writers who are 'refugees from tyranny' were entitled to PEN's protection, while writers who are 'instruments of tyranny' were not. Centres in totalitarian countries, including a prospective Soviet Centre, could not be admitted within the PEN.<sup>42</sup> This was interpreted by the Communists as proof that PEN had chosen its side.

In India, it would indeed be difficult to claim that it had not.<sup>43</sup> Although it was not surprising for *The Indian PEN* to advertise activities of the ICCF—after all, the journal was supposed to act as an echo chamber of world literary news and a 'clearing-house for news of literary developments in all of the country's language areas'—,<sup>44</sup> the proximity between both organizations was remarkable. Not only did the two journals cross-advertise their respective events and publications, but they explicitly displayed their shared understanding of the notion of 'freedom', and of the attacks to which it was subjected. Pages of *TIP* regularly assert that both PEN and the Congress stand for liberty of expression; the new monthly bulletin of the ICCF, *Freedom First*, is defined as a 'new advocate of freedom',<sup>45</sup> engaged in the 'global struggle' against enemies of 'free men' (See Fig. 5.3), and *Quest* is called a 'sister journal':<sup>46</sup>

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41 Words of the PEN Charter, op. cit.

42 *TIP*, February 1956, p. 39.

43 The PEN All-India Centre in fact received funds from organizations like the anti-communist 'Asia Foundation', created in 1951. The Indian PEN and USIS (the overseas service of the United State Information Agency) also regularly collaborated. When news of CIA involvement in the CCF and other cultural organizations became known, *TIP* published Arthur Carver's 'Categorical Disclaimer' to dispel 'false rumours' of CIA sources augmenting International PEN's income (September 1967, p. 262).

44 *TIP*, Editorial 'A Cooperative Enterprise', February 1937, p. 9.

45 *TIP*, July 1952, p. 100.

46 *TIP*, September 1955, p. 305.

*Freedom First* (127 Mahatma Gandhi Road, Bombay 1) is the monthly bulletin of the Indian Committee for Cultural Freedom, which is affiliated to the World Movement for Cultural Freedom. Its aim is to uphold culture which "has generally been spelled in terms of broadening of freedom and deepening of responsibility." Today the free man is in danger. That he has always been, but now the danger has attained, it seems, almost global dimensions. Therefore, he should be strengthened in spirit as well as in mind if the Damocles sword is not to hang over his head perpetually. Accordingly, *Freedom First* will help him in this direction. A hearty welcome, indeed,

to this new advocate of freedom—a value of life which is above all parties and prejudices. The annual subscription is Rs. 3/- (India), one dollar or seven shillings (foreign), post free.

Fig. 5.3 *The Indian PEN on Freedom First* (TIP, September 1955). Courtesy of the PEN All-India Centre.

The Indian PEN Centre and the ICCF also held joint meetings and passed joint resolutions. A non-exhaustive list of events co-organized and/or co-sponsored in the 1950s and early 1960s includes: a public meeting in Bombay to protest against a new copyright bill that encroached on the rights of authors (1956); a four-day seminar on 'Trends in Post-Independence Literature' in Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati, and Urdu (1958); a public meeting that led to a common resolution recording their deep sorrow at the persecution and the death of Pasternak (remembered both as a great writer, and as 'a valiant fighter for human freedom', see Fig. 5.4), as well as a meeting around Stephen Spender's visit to Bombay where he gave a talk on *The God that Failed* (1960); a joint scheme to raise funds for the relief of writers afflicted by floods in Poona (1961); a resolution condemning the Chinese invasion of India 'as an attack on human freedom and world democracy' (1962); a joint appeal on the invasion of Czech territory by the Soviet Union (1963).

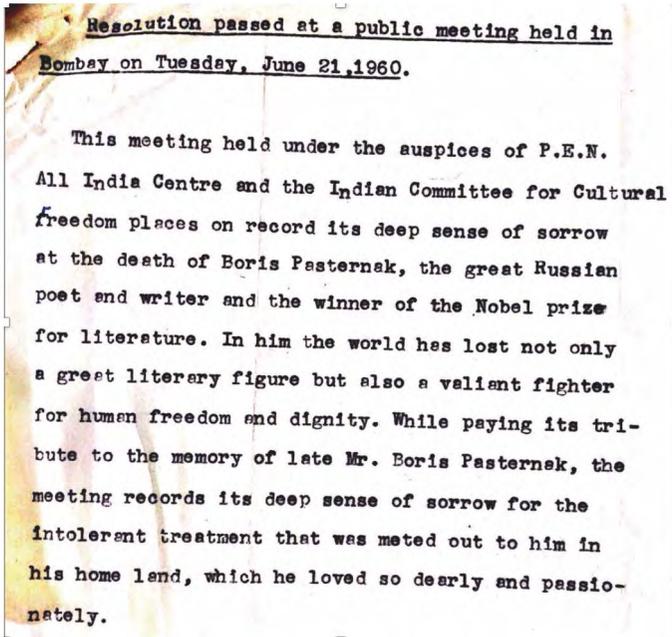


Fig. 5.4 The Indian PEN papers, Theosophy Hall.

Before discussing the different meanings and forms taken by these struggles for cultural/literary freedom in the essays of various ICCF publications, let us recall that for the CCF, and as briefly suggested above, 'cultural freedom' was synonymous with anti-communism.<sup>47</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s, both blocs were engaged in 'pressing the fight' and in devising a vast 'arsenal of cultural weapons' (in Saunders' phrase).<sup>48</sup> Out of this arsenal, the Congress, which was indirectly (and covertly) funded by the CIA through a network of foundations (such as the Ford, Farfield and Asia Foundations), had a key role, and one of its most influential 'weapons' was the magazines it sponsored, such as *Quest*.

'There is no neutral corner in Freedom's room' was one of the famous catch-phrases of the inaugural 1950 Berlin Congress.<sup>49</sup> A similar

47 Although it is important to keep in mind that various agendas and strains coexisted within the CCF. Many CCF liberals, for instance, were as opposed to communism as they were to capitalism, or (in the US) to McCarthyism.

48 *Pressing the Fight: Print, Propaganda and the Cold War*, ed. by Greg Barnhisel and Katherine Turner (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010).

49 Cited in Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe* (New York: Free Press, 1989), p. 29.

profession of faith was reproduced in the first issue of *Quest*, which opens with an insert about the CCF: 'Considering moral neutrality in the face of the totalitarian threat to be a betrayal of mankind, the Congress opposes "thought control" wherever it appears'.<sup>50</sup> The CCF is described as an unofficial 'association of free men bound together by *their devotion to the cause of freedom*' (italics mine). Most Indian writers associated with the ICCF would no doubt have recognized themselves in parts of the 'Freedom Manifesto' drafted by Arthur Koestler in 1950, which asserted that intellectual freedom is one of the 'inalienable rights of man', and also defined freedom as both 'the right to say no' and the right to express opinions which differ from those of rulers.<sup>51</sup>

Like organizations in other parts of the world connected to the liberal constellation, in India the ICCF was founded by left-wing anti-communists, but their struggle for 'cultural freedom' had other genealogies than the Cold War. The first genealogy, common to the Indian PEN, was the freedom struggle (see above). Many co-founders of the ICCF were towering intellectual figures who had not only embraced Socialism or Communism in their youth but had taken a prominent part in the Quit India Movement. Without arguing for a smooth continuity between anticolonialism and anti-communism, it is important to keep in mind that Jayaprakash Narayan (who had been tortured by the British, and later became a prominent political opponent of Nehru—and Indira Gandhi), Mino Masani and K. M. Munshi all placed their struggle for 'cultural freedom' in the 1950s in the same lineage as their earlier freedom struggle against the British Raj.

As a few scholars have recently argued, it is necessary to recover the anti-totalitarian (both anti-imperialist and anti-communist) lineage of liberalism for Third World struggles. Roland Burke, for instance, claims that the 'variegated ideological texture' of the Third World has been washed away by more obvious narratives of Non-Alignment and anticolonialism associated with the Afro-Asian movement and what he calls the 'mythology of Bandung'.<sup>52</sup> By discussing a series of conferences hosted by the CCF in Rangoon, Rhodes and Ibadan in the 1950s, he

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50 *Quest* (August 1955), n. p.

51 The 'Freedom Manifesto' is reprinted in Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy*, pp. 249–51.

52 Roland Burke, "'Real Problems to Discuss": The Congress for Cultural Freedom's Asian and African Expeditions 1951–59', *Journal of World History*, 27.1 (2016), 53–85.

foregrounds a ‘Third-Worldism’ that was shaped by Asian and African intellectuals with an aversion to concentrated power. Poised ‘between imperial and postcolonial authoritarianisms’, these ‘Cold War liberals’ voiced their concern for individuals rather than states, and focused on the universality of experience, more than on racial — or even Third World—specificity.<sup>53</sup> In Burke’s definition of the CCF’s Asian and African members, I would indeed recognize the position of many of the Indian writers examined in this essay: ‘Weary of extremity in all its species, be it nativist reaction, messianic nationalism, or bureaucratic and technocratic statism, the variegated collection of participants were generally unified in a kind of urgent insistence on caution and care in navigating the threats to freedom’.<sup>54</sup>

Anti-imperialism, then, wasn’t only a prerogative of the World Peace Congress, the Communist bloc, or the Afro-Asian Writers’ Association at the time. If, as Patrick Iber has argued, the CCF mostly ‘focused on the totalitarian continuities between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union’,<sup>55</sup> many members of the ICCF and other Asian and African branches of the Congress stressed the totalitarian continuities between colonialism and communism.<sup>56</sup>

What’s more, although anti-communism was certainly on the agenda of the inaugural ICCF conference in Bombay, it wasn’t the priority of many Indian participants whose struggles for cultural freedom also took other forms.<sup>57</sup> The huge poster featuring words attributed to Gandhi that was placed behind the podium of the opening session could sum up the spirit of the meeting: ‘I want the winds of all cultures to blow freely about my house. But not to be swept off my feet by any’. Several

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53 A point Peter Kalliney also makes about the 1962 Makerere African Writers Conference (‘Modernism, African Literature and the Cold War,’ *Modern Language Quarterly*, 76.3 (2015), 333–68). Also see *Democracy in the New States: The Rhodes Seminar Papers*, ed. by Prabhakar Padhye, Edward Shils, and Bertrand de Jouvenel (New Delhi: Congress for Cultural Freedom, 1959).

54 ‘Real Problems’, p. 58.

55 Patrick Iber, *Neither Peace nor Freedom: The Cultural Cold War in Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), pp. 2–3.

56 At the CCF Rangoon Conference in 1955, this continuity suffused many speeches. See *Cultural Freedom in Asia*, ed. by Herbert Passin (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1956).

57 See Burke, ‘Real Problems’; Peter Coleman, *The Liberal Conspiracy*; Eric Pullin ‘Money does not make any Difference to the Opinions that we Hold: India, the CIA and the Congress for Cultural Freedom, 1951–58’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 26.2–3 (2011), 377–98.

writers stubbornly flaunted their refusal to partition the globe between the 'enslaved world' and 'the free world' (where, precisely, 'varying degrees of freedom and slavery' in fact intermingled, in Narayan's words); or the splitting of writers into 'clear-cut camps' (in the words of Buddhadeva Bose); or again the 'false choice' between 'peace' and 'freedom' (Agyeya).<sup>58</sup> In a sense, many also used this platform to stage their independence, their own quests and struggles for freedom—while also connecting them to world struggles. Several resolutions were passed, including on Soviet slave-labour camps and on racial discrimination, while the last resolution emphatically condemned the suppression of cultural freedom 'by either totalitarianisms of the Left or reactionaries of the Right'.<sup>59</sup>

'Freedom', to various writers at the time and certainly to many participants of the Bombay conference, often meant freedom from Cold War alignment; freedom from the weaponization of literature reduced to 'militant propaganda';<sup>60</sup> and also freedom to build their lives/worlds/words in their 'own quiet way', to quote from Buddhadeva Bose's poignant declaration: 'refusing to be terrified [...] we in India try to build our lives in our own quiet way instead of modelling ourselves on any of the great world powers, who are now the hope and terror of other nations'.<sup>61</sup>

In his chairman's address, Jayaprakash Narayan not only castigated the 'narrow, sectarian and oppressive' aspects of Indian culture (and the immensity of the task ahead to achieve 'cultural freedom') but highlighted the hypocrisy of the 'free world', and of the British in particular, for whom the fight against fascism during World War II had meant turning India into a 'concentration camp'. In a gesture reminiscent of Mulk Raj Anand, and Sophia Wadia before him, Narayan argued that the British were no better than their totalitarian (fascist and communist) counterparts:

Why should the world, or rather the free world, as it is called be divided between the shepherds and the lambs? And what does the fight mean to the lambs? Let us concede that the lambs have been protected. What

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58 *ICCF Proceedings*, p. 63.

59 *Ibid.*, p. 64.

60 Mulk Raj Anand, 'East-West Dialogue' in *Indian Writers in Conference*, ed. by Nissim Ezekiel (Bombay: PEN All-India Centre, 1962), p. 114.

61 *ICCF Proceedings*, p. 162.

happens then? The shepherd comes one day with his shears and the lambs are shorn of their wool. And finally, the shepherd appears with his knife, and who will protect the lamb? In the circumstances you cannot blame the lamb if he does not enthuse over his protectors. There is a great deal of talk today of the conflict between totalitarianism and freedom. During the last war there was a great deal of talk of similar conflict between fascism and democracy. Mr. Churchill had then invited the Indian people to take part in that "war for democracy". [...] India had said then [...] that she would not fight for democracy when she herself was enchained in slavery. And for that answer "democracy" did not hesitate to shut up Mahatma Gandhi in prison and turn the whole country into a concentration camp. Is the situation different today? [...] Over a hundred million Negroes of Africa and millions of Arabs are being ruled today by the free nations of the world: Britain, France, Spain, Portugal. What does the fight against totalitarianism mean to these millions of people? [...] If at the end of the impending 'anti-totalitarian' war, the world picture remained essentially unchanged, i.e. of a world divided between the weak and the strong, the prosperous and the abjectly poor [...] the war would have been fought in vain.<sup>62</sup>

'Democracy' and 'freedom', 'anti-fascism' and 'anti-totalitarianism' are turned on their heads or exposed for what they truly amount to: 'mere talk' that leaves millions of Africans, Asians and Arabs in subordination. Narayan's speech, which called for the overturning of a world order that sees the 'big nations', the 'strong' and powerful, continue to use, enslave and rule over the 'small' and weak, foreshadows in many ways some of the declarations and positions later taken in Bandung, and then Tashkent. This may be another way to understand Elizabeth Holt's argument that the would-be radical gesture of *Lotus*, the trilingual journal of the Afro-Asian Writers' Association founded in 1967, 'borrows more than a few pages' from projects already initiated by the CIA's covertly funded CCF.<sup>63</sup> The difference however, was that Jayaprakash Narayan seemed less concerned by a specific 'Third World' solidarity, than by the vision and project of a 'world community', in which (as the end of his speech suggested), the big nations 'willingly share their power, prosperity and

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62 Ibid., pp. 37–38.

63 Holt, Elizabeth, 'Cairo and the Cultural Cold War for Afro-Asia' in *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties*, ed. by Jian Chen et al. (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 480–93.

knowledge with the small'.<sup>64</sup> Ideals of the 'oneness of humanity' and of 'world community' (even 'world federalism') were largely shared, as suggested above, by the Indian PEN, and they also help understand the intellectual kinship between the ICCF and the Indian PEN.

With respect to *Lotus*, Hala Halim argues that if the journal was founded in 1968 (a year after the role of the CIA in the CCF was exposed) to counter cultural imperialism, its partial funding from the Soviet Union attests to the degree that 'Non-Alignment was *inevitably undermined* by the Cold War configuration'.<sup>65</sup> Yet gauging to what extent these publishing and intellectual ventures (whatever the 'side' which sponsored them) were *undermined* by the Cold War configuration, seems far less relevant than understanding how they were constitutive of this complex—and far from manichean—configuration. First, because, as Jayaprakash Narayan declared, varying degrees of alignment and non-alignment, just like freedom and slavery, intermingled in all these ventures. Second, because, as I will continue to argue below, for many postcolonial intellectuals these ventures were often also *enabling*. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that if we want to retain the language of compromise, the journals that belonged to the transnational galaxy of the anti-communist CCF, and were sometimes ignorant recipients of CIA money, were perhaps no less and (crucially) no more undermined than those identified with the communist bloc.

It is hence difficult to agree with critics like Andrew Rubin when he declares that journals such as *Preuves*, *Encounter* or *Quest* 'reinforced the formidable structures of cultural domination', or prevented the emergence of dissenting discourse.<sup>66</sup> True, there was a certain cooptation of dissent, and of modernism, which Greg Barnhisel described as being purged of its radicalism by its Cold War institutionalization. As poet and critic Adil Jussawalla wrote of curtain-filtered or state-sanctioned literature, 'what filters through the curtain is only fit for the international shit-pot'.<sup>67</sup> True as well, the formidable publishing artillery that exported

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64 *ICCF Proceedings*, p. 38.

65 Hala Halim, 'Lotus, the Afro-Asian Nexus, and Global South Comparatism', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 32:3 (2012), 563–83, italics mine.

66 Rubin, *Archives*, p. 51.

67 Greg Barnhisel writes that 'the Cold War defanged the radicalism of early modernism' (*Cold War Modernists*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015, p.

knowledge and books to India, and ensured the publication of foreign writers (such as George Orwell, William Faulkner, Czeslaw Milosz, or Auden), contributed less to sustain local book industries and publishing infrastructures.<sup>68</sup>

Yet, Indian modernisms were crucially nurtured by the transnational and translational traffics also *made possible* by the Cold War.<sup>69</sup> What's more, the institutional cooptation of culture that could be seen as the continuation of colonial processes of cultural imperialism in postcolonial contexts often triggered, in reaction, a quest for self-determination and for unofficial literatures or countercultures. Finally, as I argue below, if *Quest* was officially a CCF mouthpiece and published a wealth of foreign intellectuals mostly belonging to its galaxy (Arthur Koestler, Paul Tabori, Denis de Rougemont, Edward Shils, Raymond Aron, Stephen Spender, etc.), it also published some of the most important Indian writers and critics of the time (in English and in translation) who often used its pages to articulate their own concerns and hone their creative, critical, and polemical skills.

## Cultural Criticism as an Exercise in Freedom

*'Cultural regression links up to political reaction'*

Nissim Ezekiel

In an essay initially published in 1963, Nissim Ezekiel made a case for writers to act as a pressure group for freedom. Since, however, an agreement as to what freedom means cannot be taken for granted, he argued, it is essential for writers to debate it frequently among themselves. Ezekiel also made a plea 'for a persistent debate of this kind' which 'clears the ground for action against censorship in all its forms'.<sup>70</sup> In many ways, these words capture the tone of Ezekiel's essays, and the agenda of several of the journals he edited: clearing the ground for

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36). I quote extensively from Adil Jussawalla's article ('Boys and Girls in Purdah', published in a student magazine in 1972) in 'What Filters Through'.

68 Philip Altbach, *Publishing in India, An Analysis* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975); Sarah Brouillette, 'UNESCO and the Book in the Developing World', *Representations* (2014), 33–54.

69 Zecchini, 'What Filters Through'.

70 Nissim Ezekiel, 'Censorship and the Writer' in *Nissim Ezekiel Remembered*, p. 213.

debate, for dissensus, and for (political, cultural and literary) pluralism as an antidote to forces of conformism and repression.

Culture, according to Ezekiel, is 'a complex of problems'—not a 'personal acquisition' or a 'formal doctrine or ritual'.<sup>71</sup> In *Quest*, whose first sub-title was 'a bi-monthly of Arts & Ideas', and which sought, as its first editorial article made clear, 'vigorously written articles of a provocative nature',<sup>72</sup> many Indian writers in effect gave voice to their 'problems' with various ideas, authors or art forms. Among the regular features of the journal were book, film, art and theatre reviews, as well as long 'review articles' and a feature called 'Discussion', where specific ideas were debated, often over the course of several issues, through two opposite opinions (for instance 'For and Against Abstract Art' in the Spring 1963 issue). The objective was to create the conditions for freedom—freedom to argue, to question, to doubt, to disagree—to thrive in India; and for cultural or critical independence, both to fulfil the political independence achieved less than ten years earlier, and to prevent the future suppression of freedom.

'We shall continue to deserve the rulers we have until a ferment of ideas displaces the co-existence of ideologies', Ezekiel wrote in another illuminating editorial in which he complained about the deep-rooted acquiescence in the acts of authority and a 'lethargic' respect for it, which he thought explained the absence of an organized political opposition.<sup>73</sup> In his essay 'Ten Years of Nehru: A Minority Report', J. S. Saxena (ICCF member and frequent contributor to *Quest*) likewise emphasized the need for dissenting thought and the importance of cultivating a pluralist conception of power, while painting a scathing portrait of a megalomaniac Nehru, surrounded by 'yes-men', and whose vision had hardened into a creed with 'apostles and renegades': 'the prime-minister has swallowed the thinker: the party-machine has tamed, if not

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71 Nissim Ezekiel, 'Some Problems of Modern Indian Culture' (*New Quest*, July–August 1981), *Selected Prose*, pp. 74–76.

72 'Editorial', *Quest* 1, August 1955, np. The first issues of *Quest* published attacks on consensual national beliefs such as the Bhoodan movement or Gandhism. Starting in 1971, *Quest* published a regular 'Comment' feature signed under pseudonym (D., later revealed to be the English-Marathi modernist writer—and member of the ICCF executive committee—Dilip Chitre) which fulfilled that provocative aim, lampooning with savage irony and wit all the cultural and political 'holy cows' and hypocrisies of the day.

73 'Editorial', *Quest*, February–March 1957, p. 9.

broken, the rebel and the democrat'.<sup>74</sup> Of course, this indictment of 'the rulers we have', and many of *Quest's* virulent attacks on the Congress, on Nehru in the 1950s and 1960s, and later on Indira Gandhi, must be contextualized within the disenchantment (or 'moh-bhang' in Hindi) of the 1950s. The feeling that India's official freedom from the British was in fact 'an untrue freedom'<sup>75</sup> was shared across ideological divides, and *Quest* was not alone at the time in challenging Nehruvian state-planning ideology and the stronghold of New Delhi, nor in voicing concerns over the betrayed promises of Independence or over the First Amendment to the Indian Constitution (1951), supported by Nehru, which restricted press freedom.<sup>76</sup>

'What exactly do we mean when we call a society free?', Ezekiel's essays tirelessly returned to that question:

A non-communist society such as the Indian does not automatically qualify for the label free. In fact [...] there is a constant need to explore the conditions in which it exists. We must probe, doubt, question, question, question. As soon as freedom is taken for granted, it is already diminished. Before freedom is destroyed a state of mind must be popular to which freedom does not matter. [...] Some other value is more important — the welfare of all, security, a national emergency [...] there may be more censorship in India during the years to come and it will not be an accident.<sup>77</sup>

In this *Quest* editorial, which also criticized the practice of preventive detention without trial, Ezekiel again emphasized the need to debate the conditions, meanings and implications of freedom, and asserted the experimental and uncertain vocation of criticism ('we must probe, doubt, question, question'). This relentless need was mirrored by a personal, self-reflexive style that did not iron out repetitions and modal expressions.

Twenty years later, another editorial (published just before the journal had to shut down during the Emergency) declared that dissent needed to 'be deliberately nursed, not muzzled and driven

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74 'Ten Years of Nehru: A Minority Report', *Quest*, July–September 1959, p. 48.

75 See Aakriti Mandhvani, 'Sarita and the 1950s Hindi Middlebrow Reader', *Modern South Asian Studies*, 53.6 (2019), 1797–1815.

76 Devika Sethi, 'Press Censorship in India in the 1950s', NMML Occasional Paper, New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 2015, p. 22.

77 *Quest*, April–May 1956, pp. 3–4, emphases added.

underground (as anti-social or inspired by forces bent on harming the nation)'.<sup>78</sup> To many writers and intellectuals, the right to *differ* seemed as imperative as cultural unity was to the Indian PEN in the years leading to Independence. Hence Ezekiel's championing of the writer as someone able to struggle 'against the processes by which a nation is made to conform',<sup>79</sup> or at least to question prevailing ideological, cultural and even formal orthodoxies—the 'streamlined beliefs'<sup>80</sup> that could in turn be those of communism or Nehruvianism, religious orthodoxy and ideological alignment, or simply intellectual conformism and literary uniformity.

Ezekiel's plural conception of power matched his plural conception of the literary and cultural field. Since the lack of literary and cultural pluralism could pave the way for the suppression of 'inconvenient' and 'angry', but also marginal and 'quiet', voices to take up Ezekiel's words again, many of the journals with which he was involved also gave space to different or marginalized forms of Indian writing at the time (Indian writing in English, modern Indian poetry, 'new' or modernist voices, translations, etc.), and to divergent ideas or various literatures (in English, together with other Indian languages). Long reviews or review-articles were also meant, as suggested above, to give form to a diversity of 'vigorously written' opinions.

## Liberalism, Modernism and the Primacy of the Individual Voice

*The origin of the new is always the individual*

Nissim Ezekiel

Unlike the PEN All-India Centre, which received government money and was close to the leaders of Indian independence (Nehru, Radhakrishnan, Sarojini Naidu, Zakir Husain, etc.), many intellectuals affiliated with the ICCF understood freedom—in accordance with the liberal credo—as the antithesis of state control. An article written by Ionesco and reprinted in *Quest* under the title 'Culture is not an Affair of State' sums up the

<sup>78</sup> *Quest*, March–April 1976, p. 7.

<sup>79</sup> Ezekiel, 'Censorship and the Writer', p. 212.

<sup>80</sup> Expression used by J. S. Saxena (*ICCF Proceedings*, p. 170).

spirit of this liberal outlook. The essay criticized the drive, on the part of governments but also organizations such as UNESCO, and even PEN, to prescribe rules for writers and artists. According to Ionesco, the only duty of a Minister for Cultural Affairs was that of a 'poet-gardener': making sure that thousands of different flowers grow while defending endangered herbs, because the 'deep instinctive biological imperialism' that inhabits plants *and* nations encourages them to suffocate the space belonging to others. No voice must ever be reduced to silence.<sup>81</sup> The essay ends with a Dada-like gesture that Tristan Tzara would not have disowned: 'When I hear men of State, politicians, international diplomats [...] speak of culture, I want to take out my revolver.'<sup>82</sup>

In Ionesco's case, his outspoken anti-communism explains his virulent anti-statism. If anti-communism similarly colored the anti-statism of many Indian writers affiliated with the ICCF ('socialist realism' is described in an article reprinted in *Quest* from *Soviet Survey*, as the 'wheels' and 'screws' of the great machine of State),<sup>83</sup> yet I would argue that this anti-statism is only one of the forms taken by their aversion to different kinds of 'thought-control'. These writers constantly object to culture or literature being made subservient to an authority or an ideology (whether statist, religious, national, or nationalist), to individual voices being diluted in the 'mass' or choked by the 'strident voices' of cultural regimentation and authoritarianism.<sup>84</sup> Art and individuality must not surrender to what J. S. Saxena also called the 'stentorian voice': 'only a totalitarian society tends to produce a monolithic individual elite, structurally centralized, speaking with a stentorian voice to the whole of society'.<sup>85</sup> Against this monolithic, stentorian or strident voice, Ezekiel and *Quest* promoted those 'myriads of little truths' and voices that humiliate 'the Truth',<sup>86</sup> and cultivated

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81 This is of course the liberal motto par excellence. See Mills' famous phrase from *On Liberty*: 'If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if had the power, in silencing mankind' (quoted in the February 2009, *Freedom First* 500<sup>th</sup> birthday issue, p. 13)

82 Ionesco, 'Culture is not an Affair of State', *Quest*, Nov.–Dec. 1974, 27–31. This article had appeared a few months earlier in *Le Figaro Littéraire*.

83 'Anonymous, 'Socialist Realism', *Quest*, October–December 1959, p. 54,

84 Expressions taken from *Freedom First*'s editorial, June 1952, 1–2.

85 Jyotishwarup Saxena, *Modern Essays* (Allahabad: Chaitanya Publishing House, 1960).

86 Ezekiel, 'Uncertain Certainties', p. 114. These myriads of 'truths' were in a sense also represented by the countless book reviews published in these journals.

doubt, ambivalence and obliqueness. 'If your certainties lack the flavor of uncertainty, the restraining power of doubt, you become a murderer in the realm of ideas', Ezekiel wrote in the beautiful essay-column tellingly entitled 'Uncertain Certainties' that he periodically published in *Fulcrum* during the Emergency.<sup>87</sup> And against these voices of power that claim to speak to the *whole* of society, writers and intellectuals affiliated with the 'liberal' constellation favoured small collectives, associations, fraternities and micro-communities,<sup>88</sup> which both the Indian PEN and the ICCF represented, to a certain extent. To get creative and critical work done, Ezekiel suggested again, we have to 'fall back on small groups and individuals. [...] In cultural affairs any colossal attempt at cultural development often fails'.<sup>89</sup>

The primacy of the individual, and of the (defiant) singular voice leads us to the question of modernism. When Nissim Ezekiel writes that 'the origin of the new is always the individual', he is, in many ways, providing a possible definition for both liberalism and modernism.<sup>90</sup> 'Modernism', as briefly suggested at the beginning of this chapter, was transformed into a Cold War cultural-diplomatic weapon by the 'free world'. The CCF and its journals promoted modernism because its so-called autonomy and abstraction, its presumed emphasis on form, style or the 'medium' itself, rather than on content or ideology, were seen as a bulwark against totalitarianism and a symbol of Western artists' freedom.<sup>91</sup> Modernism and the avant-garde were in turn targeted by the Union of Soviet Writers for being decadent, bourgeois, and solipsistic. At the first Soviet Writers' Congress held in Moscow in 1934, where Andrei Zhdanov endorsed 'socialist realism' as the official line of Communist writers, Karl Radek outlined a mutually exclusive

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87 Ibid., p. 106.

88 Also see Edward Shils, principal adviser for the CCF in India, who praised seminars hosted by the CCF like the one in Rhodes, for constituting 'small group(s) of outstanding minds' that lived together for several days 'in an atmosphere of friendship' (*Democracy in the New States*, p. 56).

89 Ezekiel, 'Art and Literature in Emerging India' in *Sameeksha, a quarterly of arts and ideas*, 'Indian Literature' number ed. by M Govindan and AN Nambiar, December 1965, pp. 54–58.

90 Ezekiel, 'Uncertain Certainties', p. 133.

91 See particularly Barnhisel, *Cold War Modernists*. As suggested above, and as Giles Scott-Smith (in *The Politics of Apolitical Culture*) among other scholars, makes clear, the idea of artistic autonomy and the championing of a literature of radical individuality were themselves an ideology.

alternative: 'James Joyce or Socialist Realism' (italics mine). Epitomized by James Joyce, modernist experimentalism was seen as the literature of a dying capitalism, whose 'triviality of content' was matched by 'triviality of form'.<sup>92</sup>

As I have highlighted elsewhere, the Cold War hence undeniably sharpened the debate between the 'politics of art' and its autonomy, between 'socialist realism' and experimentalism, between poetic vocation versus social relevance, and between 'the culture of the masses' and the radical individuality of artists.<sup>93</sup> These issues were hotly debated in Indian journals in the 1950s and 1960s as well. Yet, in the case of India the struggle of many writers and artists at the time seemed also about freeing their voices from such exclusive alternatives; freeing the notion of 'freedom', as it were, from both ideological *and* nationalist cooptation; and freeing the notion of modernism from ownership by the 'West'. Remember Mulk Raj Anand's call to free literature from the 'militant propaganda' to which the Cold War had reduced it. Many writers, whatever the 'side' they were apparently on, refused to let literature be cut to shreds by the scissors of ideology.<sup>94</sup> That is also how we must read Ezekiel's insistence on examining literature with literary standards rather than political ones, or for instance his contempt at the 'hysteria' of western critics who had 'extravagantly praised' a book such *Not by Bread Alone* by V. Dutintsev, only because it gave an unfavourable picture of the Soviet Union.<sup>95</sup>

The struggles over *Dr. Zhivago* at the time need to be read in this context. Pasternak was championed by the 'free world' for his 'a-political' art and heralded as a martyr of Communist persecution,

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92 Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/radek1934/sovietwritercongress.htm#s7>

93 The CCF in particular promoted this idea of literary autonomy throughout the world; see Justin Quinn, *Between Two Fires, Transnationalism and Cold War Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), and Peter Kalliney 'Modernism, African literature, and the Cold War', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 76.3 (2015), 333–68. Kalliney also shows that the idea of modernist autonomy was particularly attractive to postcolonial intellectuals in Anglophone Africa, who 'repurposed' it to declare their freedom from colonial bondage, from the new postcolonial state, and from Cold War binaries.

94 Though of course, as suggested above, and as Giles Scott-Smith (in *The Politics of Apolitical Culture*) among other scholars, makes clear, the idea of artistic autonomy and the championing of a literature of radical individuality was itself an ideology.

95 Ezekiel, *Quest*, Feb.–March 1958, 57.

while the Soviets accused him of 'pathological' individualism and of concealing his anti-communism behind claims to artistic autonomy. Ezekiel argued that *Dr. Zhivago* was not a political novel but a great love story, while Buddhadeva Bose paid tribute to Pasternak for 'making love the business of poets' again. By declaring his reverence 'for the miracle of a woman's hands' and his lifelong devotion to 'back, shoulders, neck', Bose argued, Pasternak had re-asserted 'man's sacred right to become and remain an individual'.<sup>96</sup> To Alexei Surkov (then Secretary of the Soviet Writers Union), who had claimed that it was crucial for writers to be of the *same* opinion, Bose offered a remarkable rejoinder. When that happens, there can be millions of printed words, but no literature: 'from the Russia of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Pasternak, comes anew the message that "salvation lies not in loyalty to forms and uniforms, but in throwing them away"'.<sup>97</sup>

## Modernism's 'Freedom Struggles': Finding One's Voice

*Freedom... consists in making meanings for yourself*

J. S. Saxena

*We breathe for ourselves, not for the age we live in*

Arvind Krishna Mehrotra

Modernism in India was also, I would argue, about the 'displacement of ideologies' through the ferment (or 'throwing away') of forms. This explains Yashodhara Dalmia's claim that the powerful individualistic possibilities of modernism could be considered a betrayal in India, where cultural nationalism was virtually required of writers and artists during the struggle against colonial rule and in the two decades following independence. The autonomy and the individuality of the artist were everything *but* a given. Asserting both was one of modernists' struggles in India.

96 'Zhivago's Poems: A Note on Boris Pasternak' in *Boris Pasternak*, ed. by K. K. Sinha (Calcutta: Congress for Cultural Freedom, 1958), pp. 8–9.

97 'Boris Pasternak: Book Review', *An Acre of Green Grass and other English Writings of Buddhadeva Bose*, ed. by Rosinka Chaudhuri (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 326–30.

The painter Gulammohammed Sheikh remembers the ‘scent of freedom, promised by the winds of the “modern” blowing in the air’ in the 1950s, and his generation’s hunger for ‘*untrammelled* visual terrains’ (italics mine).<sup>98</sup> The ‘blasting’ of academic traditions, which is an inescapable signature of the avant-garde, was also about short-circuiting ideologies, and cultural nationalism. The painter F. N. Souza states this well in a 1949 essay about the evolution of the Progressive Artists Group: ‘we have hanged all the chauvinist ideas and the leftists’ fanaticism we had incorporated in our manifesto [...] Today we paint with absolute freedom for content and techniques almost anarchic’.<sup>99</sup>

Admittedly, a journal like *Quest* was *not* at the forefront of this experimentalism, unlike the more radical, short-lived, anti-commercial and anti-establishment ‘little magazines’ in English, Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali and other languages in the 1950s–70s which were the privileged medium of the avantgarde,<sup>100</sup> or the ‘little magazine’ of Paulo Horta’s chapter in this volume. However, *Quest* and many other journals with which Ezekiel was associated welcomed some of these more experimentalist texts, perhaps because, as Adil Jussawalla puts it, Ezekiel was *also* one of the first Indian poets to show that ‘craftsmanship is as important to a poem as its subject matter’.<sup>101</sup> Arun Kolatkar’s first English published poems for instance appeared in the inaugural issue of *Quest*, and Arvind Krishna Mehrotra’s *Howl*-affiliated sequence ‘Bharatmata’ (‘which was everything that Nissim’s poetry was not’<sup>102</sup>) came out in *Poetry India*, another of Ezekiel’s magazines, in 1967.

At least during Ezekiel’s editorship, then, the intellectual and creative agenda of *Quest*—oppositional, and open to marginal or inconvenient voices—participated in the idiom and project of modernism. In fact, *Quest* did become a vehicle of literary modernism from the 1950s

98 ‘Mulk and Marg’, Gulammohammed Sheikh, in *Mulk Raj Anand, Shaping the Indian Modern*, ed. by Annapurna Garimella (Mumbai: Marg Publications, 2005), pp. 50–51.

99 Yashodhara Dalmia, *The Making of Modern Indian Art: The Progressives* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 43.

100 On these radical Indian little magazines, see the double special issue of ‘The Worlds of Bombay Poetry,’ ed. by Anjali Nerlekar and Laetitia Zecchini, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 53.1–3 (2017).

101 Adil Jussawalla, quoted by Saleem Peeradina, ‘Introduction’, *Quest*, January–February 1972, p. xiv.

102 Laetitia Zecchini, ‘We were like Cartographers, Mapping the City: An Interview with Arvind Krishna Mehrotra’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 53.1–2 (2017), p. 198.

onwards by publishing creative texts from a wealth of budding or more established contemporary voices belonging to the different literary cultures of India, among whom Asha Bhende, Gieve Patel, Mulk Raj Anand, Kamala Das, Buddhadeva Bose, Krishna Baldev Vaid, Arun Kolatkar, Indira Sant, Amrita Pritam, Jibananda Das, P. S. Rege, A. K. Ramanujan, Eunice de Souza, Agha Shahid Ali, Adil Jussawalla, Agyeya, Dom Moraes, Subhash Mukhopadhyay, Saleem Peeradina, Kersy Katrak, Keki Daruwalla, Georges Keyt, Gauri Deshpande, Farrukh Dhondy, Anita Desai, Kamleshwar, U. R. Ananthamurthy, Kiran Nagarkar, Keki Daruwalla, Dilip Chitre, and so on.

If *Quest* pressed for evaluating art and literature through literary standards, it also aimed at raising the standards of writing and style, of criticism, and of translation. In the editorial of an issue of *TIP* on 'the problem of translation', which he guest-edited, Ezekiel asserted that if translating between Indian languages and into and from English was an urgent task, the difficulty for Indians to use English *creatively* made it all the more problematic. Turning English in India, which is so often 'flat, unevocative, if not altogether dead', into a contemporary, 'live, changing language', and also into a vehicle of modernism, was obviously one of the main objectives of Ezekiel, and of many of the journals he edited.<sup>103</sup> This concern was shared by Adil Jussawalla in 'Boys and Girls in Purdah', where he equated the 'curtain' through which literatures are filtered (and castrated) to the 'purdah' of a very 'correct' English language, from which there seemed to be no escape but into what he called 'Little Englands and Little Americas'.<sup>104</sup> A lot of Indian writers who write in English are 'students who write or housewives who write' rather than writers with a sense of vocation, Jussawalla argued. Because of the dreadful trivialization of the English language, he called for the 'living acid' of the contemporary Indian writer to *wrestle* with the curtain, and tear holes in it.

Many of these texts epitomize the struggle of a generation of writers to find an idiom and a modernism *of one's own*, so to speak—connected to world voices and modernisms but also, crucially, *distinct*. 'True

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103 'The translator is incapable of using English creatively as a live, changing language. What he produces is a literal photograph of the original, flat, unevocative, if not altogether dead', 'Editorial', *TIP*, April 1955, pp. 101–02.

104 Jussawalla, 'Boys and Girls in Purdah', *Campus Times* (1972), n.p.

modernism is freedom of mind, not slavery of taste. It is independence of thought and action, not tutelage under European masters', Tagore had said, and Ezekiel often quoted him approvingly.<sup>105</sup> As I have tried to argue here, this struggle has a long lineage, and is, in many ways, shared by the more radical or experimental 'little magazine' writers mentioned above.<sup>106</sup> If this struggle may have been more acute for writers writing in English, or in English and another Indian language, it was a widely shared one. The 'curse of belatedness' (in Dipesh Chakrabarty's words) or of influence, inauthenticity and mimicry that has plagued non-western or postcolonial modernisms was another prominent 'freedom struggle' to wage after Independence, both in India (where modernism was often perceived as an offspring of the West) and in or vis-à-vis the West (where many Indian modernists were told to go back to their 'folk' or classical art).<sup>107</sup>

J. S. Saxena's essay published in *Quest*, 'The Coffee-Brown Boy looks at the Black Boy', for example, revolves around the struggle to resist imitation, and to reclaim ideas, feelings and forms that had not first been framed or voiced by others (and in the process tamed or trivialized). Focused on 'the links that bind' Indians and black Americans, connected by their common effort to resist the compulsion of 'catching up' with the West and discard abstractions about themselves, Saxena's essay gives this struggle a painful, enraged, and often self-sabotaging tone.<sup>108</sup>

How can 'coffee-brown' and 'black boys' stop writing, thinking, even feeling *like*? How do you break free from the pressure to *model yourself* on the images and the aspirations of others? How do you stop trying to return to where you never came from? What struggles and imaginaries

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105 Ezekiel, 'Some Problems', p. 81.

106 See for instance, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra's manifests in *damn you, a magazine of the arts*: 'we breathe for ourselves, not for the age we live in' (*damn you* 6, 1968, n.p.)

107 Following Geeta Kapur's and Partha Mitter's ground-breaking work, I have challenged such (Eurocentric) paradigms, but this does not mean that the anxiety of 'belatedness' or mimicry was not, at times, felt acutely.

108 J. S. Saxena, 'The Coffee-Brown Boy Looks at the Black Boy', *Quest*, April-June 1970, 60-70. Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's *Lotus* Prize acceptance speech in Kazakhstan in 1973, called 'The Links that Bind Us', refer borrowed from E. W. Dubois's speech 'The Ties that Bind' at the 1958 Tashkent conference: Dubois referred to the ties between Africans and African Americans; Ngũgĩ to those between Africa and Asia (Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, 'In Chekhov's House: The Writings of *Petals of Blood*' in *The East Was Read, Socialist Culture in the Third World*, ed. by Vijay Prashad (Delhi: Leftword, 2019). Saxena provided another twist.

can brown and black 'boys' reclaim as their 'own', when even the language of struggle and freedom has been coined or devised *for* (not *by*) them: 'Even when we talk of Indianisation and negritude, we are White Liberals draped in black or coffee-brown skin'. Saxena's essay is suffused by forms of guilt, shame, and self-hatred that also prove his argument. The compulsion to imitate breeds monsters—like the United States and the Soviet Union which, he argues, succeeded so well in catching up with Europe that they 'have become the most frightening monsters Man has ever known'.<sup>109</sup>

Like many of his other texts, Saxena's essay is saturated with a dizzying number of quotations and references to Western writers and philosophers, which also expose the difficulty of articulating one's own voice. 'Imprisoned in other people's metaphors', the 'Indian' is described as a scatter of attributes, a dust-bin for the debris and fictions (the words?) of others. In a striking image, 'a lot of gaping holes tied with the White Man's string':

The zest with which the status symbols of Europe and America are imbibed and assimilated, honed up, refurbished, renovated in the race for catching up cannot [...] cover up the nullity and boredom of the coffee-brown boy's existence. Miming is not living. [...] How do we stop being somebody else's image? [...] Freedom does not lie in searching for meanings in the debris of your own life which someone else has hidden for you to find. It consists in making meanings for yourself, in improvising [...] a set of resonances you can really call your own<sup>110</sup>

Yet in the culture of the 'black man' Saxena recognized the possibility of an alternative—for instance in the 'pure logic of refusal' of blues and jazz. Its practitioners, he argued, represent a permanent reserve of misfits condemned to 'perpetual minority'. Yet, they can claim an art which is really theirs, and which does not turn away from a brutal reality. Compared to the tameness of the coffee-brown Indian boy's idiom and rage, which 'crumble up' into 'parish-pump dissertations and home-made Indian lies', jazz and blues—but also the 'fragmentary beat' of a prose writer like James Baldwin, who makes inventive ('cubic' is another word Saxena uses) use of the English language—*give form*

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109 Saxena, 'The Coffee-Brown Boy', p. 64.

110 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

to the black man's traumatic experience of oppression and alienation. This is the central struggle articulated in Saxena's essay: finding forms and idioms to express the Indian writer's protest, his freedom and his survival.

## Conclusion

By discussing the history of the Indian PEN and the ICCF through the creative and critical spaces they cleared, and through the 'critical form' of the essay (Adorno), I have tried to argue for a connected history of decolonization, the Cold War, and modernism. By examining the varied meanings that many writers of the time gave to their 'freedom struggles' across forms and ideologies, I have also tried to restore the political and cultural significance of these two relatively neglected organizations connected by a shared liberal ethos. Struggles for literary/cultural freedom and for political freedom were absolutely inseparable, and these writers were in different ways carving out spaces/voices of self-determination and freedom that were also spaces/voices of Non-Alignment.

Nissim Ezekiel epitomized the struggle of his generation of writers—poised not only between colonial and postcolonial authoritarianisms, to borrow Burke's words again, but also between individual and collective freedom; between the quest for a voice of one's own and a shared idiom; between poetics as the invention of a subjectivity (in and through language) and politics as a form of collective practice; and between the withdrawal or solitude that sustains the creativity of a writer and the 'tempests' of history. That is also the 'dilemma of writers' that has haunted an organization like PEN: preserving literature from political alignment, as a condition of independence, while also struggling against the 'ugly face of Fascism' (in Mulk Raj Anand's words), that threatens the freedom, and survival, of writers, intellectuals and artists in India today.

Ezekiel's words in 1956 that 'there may be more censorship in years to come' (quoted above) were, in many ways, prophetic of the Emergency, which gave Indira Gandhi authority to lead by decree, suspended civil liberties and constitutional rights, and resulted in censorship of the press and the imprisonment of political opponents. His quests and

struggles, as well as the resistance of journals like *Freedom First* and *Quest* during the Emergency, and the opposition of leading ICCF figures such as Narayan and Masani to Indira Gandhi,<sup>111</sup> show that 'cultural freedom' was not just an extraneous, geopolitical or doctrinal Cold War issue in India after independence. The cultivation of a literary and critical culture; the defense, exercise and 'probing' of cultural freedom, as a prerequisite for other kinds of freedom, were a condition of India's survival, or at least its survival as a democracy. That is also how we must understand Ezekiel's luminous statement that 'cultural regression links up to political reaction'.<sup>112</sup>

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111 *Freedom First* was one of the very few journals that fought pre-censorship laws in court during the Emergency, while *Quest* eventually stopped publication in protest. In these two journals recurring threats to free speech and attacks to free press in India were in fact recorded with increasing urgency, especially from the early 1970s onwards. It is also important to note that the Indian PEN passed a resolution opposing the Emergency in very strong terms.

112 Ezekiel, 'Some Problems', p. 74.

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# 6. Moroccan Intellectuals Between Decolonization and the Arab Cold War

## Abdallah Laroui's Critical and Literary Writing

*Karima Laachir*

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The Arab Cold War of the 1950s and 1960s can be understood primarily as an ideological rivalry between Arab countries. It pitted republican against monarchical regimes as they sought to develop and promote competing visions of Arab nationalism within a shared Arab frame of reference.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the Arab Cold War can be linked to geopolitical and global factors, and to regional dynamics that include the competition of interests between the Soviet Union, Great Britain, France, and the then newly rising American power. Notwithstanding the fact that most Arab countries were part of the Non-Aligned Movement, the broader Cold War polarization came to be mapped onto the region in a crude manner, with the United States supportive of Saudi-led monarchies and the Soviet Union backing the Nasserist-led Arab republics. However, we should not see the Arab Cold War as merely a reflection of the larger Cold War rivalry between the two competing blocs, but instead recognize that it had a particular Arab dimension in which perceptions of state and society were a significant

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1 Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958–1970* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

factor. The Arab monarchies—including the Gulf States, Morocco and Jordan—were less radical in their support of pan-Arabism; they insisted on the sovereignty of Arab states, and pursued the idea of interstate solidarity and cooperation. Conversely, the Arab socialist republics—including Egypt, Syria, and Iraq—were keener on the idea of a common ‘Arab nation’ whose interests were seen to supersede that of individual Arab states; their goal was to form a single Arab nation-state.<sup>2</sup>

While states engaged in a battle of hearts and minds to win the Arab publics to their particular vision of the Arab nation—with Egypt gaining the upper hand in the 1950s and 1960s—intellectuals and writers also had a part to play in critiquing these struggles and in establishing alternative possibilities of nationhood and Arab identity. How did Arab intellectuals of the time defy top-down pan-Arabism? This was the problem of the era, which played out against the backdrop of decolonization and the attempt to liberate the newly independent and/or newly established Arab nations from the burden of colonial legacies. I argue that while state-dominated understandings of pan-Arabism were caught in the vicissitudes of the Arab Cold War and eventually crumbled under the weight of competing ideologies, figures such as the celebrated Moroccan intellectual Abdallah Laroui (b. 1933) were able to harness their critical *and* fictional writing towards generating a bottom-up pan-Arabism that continues to speak in very particular ways to regional politics and to notions of shared Arab identity.

The turn to writing literary texts, including novels, by Arab intellectuals was a response to the oppressive environment they found themselves in during the Arab Cold War and reflected their inability to openly express their disillusionment. Novels offered the opportunity to turn scathing attention on the state via criticism of societal norms and values. Reading Laroui’s literary and critical works together, I propose, can shed important light on his decolonial aesthetics and politics, and provide insights into how he perceived the unfinished project of decolonization as being aimed at both imperial hegemony and the internal exclusions of ethno-nationalism.

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2 Michael N. Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

## Revisiting Decolonization During the Arab Cold War

The 1950s and 1960s were marked by an emerging revolutionary spirit in Asia and Africa and a strong desire to decolonize the societies and cultures of the newly independent nations. The Bandung Conference held in Indonesia in 1955 marked the beginning of an era, as it brought together representatives of nations from Asia and Africa who confirmed their commitment to decolonization and opposition to the bi-polar world order of the Cold War. It was a stance of South-South solidarity from countries in Asia and Africa against Western domination and neo-colonialism; it was followed by a series of interrelated conferences, events, and movements that formed part of the project of self-determination and independence.<sup>3</sup>

Egypt's charismatic leader of the time, Jamal Abdel Nasser, was perceived as one of the foremost figures of this anti-imperialist movement. He rose to prominence after the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956, which had made him hugely popular in the Arab world and configured him as the champion of decolonization and the leader of the pan-Arab socialist revolutions.<sup>4</sup> Nasser used the policy of secondment of Egyptian teachers to other parts of the Arab world (not only to Morocco but also, in great numbers, to Algeria, Libya, Sudan, and the Gulf Arab states) as an ideological tool to export the Egyptian socialist revolution and to promote pan-Arabism, with Egypt at the centre of it.<sup>5</sup> Soft power was hugely important to this project. The distribution of Egyptian newspapers abroad as well as radio broadcasts such as *The Voice of the Arabs* were utilized by Nasser to draw Arab populations directly to his cause. Print media and radio emerging from Cairo at the time spoke directly to millions of Arabs in the region and promoted the idea of pan-Arab solidarity and socialist union; they drew heavily on Egyptian cultural icons, such as the singer Umm Kulthum, to weigh in on and promote a radical perception of pan-Arabism that was both cultural and political.

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3 Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007).

4 Joel Gordon, *Nasser's Blessed Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Elie Podeh and Onn Winckler, eds, *Rethinking Nasserism: Revolution and Historical Memory in Modern Egypt* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004).

5 Gerasimos Tsourapas, 'Nasser's Educators and Agitators across *al Watan al-'Arabi*: Tracing the Foreign Policy Importance of Egyptian Regional Migration, 1952–1967', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 43.3 (2016), 324–41.

Cairo in the 1950s was a hub of cultural and political creativity; 'a defiant city [...] ready to take on the First World with rhetoric and guns'.<sup>6</sup> In his memoir, *Mithl Sayf Lan Yatakarrar (Like a Summer Never to be Repeated)*, Moroccan critic and novelist Mohamed Berrada reflects on his five-year stint in Cairo in the early 1950s and argues that these years were pivotal to his intellectual formation.<sup>7</sup> Cairo at the time was the centre of new literary movements within the Arab world, and Berrada describes meeting there many of the greatest living Arab writers, poets, and novelists, including Najib Mahfouz (Egyptian), Mikhail Naimy (or Nuaima, Lebanese), Mahmoud Messadi (Tunisian), Youssef Idriss (Egyptian), Suhail Idriss (Lebanese), and Salah Jahin (Egyptian). The city provided a space for fierce debate at a moment in which literature and literary criticism intersected with politics, against the backdrop of flourishing optimism about the Nasserist socialist revolution.

A wealth of Arabic literary journals, such as *Al-Adab* (Literature), founded in 1952 by the Lebanese writer Suhail Idriss; *Al-Shi'r* (Poetry), founded in 1958 by the Syrian-Lebanese poet Yusuf Al-Khal; *Mawāqif* (Positions), founded in 1968 by the Syrian poet Adonis; and *Gallery 68*, founded by the Egyptian writer Edwar al-Kharrat, connected Cairo with Beirut, Damascus, Baghdad, Paris, and London in a way that suggested a moment of anticolonial or decolonizing consciousness. It hinted at a new Nahda, or awakening, in Arab critical thought; a Nahda that was linked (like the one in the nineteenth century) to the question of translation and the encounter with 'other' cultures.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1960s Cairo also became home to the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization with its Permanent Bureau of Afro-Asian Writers, whose establishment in 1968 of *Lotus: Afro-Asian Writings*, the trilingual quarterly journal in Arabic, French, and English, was an important intellectual endeavour that represented a specific South-South aesthetic and spoke to the politics of solidarity.<sup>9</sup> *Lotus* was largely sponsored by

6 Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, p. 51.

7 Mohamed Berrada, *Mithl Sayf Lan Yatakarrar (Like a Summer Never to be Repeated)* (Amman: Nashe al-Fanik, 1999).

8 The Nahda (meaning renaissance) refers to the Arab cultural awakening starting from about the mid-nineteenth century in the Arabic speaking world, particularly in the Levant and Egypt.

9 Hala Halim, 'Lotus, the Afro-Asian Nexus, and Global South Comparatism', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 32.3 (2012), 563–83. The American bloc similarly sponsored cultural initiatives to bolster its position during

the Egyptian state and also had the backing of the Eastern bloc. As such, the journal fell within the parameters of the Arab Cold War. Its editor, the charismatic Youssef El-Sebai, rarely invited contributions from writers of countries within the so-called monarchical bloc. As a result, despite the presence of a strong body of Moroccan writers, including Adbellatif Laabi and Mohamed Kheir Eddine, who were themselves radical leftists and part of the tricontinental decolonial movement, Moroccan writers were greatly under-represented in *Lotus*.<sup>10</sup> This chapter asks how Moroccan intellectuals and writers located themselves within the configuration of the Arab Cold War. Did their top-down exclusion from the pan-Arabic cultural sphere affect their perception of Arab politics and the role of writing? Revising the ‘problem-space’ of the era of decolonization and the Arab Cold War allows us to read texts and authors from a geopolitically and historically located context that reflects on the concerns of the texts and of the authors.<sup>11</sup>

## Morocco in Arab Cold War Politics

Where was Morocco located in Arab Cold War politics? Relations with Egypt were sour after the 1952 revolution, when the new Egyptian regime looked with suspicion on the Moroccan anticolonial nationalists who campaigned in Cairo for Egypt and the Arab League to support Moroccan independence.<sup>12</sup> Nasser’s Egypt did not consider the Moroccan nationalists sufficiently radical, given that they pursued

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the Cold War (see Introduction and Laetitia Zecchini’s chapter in this volume). The Arabic literary journal *Hiwār*, until its scandalous collapse in 1967, was used ‘to co-opt the Arab avant-garde, offering authors both material compensation for their writing, as well as the much lauded cultural freedom’, Elizabeth M Holt, ‘“Bread or Freedom”: The Congress for Cultural Freedom, the CIA, and the Arabic Literary Journal *Hiwār* (1962–67)’, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 44.1 (2013), 83–102 (p. 83).

- 10 Andy Stafford, ‘Tricontinentalism in Recent Moroccan Intellectual History: The Case of *Souffles*’, *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 7.3 (2009), 218–32.
- 11 David Scott defines problem-spaces as those ‘conceptual-ideological ensembles, discursive formations, or language games that are generative of objects, and therefore of questions. And these problem-spaces are necessarily historical inasmuch as they alter as their (epistemic-ideological) conditions of existence change’; *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1999), p. 8.
- 12 The revolution marked not only the overthrow of King Faruq and the monarchical system by a group of military officers called the Free Officers but also ushered a new era in Egypt, see *Modern Egypt: The Formation of a Nation State*, ed. by Arthur

various forms of diplomacy and kept generally good relations with the United States.<sup>13</sup> Despite the tensions with Nasserist Egypt, Morocco, like other postcolonial Arab States, adopted Arabic as its national language and the policy of Arabization in education. Its constitution declared that the people of Morocco belonged to an 'Arab nation', which was understood to transcend national territories and to be based on the notion of solidarity and commitment to Arab 'causes' including the Palestinian one.<sup>14</sup> Arabic Fusha (Modern Standard Arabic) was therefore perceived in most postcolonial Arabic-speaking nations as the emblem of a decolonized Arab national identity: a cosmopolitan, trans-regional, and symbolic language representing a rich and prestigious cultural heritage. Arabic Fusha was seen as an important component in the construction of national identity and vital for 'the re-birth of traditional Islamic culture and national identity'.<sup>15</sup> As the language of Arab patriotism, Arabic Fusha facilitated the inclusion of Morocco in a pan-Arabic 'imagined community', a 'vast sound chamber in which information, ideas, and opinions have resonated with little regard for state frontiers'.<sup>16</sup> Unlike the vernacular languages of Darija (spoken Moroccan Arabic) and Tamazight (the languages of the indigenous population), Arabic Fusha was viewed as the legitimate replacement of French and as playing a crucial role in severing lingering colonial ties to Europe.<sup>17</sup>

Moroccan thinker Mahdi Elmandjra states that cultural decolonization remains an unfinished project in the intellectual and political evolution of the Maghreb and the wider Arabic speaking world.<sup>18</sup> The attempt to decolonize Arabic thought haunted a generation

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Goldschmidt (New York: Routledge, 2019). Morocco only gained independence from France in 1956.

- 13 For a detailed analysis, see David Stenner "'Bitterness towards Egypt"—The Moroccan Nationalist Movement, Revolutionary Cairo and the Limits of Anti-Colonial Solidarity', *Cold War History*, 16.2 (2016), 159–75.
- 14 Raymond Hinnebusch, *The International Politics of the Middle East* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).
- 15 Fatima Siddiqi, *Women, Gender, and Language in Morocco* (Leiden: Brill 2003), p. 47.
- 16 Paul Noble, 'The Arab System: Pressures, Constraints, and Opportunities' in *The Foreign Politics of Arab States*, ed. by Bahgat Korany and Ali E. Hillal Desouki (Boulder: Westview 1991), p. 55.
- 17 Alexander Elinson, 'Dārīja and Changing Writing Practices in Morocco', *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 45.4 (2013), 715–30 (p. 716).
- 18 Mahdi Elmandjra, *La décolonisation culturelle, défi majeur de 21ème siècle* (Marrakesh: Editions Walilli, 1996).

of Maghrebi intellectuals who were predominantly steeped in French colonial schooling and largely influenced by the metropole's intellectual trends of the 1960s and 1970s. As Ibrahim Abu Rabi puts it:

After independence, the most distinguished North African intellectuals thoroughly immersed themselves in the imperialist cultural problematic. Some attempted to find creative solutions to the onerous legacy of imperialism by advocating a sort of synthesis between their culture and that of the West. Only a few advocated a sharp separation between the "indigenous" and "foreign." In other words, even the most committed nationalist intelligentsia dared not advocate cultural or intellectual disengagement with the Center. All these of this class were born during the reign of colonialism and most of them studied in schools espousing its philosophy either at home or abroad.<sup>19</sup>

The period of decolonization was marked by debates around power, representation, and identity in a postcolonial setting consumed with 'the specter of "Europe" and the problem of elaborating a politics in relation to it'.<sup>20</sup> Now, decades after the unravelling of the European colonial project, it has become necessary to interrogate the notion that independence was born straightforwardly out of decolonization.<sup>21</sup> But even as early as the 1960s, political oppression, instability, and violence in post-colonial settings led a number of intellectuals to link independence with the reorganization of power structures and economic inequalities inherited from colonial structures in ways that guaranteed the rights of the elites at the expense of broader society. Economic and political dependence continue to haunt those countries that were unable to break the chain of subservience. The privileging of nation-building in discussions of decolonization, however, has marginalized other important issues, such as the formation of cultural and political solidarities that do not correspond to the 'physical or conceptual borders of postcolonial nation-states'.<sup>22</sup> It has further resulted in a failure to recognize the co-constitution of decolonization across the colonizers/colonized divide, particularly in

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19 Ibrahim Abu Rabi, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), p. 344.

20 Nils Riecken, 'Relational Difference and the Grounds of Comparison: Abdallah Laroui's Critique of Centrism', *ReOrient*, 2.1 (2016), p. 14; see also Zecchini in this volume.

21 Ruth Ginio and Lynn Schler, 'Decolonisation Reconsidered: Rebirths, Continuities and Erasures', *HAGAR: Studies in Culture, Polity and Identity*, 9.2 (2010), 2–12.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

the region of the Maghreb, where intellectual leftist solidarities inspired the French theory of post-structuralism, and where France constituted a hub of intellectual and political inspiration for a number of Maghrebi intellectuals.

Moroccan intellectuals identified with various decolonial movements and solidarities: pan-Arabism, pan-Maghrebism, pan-Africanism, and the tricontinental movement originating in Havana in 1966 (see Srivastava in this volume); they were also vividly involved in promoting Berber culture against the monoculturalism of the state. Morocco was perhaps uniquely placed, insofar as 'its Janus-faced standing with regard to Europe and Africa allowed for the interconnectedness of "late" independence struggles',<sup>23</sup> to which we may also add its role in the decolonial struggles within the dynamics of the Arab Cold War.

### Abdallah Laroui's Writing: Between the Critical and the Literary

Abdallah Laroui represents a generation of leftist intellectuals with a strong desire for change in the aftermath of the end of colonialism. In addition to his critical writing, Laroui used literary writing, and particularly novels, as a form to mediate his ideas. In the preface of his seminal book *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1998–1939*, Albert Hourani stresses the need to study how literature functioned as a vector to disseminate Arab intellectuals' thoughts to larger audiences.<sup>24</sup> I am also inspired by Jacques Rancière's idea that aesthetics and politics are intertwined and are not autonomous spheres.<sup>25</sup> Politics for Rancière is a 'dissensus' from a normative 'partition of the sensible', that is, a practice that is deeply disruptive of the normalized conceptual underpinnings of hierarchical social orders and forms of domination.<sup>26</sup> Like politics, aesthetics also disrupts a particular distribution of the sensible, though in a different way. For Rancière, aesthetics does not refer to art as a whole, but rather to a particular artistic practice in which 'the field of

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23 Stafford, 'Tricontinentalism in Recent Moroccan Intellectual History', p. 218.

24 Hourani, Albert, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1998–1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. viii.

25 Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. by Steven Corcoran (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2013).

26 *Ibid.*, p. 152.

experience, severed from its traditional reference points, is therefore open for new restructuring through the “free play” of aestheticization.<sup>27</sup> Laroui’s aesthetics, I argue, is marked by this free play, which enables alternative imaginings of society, and therefore challenges the existing normative social and political hierarchies and also, most importantly, expands the critical field.

Laroui is considered one of the Arab world’s radical critics. He invented a decolonial language of critique in both Arabic and French that draws simultaneously on local and global paradigms.<sup>28</sup> Laroui’s philosophical and historical works, mostly written in French, are widely studied and translated in the Arabic speaking world, in the United States, and in Europe, but his literary works, written in Arabic, are little known or studied. In fact, there are no existing studies that read Laroui’s critical works together with his literary ones. However, such an approach sheds important light on Laroui’s decolonial aesthetics and politics, his efforts to resist and elude the strictures imposed by the Arab Cold War bi-polarity and, perhaps most importantly, his perception of the unfinished project of decolonization in Morocco and the wider Arab world.

Laroui is the product of colonial education: he went to colonial primary state schools in the early 1940s where both Arabic and French were taught, and then to high schools in Marrakesh, Rabat, and Casablanca. He was subsequently trained in history and economics in Paris, where he attended the Institut d’Etudes Politiques at the Sorbonne in the 1950s. During this period, he also trained himself independently in the history of the Islamic world and Arabic thought. From the early 1960s to the late 1970s he moved between Cairo (where he worked as a cultural attaché), Paris (where he completed his PhD), then UCLA in Los Angeles where he taught from 1967 to 1971, then back to Rabat where he settled as a Professor of History at Mohamed V University in the early 1970s. He is a multilingual writer fluent in Arabic, French, and English. His training in both European critical traditions and Islamic/Arabic ones has equipped him with the tools to be comfortable in both, and equally to be critical of both. He was preoccupied with exploring the question of national

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27 Steven Corcoran, ‘Editor’s Introduction’ in Rancière, *Dissensus*, p. 17.

28 Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A theory of Distorted Change in the Arab World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Hosam Aboul-Ela, *Domestications: American Empire, Literary Culture, and the Postcolonial Lens* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2018).

culture after independence beyond hegemonic colonial narratives, and with exploring the nationalism of the newly independent state of Morocco and independent states of the wider Arabic speaking world. Some of his critical pieces have appeared in magazines with wide circulation in the Arab world, including *Arabic Studies* and *Mawāqif*, both based in Beirut, the Rabat-based *Aqlām*, and the well-known Paris based *Les Temps Modernes* and *Diogenes*. Three main critical books, all written in French in the 1970s, were inspired by this ‘significant geography’ and movement between Europe, North America, and the Arab world: they include *Contemporary Arab Ideology*, *The Crisis of the Arab Intellectuals*, and *History of the Maghreb*.<sup>29</sup> In the same decade, he also published (in Arabic), *Arabs and Historical Thinking*.<sup>30</sup> Laroui’s novels, written over a span of four decades, are all written in Arabic and include *Al-Ghorba* (Exile, 1971), *Al-Yatīm* (The Orphan, 1978), *Al-Farīq* (The Team, 1986), *Folios* (Awraq, 1989), and *Al-Āfah* (The Disaster, 2006). Reading Laroui’s critical decolonial project in parallel with his literary novels, I focus on the question of the dialectical dichotomy between tradition and modernity, a dichotomy that marked the historical phase of decolonization in the Arabic speaking region in the 1950s and 1960s. As Laroui himself stated in 1956 (the year of Moroccan independence):

The question that we all posed to ourselves was the following: on which bases can our country be rebuilt? It went without saying that we could not continue the colonial situation nor revive the past that had led to it. [...] The nationalists said: the colonialists have introduced reforms based on their own experience, their defeat proves that those reforms are not suitable for us. We thus have to evince imagination, underline our differences, be ourselves. Those who leaned towards communism tried to give it a national coloring. [...] That problematic determined my whole way of thinking. Wanting to be free from external influence, wanting to create, innovating, tending to one’s difference, enriching human experience, all of this, I told myself, is laudable, but is it feasible?<sup>31</sup>

29 Abdallah Laroui, *L’Idéologie arabe contemporaine: essai critique* (Contemporary Arab Ideology: a critical essay) (Paris: François Maspero, 1967); *La crise des intellectuels arabes, traditionalisme ou historicisme?* (The Crisis of Arab Intellectuals, traditionalism or historicism?) (Paris: François Maspero, 1974); *L’Histoire du Maghreb, un essai de synthèse* (Paris: François Maspero, 1970).

30 Abdallah Laroui, *Al-‘Arab wa al-fikr al-ta’rīkhī* (Arabs and Historical Thought) (Beirut: Dar Al-Haqīqa, 1973).

31 Laroui’s quote, cited and translated from French by Riecken in ‘Relational Difference and the Grounds of Comparison’, p. 22. Originally in Abdallah Laroui, ‘Histoire et

As this quote shows, it is not difference *per se* but specifically a difference in relation to Europe and colonization that haunts the efforts to decolonize and to ‘modernize’. How can the ‘West’ be de-centred in Arab intellectual debates on modernization? The unsettled problematic of the conflict between *turath* (tradition, implying the Arab-Islamic heritage) and modernity started before formal colonialism but accelerated with it. It was (and still is up to the present day) a divisive debate that dominates the discussion on decolonization in the Arab world, especially after the traditionalist turn of Arab nation-states in the 1960s, during which the state, faced with popular protest, positioned itself as the defender of the nation’s language, religion, ‘heritage’, and glorious past.

In Laroui’s first novel, *Exile (Al-Ghorba, 1971)*, the author presents the dichotomy between modernity and tradition through the two main characters, who are childhood friends but whose lives follow vastly different trajectories. Ultimately, the story is analogous to a significant moment in Moroccan postcolonial history, when Francophone and Arabophone intellectuals worked together—despite linguistic and ideological differences—to challenge the colonial legacy and the ethno-centric tyranny of the state. I return to this novel, its two protagonists, and its dialogic form below after a reading of Laroui’s critique of the figures of the cleric, the liberal, and the technophile in his *Contemporary Arab Ideology*. Reading the two texts together reveals that Laroui is aware of the limitations of his critical works and the fact that he uses the literary form and the genre of the novel to expand and even contest his own critical thinking.

## Laroui and the Pan-Arab Intellectual Sphere

Laroui has pursued his decolonial project both through historicism, because of the need to historicize theory and practice from geo-historical and local perspectives, and through aesthetics or literary writing, particularly the genre of the novel. His book on *Contemporary Arab Ideology* was translated into Arabic in 1970 and published by the

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rationalité’ in *Le sens de l’histoire. La raison aux prises avec la condition humaine*, ed. by A. Filali-Ansary (Casablanca and Rabat: Fondation du Roi Abdul-Aziz al Saoud; Fondation Konrad Adenauer, 2008).

Beirut-based publisher Dar Al-Haqiqa.<sup>32</sup> Laroui wrote the book in French because he believed that European interest in his critical texts always triggered interest from the Mashreq, i.e. the Arabic Middle East. Indeed, *Contemporary Arab Ideology* received excellent reviews in France and in Europe more broadly, which subsequently provoked the interest of intellectuals in the Middle East.<sup>33</sup> Here, the question of the power of European academe and markets, as well as the colonial legacies in the Arab-speaking Maghreb and Mashreq, are crucial. In the last hundred years or so, Arabic critical and literary productions have been mediated through the West, in the sense that they only become known across the two regions through their reception in Europe; for example, only after an Arabic critical book is translated into French and English does it become important in the wider Arab-speaking region. Laroui claims that ‘any contact between us—Maghrebis, Arabs or Muslims—passes through the West’.<sup>34</sup> This kind of tacit request for recognition via the West raises important questions about the unfinished project of decolonization in both the Maghreb and the Mashreq. But it also shows that the top-down Arab Cold War between republican and monarchical states in the Arabic-speaking world in the 1950s–1960s did not alter the conceptual geography of imagined and real pan-Arabism from below, which differs from—and in fact critiques—the ideology of pan-Arabism imposed from above by the postcolonial Arab states seeking political and popular legitimacy. This intellectual pan-Arabism is embodied in a shared cosmopolitan heritage that is linked to language and that transcends enclosed national communities in order to embody wider geographies of influence and cultural circulation.

In a number of his works, Laroui has linked his critique of orientalism and knowledge production—including the circuit of recognition outlined above—to the crisis of the Arab intellectual.<sup>35</sup> In his search for epistemological liberation, Laroui has emphasized

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32 The book was translated by Mohammad Eitany with a preface by Maxime Rodinson. Laroui also wrote a preface to the Arab version introducing the book to Arab readers.

33 See Abdelfattah Kilito, *Atakallam jamīc al-lughāt lākin bi’l-‘arabiyyah* (*Je parle toutes les langues mais en arabe*) trans. by Abdesalam Benabd Alali (Casablanca: Dar Toubkal 2013), p. 42.

34 Laroui, cited and translated by Riecken, p. 22.

35 Laroui, *L’Idéologie arabe contemporaine*; Laroui, *La crise des intellectuels arabes*.

how colonial knowledge production of the region shaped the Arabic speaking world's understanding of itself and others. Long before the publication of Edward Said's influential *Orientalism*,<sup>36</sup> Laroui—in the tradition of a number of Arab intellectuals writing on this topic, such as Muhammad Husayn Haykal, Anouar Abdel-Malek, and others—published a significant essay critiquing orientalism. The essay, entitled 'The Arabs and Cultural Anthropology: Notes on the Method of Gustave Von Grunebaum' and included in *Contemporary Arab Ideology*, critically engages with the intellectual itinerary of the Arabist Von Grunebaum (1909–1972) to reflect on questions of knowledge production and representation, and on Von Grunebaum's negative and reductive culturalist reading of Islamic history.<sup>37</sup> Laroui links this critique of orientalism and its knowledge production to the crisis of the Arab intellectual, who, he argues, cannot engage in such a critique without self-critique. In *Contemporary Arab Ideology*, Laroui reflects on the Arab intellectuals' engagement with the colonial and post-colonial condition since the mid-nineteenth century, and on their modes of understanding the Arab self in its historical and cultural trajectory.<sup>38</sup> Through his use of the figures of the cleric, the liberal, and the technophile, who represent various Arab ideologies and models of political and cultural formation, Laroui argues that the West is implicated in all currents of Arab ideology. All of them are, for Laroui, incapable of grasping the reality of the Arab condition.<sup>39</sup> He particularly criticizes 'the "traditionalism" that predominates in contemporary Arab modes of inhabiting their reality, and which conceives of history as the domain of divine will rather than that of human agency', to quote Yasmeen Daifallah.<sup>40</sup> The method needed to overcome this traditionalism, according to Laroui, is historicism, or a way of understanding history as a lived reality linked to the subject's agency, in a self-reflexive dialectic that critiques both Western hegemonic epistemology and one's *turath* or tradition.

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36 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

37 Laroui, *L'Idéologie arabe contemporaine*.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

40 Yasmeen Daifallah, 'Political Subjectivity in Contemporary Arab Thought: The Political Theory of Abdullah Laroui, Hassan Hanafi, and Mohamed Abed al-Jabiri' (Unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2012), p. 18.

Laroui criticizes the two dominant ideologies in the postcolonial Arab world: traditionalism, which he links to Salafism or Islamism; and nationalism, which mixes traditional and Western notions of development. The characters of Sohaib and Idriss in Laroui's novel *Exile* (1971), as we shall see, represents these ideologies. Laroui's project is to demystify the so-called authenticity of *both* traditionalism and nationalism through a geopolitical, historical, and conceptual analysis that grounds both people in an understanding of their own social and political reality. He shows how 'traditionalism is responsible in great part for the failure of Arab attempts at instituting change, and the introduction of an alternative modality of understanding history and reality'.<sup>41</sup> Like other Arab intellectuals of the decolonization era, Laroui claims that the West has come to inhabit the Arab and Maghrebi intellectual consciousness and, therefore, any new thoughts must be in conversation with the West in a way that 'deepen[s] the realm of Western culture' and shows that 'its alleged universalism is in fact lacking'.<sup>42</sup> Yet Laroui avoids binary oppositions, and demands thinking with 'experiment and risk' in order to find 'an alternative modality of understanding one's history and reality'.<sup>43</sup>

Laroui's historicism is a 'self-reflexive dialectical method'.<sup>44</sup> He develops a nuanced understanding of difference 'by historicizing defiantly against a teleologically defined future, but rather toward an open horizon and within a relational, non-centrist architecture of difference that takes no conceptual form — be it history, the present, time, "Europe", Islam, or the human — as its transcendental epistemic frame'.<sup>45</sup> This involves an epistemological break with his own tradition, but also with the hegemony of the West. Laroui does not embrace the West and its modernity unconditionally, nor does he think of Europe as the ideal model to follow. The current backwardness of Arab societies does not mirror the past of the West. As Hosam Aboul-Ela notes, 'the great challenge to producing a truly historicist vision for Arab thinkers at that moment was the thoroughgoing interweaving of contemporary Arab ideology—even in its

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41 Ibid., p. 33.

42 Ibid., p. 39.

43 Ibid., p. 33.

44 Riecken, 'Relational Difference and the Grounds of Comparison', p. 27.

45 Ibid., p. 28.

nationalist and traditionalist manifestations—with Western metaphysics and the colonial historiography that correlates to it'.<sup>46</sup>

Laroui's pan-Arabist critical project was never derailed by the Arab Cold War, since his critique was directed at Arab intellectuals across the spectrum. According to Abu Rabi:

Laroui's theoretical reflections on social, economic, political, and cultural conditions in the Arab world have influenced the work of such intellectuals as Elias Murqus [Syria], Mahmud Amin al-'Alim [Egypt], Mahdi 'Amil [Lebanon], Yassin al-Hafiz [Syria], Burhan Ghalyun [Syria], Hisham Sharabi [Palestine], Hichem Djaït [Tunisia], Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabiri [Morocco], as well as many other Moroccan and non-Moroccan thinkers.<sup>47</sup>

Laroui's wide-ranging impact shows that the energy of critical pan-Arabism, which has been resilient and has lived on after the end of its state-imposed equivalent and its Arab Cold War dynamics, thanks to its cultural consciousness and its power to link Arabic-speaking people through cultural critique, and social and political solidarity. Whether in French or Arabic, this critical pan-Arabism created a conceptual space to escape the repressive Arab states' control, particularly in the 1950–1970s when postcolonial Arab states moved from revolutionary solidarity to oppressive authoritarianism. But whereas Laroui's critical works circulated widely in the Arab 'vast sound chamber' and influenced a generation of intellectuals, his literary writings have remained largely unknown even in the Arab world.

### Laroui's Literary Oeuvre: The Case of *Exile* (1971)

Ultimately Laroui's audience, whether of his critical or literary works, has always been located within Arab intellectual circles. In his critical works, as we have seen, he maintains the importance of breaking with traditional modes of thought in favour of new ways of understanding Arab reality that are grounded in a historicist method of self-critique. In his literary works, Laroui shows that the break with tradition remains an unresolved issue and is almost impossible to achieve. In doing so, he

46 Aboul-Ela, *Domestications*, p. 70.

47 Abu Rabi, *Contemporary Arab Thought*, p. 345.

highlights the dilemma of his generation in their attempt to break away from their inherited mental tools as well as from European hegemony.

In a number of interviews Laroui has declared that literary writing allows him to move from history to 'love' (the act of writing in Arabic as a pleasure), in a self-reflexive movement that is free of the constraint of disciplinary boundaries and opens up the horizon of the theoretical from the perspective of the unsaid. In other words, the literary form of the novel allows him to free himself from the rigidity of discipline to reflect on other aspects of the soul and on the psychology of the mind.<sup>48</sup> In a 1992 interview, Laroui rejected the idea that his literary texts reflect the ideas found in his critical work: 'The more I reach a conclusive point in the critical and analytical field, the more I leave matters hanging in the creative field'.<sup>49</sup>

Laroui devotes a section of his seminal book on Arab ideology to literature and calls for the questioning of literary forms and borrowed ideas. The epitaph of his second novel *The Orphan* (which is considered as a sequel to *Exile*), starts with Andre Gide's famous quote, 'Fiction is history that might have happened. History is fiction that did happen'.<sup>50</sup> These gestures can be read as blurring the boundaries between history and fiction, and one can read Laroui's literary works as a move from the critique of Arab intellectuals' modes of thought to a particular focus on the internal conflicts and dynamics within postcolonial Morocco, which are, to a large extent, representative of the wider region.

In *Exile*, Laroui presents the discussion on *turath* and modernity through the dialogic relationship between the novel's two protagonists, who are childhood friends: Idriss is a young, urban, middle-class intellectual educated in French colonial schools and subsequently in France; Shoab is educated first in a traditional Moroccan school and subsequently graduates from the Yousufiyya School, a prestigious religious school in Marrakech. The same trope of the two friends is powerfully present in Laroui's other novels, including *The Orphan* (1978),

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48 Abdallah Saef, 'Interview with Abdallah Laroui', *Afaq*, 3-4 (1992), 147-90; Mohamed Adahi, *Abdallah Laroui: Mena Atarikh el Al-hub, Interview* (Abdallah Laroui: From History to Love, Interview) (Casablanca: Fnack, 1996); Nancy Gallagher and Abdallah Laroui, 'Interview — The Life and Times of Abdallah Laroui. A Moroccan Intellectual', *The Journal of North African Studies*, 3.1 (1998), 132-51.

49 Saef, 'Interview with Abdallah Laroui'.

50 Abdallah Laroui, *Al-Yatim (The Orphan)* (Casablanca: Al Markaz Athaqafi Al Arabi 1978), republished in 2018 in a collection of Laroui's novels, p. 185.

*The Team* (1986), and *Folios* (1989). The relationship between Idriss and Shoaib is framed as a duality (*izdiwajiya*), but it is a duality based on understanding and harmony. While Idriss represents modernity and Shoaib represents tradition, this is not necessarily presented as a matter of conflict between them. Laroui reflects on this duality when he claims in an interview that:

Of course, Shoaib is the Arab prophet, and he is Abu Shoaib al-Sariah,<sup>51</sup> a Sufi saint, and he is also the original part of Idriss's conscience [implying *turath* or tradition]. Likewise, Idriss is the Arab prophet as well, and he is an open consciousness for continuous and constant study [implying modernity]. And the dialogue continues between Shoaib and Idriss without one overpowering the other.<sup>52</sup>

In the sequel to *Exile*, Idriss dies, and across subsequent novels Shoaib carries on investigating the cause of Idriss's death.<sup>53</sup> For Laroui, Idriss's fate represents the restlessness of Arab intellectuals who could not find peace, nor answers to the question of *turath* or tradition in the era of decolonization. This restlessness is, in Laroui's thinking, a deadly psychological complex that is haunting all Arab intellectuals who are fully aware of what is at stake.

Laroui's novel *Exile* represented a new trend in Moroccan fiction in its use of complex aesthetics to reflect on decolonization. The novel is plotless, a very rare feature in Moroccan Arabic novels of the early 1970s,<sup>54</sup> and it moves through flashbacks between the colonial past and post-independence Morocco. The narrative focuses on the subjectivities of a group of young intellectuals at the margins of the anticolonial struggle; their revolutionary fervour before independence turns into frustration, powerlessness, and self-imposed exile in France in the ensuing decade. Laroui uses a series of endnotes to explain the complex references and allusions in the novel, like those relating to medieval saints and religious

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51 A well-known Moroccan Sufi master who lived during the Almoravid dynasty in the twelfth century. He was born and buried in the city of Azemmour, which is Laroui's home town; his shrine still attracts a large number of visitors today.

52 Saef, 'Interview with Abdallah Laroui'.

53 See *The Orphan* (1978); *The Team* (1986); and *Folios* (1989).

54 Ian Campbell's *Labyrinths, Intellectuals and the Revolution: the Arabic Language Moroccan Novel, 1957–1972* (Leiden: Brill 2013, p. 162) argues that Moroccan Arabic novels of this period 'address in a relatively straightforward manner the experiences of young intellectuals during and after the revolution', unlike Laroui's complex narrative.

figures, historical events, or references from the Qur'an.<sup>55</sup> The importance of spoken Moroccan Arabic or Darija is stressed throughout the novel, which also employs a layered mixture of Quranic, classical and modern Arabic.<sup>56</sup> The novel's lack of a clear plot, complex characterization, linguistic play, and temporal movement between past and present attest to its freer aesthetic and philosophical discourse—compared to the historicism of Laroui's critical works—on questions related to identity, culture, and modernity during decolonization.

In an epitaph to the section in the novel titled 'That's How We Were', the disappointment with life after independence is poignant and contrasts with what is, in other Arabic novels of the time, a moment of jubilation:

That's how we were ... enthusiasm, liveliness and sharp discussion ... Believing in ideas and burning emotions ... demanding total agreement or division.... Look at us [now]; our emotions have faded. We try to bring back anger and wrath and explosion as if they were the misgivings of a forgotten generation.... That's how we were....<sup>57</sup>

In the footnote to this opening quote, Laroui claims that these thoughts could equally be those of Idriss, Shoaib, or Mariya, Idriss's fiancée who leaves Morocco for Paris exasperated at the lack of change in relation to women's rights in postcolonial Morocco.<sup>58</sup>

The novel reflects on the failure of intellectuals to instigate political and social change, not only because of the way the monarchy and conservative forces imposed a hegemonic vision of what it was to be a Moroccan citizen, but also because of the intellectuals' inability to rid themselves of their 'inherited mental tools' and to act decisively in favour

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55 The novel has 151 footnotes (pp. 149–56). For example, footnote 1 explains his reference to verse 28 of the Surah Hud in the Qur'an, 'Should we force it upon you while you are averse to it' as coming from Prophet Noah addressing his own people and that more references to the story of Noah will be made in the novel. Footnote 125 (p. 155) explains the subtle linguistic reference in the novel ('indeed, our father is in clear error', p. 125) to Surat Yusuf in the Qur'an. These Quranic references, as well as references to medieval scholars and Sufi figures, occur throughout the novel, an indication of Laroui's mastery of Islamic sources.

56 See footnote 2 when the reader is alerted that the dialogue between Shoaib and his wife (Laroui, *Al-Ghorba*, p. 7), although written in Fusha, is influenced by a Darija expression. She asked him 'Are you going out tonight', which although correct in Fusha, is more used in Moroccan Darija.

57 Ibid., p. 67. Ellipses in the text.

58 Ibid., footnote 74, p. 152.

of change. The narrative is not an exercise in the politics of blame, though, but an attempt to explore the dynamics behind this individual and collective failure, both from the perspective of the legacy of colonialism, which created a class of intellectuals who were practically alienated from their own societies through colonial education and language, which were perceived as signs of modernity and modernization; and from the perspective of the intellectuals' inability to challenge their traditional inherited norms and values.

The fate of the two protagonists after independence epitomizes this failure. The novel starts with Shoaib anticipating the long awaited return of Idriss from Paris, where he has been living in exile.<sup>59</sup> Shoaib describes Idriss's exile as the result of his disappointment with the state of affairs in the newly independent nation, but notes that his friend could not find answers there either and hence decided to return to his home country.<sup>60</sup> Flashbacks take us the anticolonial militancy against the French, in which both Shoaib and Idriss participated and which led to Shoaib's imprisonment.<sup>61</sup>

Meanwhile, Shoaib is rejected by society and by his wife because he is not 'modern' enough, yet he does not betray his principles.<sup>62</sup> Shoaib is the part of Idriss to which the latter always returns; he is the silenced part of his soul that he cannot extinguish. Shoaib is Idriss's heritage, an embodiment of a lived mystic culture. In one scene, Shoaib teaches his friend to swim—swimming being a reference to mystic ways of learning—and 'show[s] him the concealed secrets of God'.<sup>63</sup> This is described in terms of Idriss 'drawing from the well of Shoaib's knowledge to strengthen his conviction'.<sup>64</sup>

Neither friend is decisive enough to break with the past and instigate change, though Idriss is more problematic in this regard because of his training in French colonial education that aimed at 'overcoming' the past. Through the character of Shoaib, the novel presents us with two interlinked definitions of *turath* or tradition: print tradition, which extends beyond the borders of the local to the transnational Islamicate

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59 Ibid., pp. 8–10.

60 Ibid., pp. 10–11.

61 Ibid., pp. 45–53.

62 Ibid., p. 126.

63 Ibid., p. 117.

64 Ibid., p. 116.

culture, and which Shoaib masters (the 'yellow old books' in the quote below); and the oral popular and locally lived tradition which includes not only the mystical realm but also the norms and values that determine the religious behaviour of individuals. Shoaib's own relationship to the Arabo-Islamic heritage is complex, as this silent dialogue with Idriss shows:

Shoaib went to the room that he used for reading, he went to a cabinet on top of which a number of books were covered in white paper. He read [their titles] out loud: *Healing, Mastery, Aspiring*.<sup>65</sup> Oh... if only I had my complete senses....

Sure, my friend [Idriss] ... these yellow books, there is a delight in overcoming their difficulty and pleasure in their depth. I drank from them the first time and I return to them whenever I feel helpless. You say I am not really faithful to them and that the [new] white coloured books decorated with pictures have ruined my mind and disturbed my emotions. You may be right. Here I am, feeling these [yellow] books to seek some sort of tranquillity.... I only find in them temporary tranquillity and I want to see you my friend and listen to your logic.<sup>66</sup>

Shoaib finds only temporary comfort in his old cultural heritage, which seems to be overcome by other new intellectual trends and concepts coming from Europe, represented by Idriss and his French education. The new modern books that Shoaib reads in Arabic translation (on white paper) make him question his own old (yellow) books. The temporary comfort that the 'yellow books' offer is indicative of Shoaib's perceived need to reinvent the intellectual heritage in order to make it relevant to modern life, a discussion that was important to many Arab intellectuals in the decolonization era. Just as Idriss misses Shoaib, Shoaib longs for Idriss, so that the two are placed in a dialectical relationship, without one overcoming the other. For Shoaib, the old books are a refuge from doubt and confusion, but he also reads the new ones, symbolizing modern European thoughts, to keep up with the new age. In the passage above, Shoaib appears still torn between the two and longs for

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65 In a footnote, Laroui explains that these are the titles of canonical works of Islamic philosophy, jurisprudence and Sufism; they include Abi Ishaq Al-Shatbi's *Seeking Protection* (790 CE), Al-Qadi Ayad's *Healing* (544 CE), Jalal Eddine Al-Sayuti's *Mastery in Quranic Sciences* (911 CE) and Abi Yaqoob Al-Qadili's *Aspiring to Learn from Sufis* (617 CE).

66 Laroui, *Al-Ghorba*, pp. 7–8; ellipses in the text.

Idriss to 'listen to his logic'. It is clear that Laroui considers the old to be part of the intellectuals' *wujdan* or soul, and that this soul cannot easily be eradicated. We can read Shoaib as the silenced part of Idriss's (and by extension, Laroui's) subjectivity. Indeed, the author claims in an interview that he wanted to give *taqlid* or tradition a space in his literary work, in order to express its existence and not cut it off completely.<sup>67</sup>

Idriss, by contrast, is in search of the new to improve the present. In a conversation with his father, the latter questions the pursuit of theoretical knowledge, claiming that it is of no 'real' use to society.<sup>68</sup> Idriss, however, tells his father that 'the ways of the past are no longer useful, so let us search for new paths, open to all and binding to all'.<sup>69</sup> Yet Idriss also longs for the old, as he states in language reminiscent of Sufism: 'each of us goes back to the birthplace of the soul [*masqat al wujdān*]... each one of us searches for their source'.<sup>70</sup> Although he believes in the right of women to liberate themselves from patriarchal constraints, he cannot understand the choice made by Mariya, his fiancée, who leaves for France once she realizes the curtailing of her freedoms in postcolonial Morocco.<sup>71</sup>

Idriss, the 'modern' scholar, is in fact more confused than Shoaib, the traditional one. A decade and a half after independence, and after his discovery, following his short sojourn in France, of how Morocco has changed for the worse and its people are 'stuck in their past', Idriss develops intellectual and social fatigue.<sup>72</sup> His questions about the reasons for this failure find no answer. His fatigue is not only caused by the authoritarian behaviour of the state, nor the neo-colonial economic policies of the metropolitan centre; most importantly, he blames inherited social behaviours and the mentality of a nation held back by its heritage. Social and political changes cannot be imposed from above; if a nation is not given the tools to dismantle its inherited shackles, it cannot 'modernize': 'In the past, I used to call for a deepening one's search and a careful treatment since we were in a transition period. But now the problem is a problem of civilisation and not of sovereignty and

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67 Saef, 'Interview with Abdallah Laroui'.

68 Laroui *Al-Ghorba*, p. 114

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid., p. 40, ellipses in the text.

71 Ibid., p. 111.

72 Ibid., p. 112.

leadership. Civilisation cannot be taken like this glass, though, it needs time and a long time. Why this pessimism and stubbornness?<sup>73</sup>

The intellectual class seems incapable of enacting change. Idriss confesses to his father that even on the eve of the country's independence he had felt that the path to national liberation would be hampered.<sup>74</sup> He speaks of Moroccans as 'tied up with an unseen silk thread' that does not allow them to reach their goal: 'We are free but within borders that we are not allowed to transgress'.<sup>75</sup> While the local geopolitics of Morocco are important to the novel, the story is also recognisable and relatable for the rest of the Arab world, particularly the idea of disillusionment with the postcolonial state, which instigated change from above without giving societies the tools to change their mental beliefs and social practices. At a time when intellectuals like Laroui were censored, imprisoned, and tortured for voicing open criticism of the regime of King Hassan II, Laroui is careful to express his ideas in a way that does not exonerate the state but focuses more on the role (and failure) of the intellectuals in mobilizing the masses locally and changing their mentality towards social and political practice. Through the characters of Mariya and Idriss, the novel presents a condition of exile that was common among many Arab intellectuals and writers in the 1960s–1970s, who suffered the advance of authoritarian regimes that derailed the dreams and aspirations of generations who had lived through anticolonial struggles. After the defeat against Israel in the 1967 war, many Arab writers such as Laroui disengaged from romanticizing the revolutionary aspirations of their people and turned to a 'more self-reflexive mode of writing' with the aim 'to continue to disrupt the hegemony of the dominant group'.<sup>76</sup>

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73 Ibid., p. 132.

74 Ibid., p. 135.

75 Ibid.

76 Zeina Halabi, 'The Day the Wandering Dreamer Became a Fida'i: Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and the Fashioning of Political Commitment' in *Commitment and Beyond: Reflections on/of the Political in Arabic Literature since the 1940s*, ed. by Frederike Pannewick et al. (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2015), pp. 156–70 (p. 167). For a detailed discussion, see the whole volume.

## Conclusion

Abdallah Laroui used his formative experiences in Rabat, Paris, Egypt, Los Angeles, and various other places to theorize and write on the Arab World, denouncing socialist ideologies such as Baathism, Nasserism and others that dominated the region in the 1950s to 1970s and that became tyrannical and oppressive towards their own people. Laroui was radical in his critical thinking, particularly in his call to abandon all forms of 'traditionalist' thinking in favour of a more historicist method based on self-critique and grounded in the lived realities of Arab societies. He refused the label of Marxist but acknowledged his debt to the Marxist historicism that inspired his critical project. His political leanings were clearly leftist and aligned with popular aspirations for freedom and democracy. In his critical work, Laroui calls for a 'double critique' of the Self and the Other in order to demystify both traditionalism and nationalism, which he views as hindrances to decolonization and change; he seeks alternative modalities for understanding one's geopolitical history and reality that are not subordinated to Western hegemony but in dialogue with it. Laroui's historicist method calls for a decisive abandoning of 'traditionalism' so as to build a new thought structure that can reconcile the political subject with their sociopolitical condition or lived reality. His first novel, *Exile*, however, raises questions as to whether one can ever abandon what is imprinted on the heart. As Laroui puts it 'Since the time of the Nahda, our bodies have been living in one century while our thoughts and feelings inhabit another ... this has been the trick played on us by the backward parts of our societies and our psyches for the purpose of perpetuating and exploiting this backwardness'.<sup>77</sup> The novel describes the conundrum faced by intellectuals in the decolonization era in their attempt to live up to the project of independence, in a pan-Arabic political and cultural sphere that was fragmented by the top-down Arab Cold War but also by the colonial legacies of knowledge production. Laroui's literary works, this chapter has argued, expand on aspects of his critical work but also diverge from their conclusions. The denunciation of the *turath* that we find in his critical writings, for example, reappears in his novel *Exile*,

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<sup>77</sup> Translated from Arabic and cited in Daifallah, 'Political Subjectivity in Contemporary Arab Thought', p. 16; ellipses in the text.

one of whose key themes is that no one can rid themselves of their traditional heritage, which is engraved in one's *wujdan*, one's soul. This suggests that the decolonization of the self and of national culture is an unfinished business, which in fact continues to preoccupy Arab intellectuals up to the present day.

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# 7. The Poetics and Politics of Solidarity

## *Barg el-Lil* (1961) and Afrotopia

Itzea Goikolea-Amiano

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### Introduction

Bachir Khreyif's Arabic novel *Barg el-Lil* (1961) traces the adventures of a black slave across the rivalry between the Spanish and Ottoman empires, the two main early-modern Mediterranean empires, as it played out in sixteenth-century Tunisia.<sup>1</sup> *Barg el-Lil* (literally 'night lightning', probably a reference to his swiftness) is a black *pícaro* or trickster character.<sup>2</sup> He disguises himself in every possible way, as *pícaros* do, to escape fights or being captured by those claiming ownership over him. *Barg* can fade into busy streets and survive impossible crises. He

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1 The novel was translated into Spanish in the early 1980s, and only very recently into French: Bašir Jrayyef, *Barg el-Lil*, trans. by Ana Ramos (Madrid: Instituto Hispano-Arabe de Cultura, 1982); Béchir Khraïef, *Barg Ellil*, trans. by Ahmed Gasmi (Tunis: Éditions Arabesques, 2017). Khreyif is one of the best-known authors in contemporary Tunisia, and his works—which include plays, short stories, essays and two historical novels—are part of the secondary-school curriculum. Fawzi Al-Zimarli, 'Introduction', *Al-Bachir Khreyif: Al-A'māl al-Kāmila* (The Complete Works of Bachir Khreyif), 4 vols (Tunis: Dar al-Janub, 2005), I, pp. 21–22. I would like to thank the editors, Orsini, Zecchini and Srivastava, and the anonymous second reader, for their insightful comments to the first draft of this chapter, which significantly improved it.

2 I refer to the novel as *Barg el-Lil* as per Tunisian pronunciation, instead of the Modern Standard Arabic transliteration, *Barq al-Layl*. I refer to the protagonist as *Barg*, since this is how he is referred to in the novel.

tumbles down from rooftops, crosses the *suq*, hides in a cemetery, and encounters all sorts and classes of people along the way. Uprooted and enslaved as a child, Barg carries the weight of violence and oppression, though he also tricks his way into temporary positions of privilege and becomes a prominent agent in shaping Tunisian history. Through its slave protagonist and an early textual reference to Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, the novel hints at the multiple influences that—embedded in the history of trans-Saharan connections and Mediterranean relations—have shaped Tunisian history and culture.

The form of ideology discussed in this chapter is that of the historical novel in the context of Tunisian independence and postcolonial state nationalism but also of debates about 'committed literature' and the pan-Africanist wave that swept through the Maghreb and the whole continent. *Barg el-Lil* was the first historical novel in Tunisian literary history and the first Arabic novel to have a black slave as protagonist. Unlike the 'ancient founders of the nation' like the Numidian king Jugurtha or resistance figures like the Emir Abdelkader who animated historical fiction in neighbouring Algeria, or the iconic peasant of Egyptian literature, *Barg el-Lil* focuses on the adventures of a black slave who manages to escape his tyrant owner and whose actions lead a fast-paced narrative.<sup>3</sup>

The three layers of this chapter will progressively take us closer to the text and its narrative. The first layer situates *Barg el-Lil* within Khreyif's literary career in the context of print culture and the decolonial momentum in Tunisia, where literary form, language, content and ideology are entangled. If Khreyif's choice of a black slave as protagonist needs to be read in relation to Negritude and pan-Africanism, the 'afrotopian' momentum, and Bourguiba's colour-blind policies,<sup>4</sup> and the fact that its protagonists belong to 'the masses' (to use the terminology of the time) and are makers of history, is to be read in relation to 'committed literature' (*adab multazim*), a term hotly debated in Arabic literary circles and periodicals across the Third World in those decades. By situating emancipation in relation to both colonialism and slavery and

3 Zineb Ali Benali, 'Les ancêtres fondateurs: Élaborations symboliques du champ intellectuel algérien (1945–1954)', *Insaniyat / إنسانيات*, 25–26 (2004), 201–14.

4 I use 'afrotopia' as used in Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (Princeton: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), pp. 19–48; see below.

the forced uprooting of Africans into several world diasporas, including the Maghreb, these discussions and movements offer a specific angle on Cold War struggles.

The second layer takes us to the locatedness of the story and the geographical imaginaries it foregrounds through the notion of ‘significant geographies’, an alternative to the generic meta-category ‘world’ employed in world literature that highlights the specific spaces, repertoires, tropes and literary imaginaries that matter to historically located literary actors and texts.<sup>5</sup> *Barg el-Lil* situates Tunisia within what Edwige Tamalet Talbayev calls ‘the transcontinental Maghreb’, which includes the historical rivalry between the Spanish and Ottoman empires and the millennia-old cultural connections, literary cross-pollinations and asymmetries embedded in the Mediterranean.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the novel also places Tunisia within the history of trans-Saharan (slave) trade and the cultural and political relations between northern and southern Sahara. In doing so, it erases the fallacious division between North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa that so pervades scholarship and the public imagination and performs the kind of decolonial work that Moroccan critic Abdelkebir Khatibi proposed in the 1980s, which saw the Maghreb as ‘a topographical site between Orient, Occident, and [sub-Saharan] Africa—a site that may become global in its own right’.<sup>7</sup>

The third layer explores the poetics and politics of solidarity within the novel against the backdrop of Tunisian state feminism and the implementation of the new Personal Status Code (PSC) in 1956, only five months after independence, by Habib Bourguiba—the ‘father of the nation’ whose legacy continues to be disputed among feminists and non-feminists.<sup>8</sup> In *Barg el-Lil* patriarchal oppression is epitomized

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5 Karima Laachir, Sara Marzagora, and Francesca Orsini, ‘Significant Geographies in Lieu of World Literature’, *Journal of World Literature*, 3.3 (2018), 290–310.

6 Edwige Tamalet Talbayev, *The Transcontinental Maghreb: Francophone Literature across the Mediterranean* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

7 Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel* (Paris: Denol, 1983), p. 26. Many Maghrebis still use ‘Africa’ (*Ifriqiya*) to refer only to sub-Saharan Africa. For a brief history of how Africa got separated into the two scholarly fields of Middle Eastern and North African Studies vs African Studies (i.e. sub-Saharan Africa), see Hisham Aïdi, Marc Lynch, and Zachariah Mampilly, ‘And the Twain Shall Meet: Connecting Africa and the Middle East’ in *Africa and the Middle East: Beyond the Divides*, POMEPS Studies 40 (POMEPS and Columbia SIPA, 2020), pp. 8–18.

8 Sophie Bessis, ‘Bourguiba, Un Destin Tunisien’, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, September 2018, p. 7.

by repudiation, women's confinement, and the state's institutional violence, some of the key issues addressed by the PSC. The novel also discusses masculinity, and moments of inter-racial intimacy and solidarity mark the friendship between the two male protagonists—the central African slave Barg and local free man Sha'shu'. All in all, the novel posits pre-modern gender politics as repressive, but suggests that solidarity, friendship and love, and the subaltern heroes' individual wit and force, can challenge and dismantle it, which is interesting in light of the state- and Bourguiba-centric reformism.

### *Barg el-Lil* in Tunisian and Third World Postcolonial Print Culture

*Bachir Kh[rey]if [is] the only Tunisian writer who provoked in me a sweet yet violent shock, such as I experienced when I read Zuqāq al-Midaq (Midaq Alley) by Naguib Mahfouz, and when I finished reading Arkhaṣ Layālī (The Cheapest Nights) by Yusuf Idris.*

Hassouna Mosbahi<sup>9</sup>

Tunisia had been a French Protectorate since 1881, with significant communities of Italian, Maltese and Greek immigrants since the beginning of the century.<sup>10</sup> At the time Bachir Khreyif (or Béchir Khraïef, 1917–1983) started writing in the late 1930s, the majority of the Tunisian print culture was Francophone.<sup>11</sup> Khreyif was born in the town of Nefta in the south-western Djreid region, known for its many Sufi lodges, but was raised in Tunis after his family moved there. Like many of his peers, Khreyif first received a traditional education and studied (and memorized) the Qur'an and classical Arabic poetry and language—skills which enabled him to read the sixteenth-century chronicles and exemplary biographies (*manaqib*) that underwrite *Barg el-Lil*.<sup>12</sup>

9 Hassouna Mosbahi, 'James Joyce in Tunisia', trans. by Peter Clarck, *Banipal*, 19 (2004), p. 156.

10 Julia Ann Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c. 1800–1900* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2011).

11 Around 63% of the Tunisian press in the 1930s was in French, 22% in Arabic, and the rest in Italian and Judeo-Arabic; Manoubia Ben Ghedahem, *Haddad et la presse d'expression française: un aspect méconnu de la querelle* (Tunis: Ichraq Editions, 2009), p. 6.

12 Fawzi Al-Zimarli, 'Introduction', *Al-Bachīr Khreyif*, I, p. 10.

Though he did not attend Sadiqi College, one of the Maghreb's earliest modern schools established by the Ottoman-Tunisian statesman and reformer Khayr el-Din in 1875, and where many prominent nationalists, including Bourguiba, were educated,<sup>13</sup> Khreyif received education in Arabic and French at a bilingual primary school and later read Flaubert, Balzac, Stendhal, Dostoevsky, Schiller, Chekhov and Hemingway. He also read modern Arabic writers, mainly from Egypt and the Middle East, including Mahmoud 'Abbas al-'Aqad, Taha Hussein and Tawfiq al-Hakim, who advocated a new poetic sensibility under the rubric of 'art for art's sake' and would later oppose the explicit politicization of literature advocated by Arab writers in the 1950s.<sup>14</sup>

Arabic literature and print culture in Tunisia were deeply tied to trends in Egypt and the Levant (or Mashreq). If at the turn of the twentieth century the Arabic press and literary periodicals in the Maghreb published Levantine and Egyptian writers belonging to the movement of cultural revival or *Nahda*, in the 1920s a new generation of Tunisian writers with modernist ideas emerged, including Abu al-Qasim al-Shabbi, Ali Douagi, Mohamed Saleh al-Muhawidi and Mustapha Khreyif—Bachir's brother.<sup>15</sup> Together they formed the literary group *Taht Essour* (Under the Wall), named after the café in the old part of Tunis where they gathered to debate and write.<sup>16</sup> *Taht Essour* criticized the weight of normative tradition and experimented with style and the use of Tunisian Arabic or *Darija*, and its members lived a bohemian lifestyle. Al-Shabbi himself was clued into contemporary Arabic literature from the Levant and North America and published in the Egyptian literary magazine *Apollo*. The use of *Darija* and the iconoclasm of the *Taht Essour* group arguably influenced Khreyif.

Bachir Khreyif started publishing short stories, critical pieces and translations in Tunisian and other Arabic literary magazines in

13 Julia Ann Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans*, especially chapter 5.

14 Al-Zimarli, 'Introduction', pp. 12–13. Yoav Di-Capua, 'The Intellectual Revolt of the 1950s and the "Fall of the Udabā"' in *Commitment and Beyond: Reflections On/of the Political in Arabic Literature Since the 1940s*, ed. by Friederike Pannewick, Georges Khalil, and Yvonne Albers (Weisbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2015), pp. 89–104.

15 Augustin, Jomier, 'Le journalisme de langue arabe au Maghreb (1850-1950)' in *Encyclopédie Des Historiographies: Afriques, Amériques, Asies*, vol. 1, ed. by Nathalie Kouamé, Éric P. Meyer, and Anne Viguier (Paris: Presses de l'Inalco, 2020), pp. 942–47.

16 Hassouna Mosbahi, 'Outstanding Figures in 20th Century Tunisian Culture', *Banipal*, 39 (2010), pp. 46–47.

the interwar period.<sup>17</sup> His experiments in historical fiction began in the aftermath of the 1938 events, when civil disobedience protests encouraged by activist Habib Bourguiba's Neo-Destour nationalist party were violently repressed by the police.<sup>18</sup> It was then that Khreyif began writing *Balara*, a text in which he delved into the little known Hafsid period (1229–1574), when Ifriqiya (western Libya, Tunisia, and eastern Algeria) was ruled by a Sunni Muslim dynasty of Berber descent, which is also the setting for *Barg el-Lil's* narrative (Fig. 7.1).<sup>19</sup> Though he did not publish *Balara* until decades later, it prefigures *Barg el-Lil* in having Barg himself as a character.<sup>20</sup>

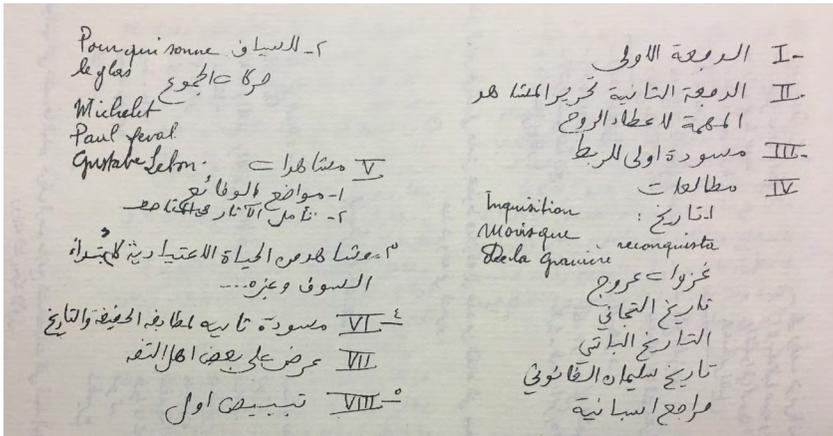


Fig. 7.1 Khreyif's (bilingual) notes on the chapters for *Balara*, which led him to delve into Hafsid Tunisia. The notes include historical episodes such as the Reconquista or the attacks led by Aruj Bey 'Barbarossa'; they mention the Inquisition, Arabic and Spanish chronicles, and French historiography. From Fawzi al-Zimarli, *Al-Bachūr Khreyif: Al-A'māl al-Kāmila* (Tunis: Dar al-Janub, 2007), IV, p. 365.

17 Al-Zimarli, 'Introduction', p. 11.

18 Ibid., p. 25. The so-called 'festival of the martyrs' of 9 April 1938 acquired multiple meanings in independent Tunisia; Mary D. Lewis, *Divided Rule: Sovereignty and Empire in French Tunisia, 1881–1938* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), pp. 176–78.

19 Al-Zimarli 'Introduction', p. 13.

20 Khreyif did not publish *Balara* fearing readers' criticism, possibly because his depiction of Hafsid Tunisia as a melting pot departed from the ethno-nationalist discourse of the time. Khreyif returned to *Balara* in 1959 and turned it into play (*al-Banāt* [The Girls]); *Barg el-Lil* saw the light a year later; Al-Zimarli 'Introduction', pp. 14, 36–37.

Khreyif reappeared in 1958 on the pages of the monthly *al-Fikr* (Thought), one of the main literary and intellectual platforms in postcolonial Tunisia founded in 1955 by Muhammad Mzali.<sup>21</sup> Beside launching many new Tunisian writers, *al-Fikr* published major poets and intellectuals from across the Arab world, such as the Egyptian critic and writer 'Aisha 'Abd al-Rahman and the Iraqi champion of the Free Verse Movement Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, but also French and Spanish Arabists Jacques Berque and Emilio García Gómez, together with translations from Chekhov, Camus and Kafka.<sup>22</sup>

Like its coeval *al-Nadwa* (Cenacle), *al-Fikr* sought to define the nature of the writer's mission in society.<sup>23</sup> Although the question of the responsibility of writers toward their people had already emerged in the 1920s, the term *iltizām* (commitment) became current only after Taha Husayn decried Sartre's notion of *littérature engagée* in 1947. Ironically, as Yoav Di-Capua notes, 'in warning the young of the dangers of commitment, Taha Husayn gave this burgeoning intellectual movement its Arabic name'.<sup>24</sup> When the Egyptian critic Salama Musa (1887–1958) adopted socialist theories and the Beirut-based periodical *Al-Ādāb* became 'the mouthpiece of a whole generation of committed writers and poets', the idea of a committed literature (*al-adab al-multazim*) took a more leftist hue, and as such came to dominate the Tunisian and pan-Arabic field in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>25</sup> The first 1959 issue of *al-Fikr*, for example, was devoted to the social role of universities, with essays comparing the state of higher education and the role of intellectuals in Asian, African and European countries and the Arab world.

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21 Abir Kréfa, 'La quête de l'autonomie littéraire en contexte autoritaire: le cas des écrivains tunisiens', *Sociologie*, 4.4 (2013), p. 400.

22 Aisha 'Abd al-Rahman a.k.a Bint al-Shati wrote on women's/feminist writing in Arab literature (*al-Fikr*, December 1961); Badr Shakir al-Sayab on *engagement* in contemporary Arab literature (*al-Fikr*, December 1961); Emilio García Gómez on Andalusí romances (*al-Fikr*, December 1962).

23 Jean Fontaine and Mounir B. H. Slama, 'Arabic-Language Tunisian Literature (1956–1990)', *Research in African Literatures*, 23.2 (1992), 183–93 (p. 184).

24 Di-Capua, 'The Intellectual Revolt of the 1950s', p. 93.

25 Verena Klemm, 'Different Notions of Commitment (Iltizām) and Committed Literature (al-Adab al-Multazim) in the Literary Circles of the Mashriq', *Arabic and Middle Eastern Literatures*, 3.1 (2000), 51–62 (p. 54). See also Yoav Di-Capua, 'Arab Existentialism: An Invisible Chapter in the Intellectual History of Decolonization', *The American Historical Review*, 117.4 (2012), 1061–91 (p. 1061).

While poetry dominated the Tunisian and Arabic literary field and print culture until the 1950s, *al-Fikr* gave room other genres, too.<sup>26</sup> An entire issue in July 1959 was devoted to ‘the story’ (*qiṣṣa*), a genre the editors felt was missing from the Tunisian postcolonial literary field. In fact, in the late 1950s and early 1960s it was often difficult to draw a clear demarcation between the story or tale and the novel or long narrative (*riwāya*). Novels appeared as serialized stories in journals, and some writers produced texts ‘in a sort of intermediary form, somewhere between a short novel and a long short story’.<sup>27</sup> Finally, language debates divided Tunisian print culture like other parts of the Arab world. Many French-educated Tunisians challenged the colonial preference for the vernacular or Darija over literary Arabic on the basis that the latter was incompatible with modernity. (We will hear echoes of these arguments in the criticisms of Khreyif for his use of Tunisian Darija.<sup>28</sup>) At the same time, criticisms of the use of Darija also reflected elitist conceptions of literature. Despite a long tradition of vernacular popular poetry across the whole Arabic-speaking region, modern intellectuals tended to dismiss it as unworthy or illegitimate because it did not fit into the prevailing notion of *adab*, which entailed ‘conformity to linguistic norms, such as those governing purity and correctness’.<sup>29</sup>

Throughout the 1960s Khreyif published in *al-Fikr*, where *Barg el-Lil* appeared in serialized form and where he took part in the debates on language, committed literature, and genre. Literature for Khreyif had to relate to the socio-political reality of the world around it and draw from the lives of the common people, and although he became most famous for

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26 Josefina Veglión Elías de Molins, ‘La personalidad literaria de Túnez en el siglo XX’, *Hesperia culturas del Mediterráneo*, 10 (2008), 37–47 (p. 42).

27 Richard Jacquemond, *Conscience of the Nation: Writers, State, and Society in Modern Egypt* (Cairo: American University Press, 2008), p. 218. Khreyif’s ‘Iflās aw Ḥubbak Ḍarbāny’ (Bankruptcy or Your Love Drove me Crazy, 1958–59) was the first ‘long story’ published by *al-Fikr*; it discusses the sexual education of an urban young man, denouncing false appearances; it was dedicated to ‘the son of the country’ (*ibn al-balad*) and serialized in three parts between December 1958 and June 1959; Fawzi al-Zimarli, *Al-Bachīr Khreyif*, II, p. 9.

28 Nadia Mamelouk, ‘The Death of Arabic: Language Wars in Tunis during the Colonial Period’, *Unpublished*, n.d. I would like to thank Nadia Mamelouk for sharing this unpublished work and parts of her private archive during my fieldwork in Tunis in 2018.

29 Since the eighteenth century, the vernacular corpus was ‘allowed into canonical culture only if [it] ha[d] been domesticated or reified as “folklore”’; Jacquemond, *Conscience of the Nation*, pp. 9–10.

his historical novels he considered plays and stories—rather than novels—to be the genres most suited for tackling people’s concerns (see Orsini in this volume).<sup>30</sup> In a 1959 article in *al-Fikr* he rejected the apocalyptic future of ‘isolation’ (*in’izāl*) from the pan-Arabic literary field that critics envisaged for literature containing Tunisian Arabic.<sup>31</sup> He pointed towards the living nature of language and signalled the ‘co-existence’ (*ta’āyush*) of standard and vernacular forms of Arabic. Khreyif did not advocate the end of Tunisian affiliation with the body of Arabic classical literature; rather, he wanted to continue to belong to such tradition while making it compatible with Tunisian locatedness, expressed particularly through dialogues. Finally, he asked *al-fuṣaḥā’* (people of eloquence) to stop being pretentious and to consider Darija a respectable language (*lughā muḥtarama*). Khreyif’s criticism of the elitism of the intellectuals echoes Egyptian Salama Musa’s call for writing ‘in the language of the simple people’ and his accusation that traditional literature was ‘the literature of the rulers’, whereas committed literature was ‘responsible, devoted to social problems and had a declared position with respect to war, imperialism, exploitation, suppression of women and gender injustice in law and economy’.<sup>32</sup> Khreyif later modified his position and argued, in an article published in *al-Fikr* in 1964 with the title ‘*al-Iltizām khaṇq al-adab*’ (Commitment chokes literature), that *iltizām* could, and at times did, divest literature of its creative soul. Khreyif decried the writers’ constant political positioning and need to justify every choice, which sounded pedantic (*ḥadhlaqa*) to readers. Instead of committed literature he called for ‘liberated literature’ (*adab mutaḥarrir*), and affirmed that ‘the role of the intellectual is to express his opinion freely’.<sup>33</sup>

The history of the publication of *Barg el-Lil* sheds light on the importance of periodicals as the first port of publication and the slippage between stories and novels. Many Maghrebi works published in periodicals in the first half of the twentieth century have either been forgotten or, if they were later published in book form as novels, their

30 Al-Zimarli, ‘Introduction’, p. 40. Khreyif was not alone in considering that the novel was unable to express ‘communal concerns and the community’s language’; Mohamed-Salah Omri, ‘Guest Editor’s Introduction’, *Comparative Critical Studies*, 4.3 (2007), 317–28.

31 Al-Zimarli, *Al-Bachīr Khreyif*, IV, pp. 19–24.

32 Klemm, ‘Different Notions of Commitment (Iltizām)’, p. 56, which refers to Salama Musa’s *al-Adab li-l-sha’b* (Literature to the Masses).

33 Khreyf, ‘Al-Iltizām Khaṇq al-Adab’ in al-Zimarli, *Al-Bachīr Khreyif*, IV, pp. 33–35.

original serialization as stories is unacknowledged.<sup>34</sup> A paradigmatic example is Abdelmajid Benjelloun's *Fī al-Tufūla* (In Childhood), acclaimed as the first Moroccan novel published in 1957, whereas the stories that constitute it appeared in the periodical *Risāla-t al-Maghrib* between 1949 and 1951.<sup>35</sup> In fact, publishing literary books in early postcolonial Tunisia was difficult, at least until the 'Maison Tunisienne d'Édition' was established in 1966.<sup>36</sup> In the case of *Barg el-Lil*, though Khreyif completed it as single piece in March 1960 and sent it to the Tunis city council (Ali al-Balhawan) literary competition on Tunisian history, it was only after it won the prize that *al-Fikr* began to serialize it in December 1960 (Fig. 7.2), before its book publication in 1961 (Fig. 7.3).<sup>37</sup> Note that whereas the instalment in *al-Fikr* spelt the name of the protagonist according to the Darija pronunciation (Barg, with three dots), the note by *al-Fikr's* editors and the cover of the novel reproduced the standard Arabic pronunciation (Barq, with two or no dots).

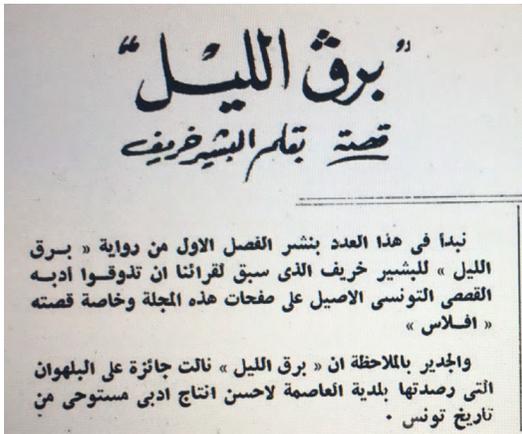


Fig. 7.2 'Barg el-Lil: a story [*qiṣṣa*] by al-Bashir Khreyif, a 'literary treasure' [*athr adabī rā'i*] which we hope will be published and occupy the place it deserves in Tunisian literature'. From *al-Fikr*, 1 December 1960, p. 9.

- 34 This amnesia is partly due to the fact that the novel has been constructed as the modern genre *par excellence* and endowed with a prestige that stories serialized in periodicals lack; Omri, 'Guest Editor's Introduction', pp. 317–28.
- 35 Gonzalo Fernández Parrilla, *La literatura marroquí contemporánea: la novela y la crítica literaria* (Cuenca: Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, 2006), pp. 123–24. The same was true of Jurji Zaydan's historical novels, first serialized in his periodical *al-Hilāl*.
- 36 Fontaine and Slama, 'Arabic-Language Tunisian Literature (1956–1990)', p. 186.
- 37 Part 2 of the novel appeared in January 1961, and part 3 in February; serialization stopped when the novel came out in book form.



غلاف الطبعة الأولى لبرق الليل (الشركة القومية للنشر والتوزيع - تونس 1961)  
نعتقد أنه من إنجاز حسن تعازيت ومنه استوحينا غلاف طبعة "عمون المعاصرة".

Fig. 7.3 Cover of the 1961 novel by illustrator Hassan Ta'rit. From Bachir Khreyif, *Barg el-Lil* (Tunis: Dar al-Janub, 2000), p. 23.

Khreyif's choice of a black slave as protagonist was a powerful expression of his literary commitment. *Barg el-Lil* was written in the time of what Saidiya Hartman calls 'afrotopia', a movement aimed at the cultural and political emancipation of Africans as well as those of African descent at a moment in which 'it seemed that as soon as tomorrow the legacy of slavery and colonialism would be overthrown'.<sup>38</sup> This moment included the publication of the journal *Présence africaine* (1947, ed. Alioune Diop) and of Leopold Senghor's *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache* (Anthology of new black and Malagasy poetry, 1948), and the re-publication of Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (*Return to the Native Land*, 1947 [1939]), among others.<sup>39</sup> If Frantz Fanon, who

<sup>38</sup> Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, p. 35.

<sup>39</sup> For Third-Worldism as the formation of an international intelligentsia based in Europe, see Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

moved to Tunis after he was expelled from Algeria by the colonial authorities in 1956, decried the ‘inverted Manicheism of the “Negroism” of the Negritude writers’, these debates moved race and anticolonialism from the margins to the centre of Francophone public discourse—in the Maghreb and Tunisia as well.<sup>40</sup>

Although Bourguiba was pro-Western in contrast to Nasser’s Egypt, Muammar al Qaddafi’s Libya, and the Front de Libération Nationale’s (FLN) Algeria, by the late 1950s he sought to reinforce the international position of Tunisia as a non-aligned state.<sup>41</sup> In the 1960 Tunisia hosted the All African Peoples Conference (AAPC), which gathered the international movement for freedom and democracy while aiming to build a black nation. First held in Accra (Ghana) in 1958 and then in Tunis in 1960, the AAPC brought many African nationalist leaders into contact with others still actively struggling for independence, like Algeria’s, for the first time. Fanon wrote a large part of *The Wretched of the Earth* while in Tunis and Ghana. Maghrebi delegations from Tunisia, Morocco and Libya attended the AAPC in 1958, as did other radical intellectuals: Malcolm X lectured in Accra, where he met Shirley Du Bois and Maya Angelou. Fanon, who had joined the editorial team of the FLN newspaper *El Moudjahid* while in Tunisia, was appointed by the Provisional Government of Algeria in 1960 as ambassador to Ghana, from where he made trips to other African countries to extend the call for pan-African unity.<sup>42</sup> Fanon progressively made the link between the growing movement for national liberation in Algeria and the revolutionary movement in Africa as a whole.<sup>43</sup> ‘Watching the world from the vantage point of Ghana’, writes Kevin Gaines, the international expatriates and African intellectuals ‘articulated a neutralism resistant

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40 Max Silverman, ‘Frantz Fanon: Colonialism and Violence’ in *Postcolonial Thought in the French Speaking World*, ed. by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), p. 86.

41 Yahia H. Zoubir, ‘The United States, the Soviet Union and Decolonization of the Maghreb, 1945–62’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, 31.1 (1995), 58–84; Amy Aisen Kallander, ‘“Friends of Tunisia”: French Economic and Diplomatic Support of Tunisian Authoritarianism’ in *Making of the Tunisian Revolution: Contexts, Architects, Prospects*, ed. by Nouri Gana (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. 103–24.

42 Rachid Ouaisa, ‘On the Trail of Fanon’ in *Commitment and Beyond: Reflections On/of the Political in Arabic Literature Since the 1940s*, ed. by Friederike Pannewick, Georges Khalil, and Yvonne Albers (Reichert Verlag, 2015), p. 107.

43 Silverman, ‘Frantz Fanon’, p. 78.

to the dictates of both the United States and the Soviet Union'.<sup>44</sup> They also situated emancipation in relation to the history of slavery and the forced uprooting of Africans to different world diasporas. *Barg el-Lil* tells the story of one such enslaved sub-Saharan in early-modern Tunisia.

Parallel to the transnational 'afrotopian' context, there are national dynamics also to be considered. Led by Bourguiba, the nascent Tunisian postcolonial state aimed to create a politically unified modern and secular nation.<sup>45</sup> Bourguiba implemented 'policies intended to ingest heterogeneous entities and homogenize the nation', subsuming regional, racial and class differences under full citizenship. Yet Bourguiba's project for modern Tunisia clearly privileged the secular and urban middle classes and their cultural orientation, and throughout the 1960s the one-party state sidelined the working class, students, and peasants in the already marginalized interior while it consolidated its power in ways that benefited landowners and the urban middle classes.<sup>46</sup>

Bourguiba's policies were 'colour-blind', Afifa Ltifi argues, and although they aimed at 'suppress[ing] the memory of slavery', they reinforced its stigma and the inequality between their descendants and other Tunisians.<sup>47</sup> In light of Bourguiba's 'colour-blind' policies, the fact that *Barg el-Lil* connects North and sub-Saharan Africa foregrounds a postcolonial pan-African geographical imagination and sheds light onto the silenced history of the trans-Saharan slave trade, which underpins Khreyif's exceptional vision and suggests that he was alert to the afrotopian moment.

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44 Kevin K. Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), p. 13.

45 Afifa Ltifi, 'Black Tunisians and the Pitfalls of Bourguiba's Homogenization Project' in *Africa and the Middle East: Beyond the Divides*, ed. by Hisham Aidi, Marc Lynch, and Zachariah Mampilly (POMEPS and Columbia SIPA, 2020), pp. 69–72.

46 In the late 1960s Bourghiba repressed student mobilizations against global anti-imperialism and autocracy; Burleigh Hendrickson, 'March 1968: Practicing Transnational Activism from Tunis to Paris', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 44.4 (2012), pp. 755–74. Bourguiba's own family belonged to small land-owning bourgeoisie from coastal Monastir, and he studied in the Sadiqi college and Law and Political Science in Paris. On his life and political trajectory, see Sophie Bessis and Souhayr Belhassen, *Bourguiba: À La Conquête d'un Destin (1901–1957)* (Paris: Jeune Afrique Livres, 1988), I.

47 Ltifi, 'Black Tunisians', p. 69.

## Tunisian Borderlands: Between the Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan Africa

*This is the story [qiṣṣa] of the Tunisian hero 'Barq el-Lil' who lived through the hazardous historical events of the hijri tenth century. He witnessed the arrival of Khayr al-Din, Hazardous Wednesday, the Spanish occupation, and local people fleeing to the area of Zaghuan—and his deeds were extraordinary throughout.*

Khreyif, *Barg el-Lil*, p. 27

One of the most interesting aspects of this fascinating novel is its locatedness and the geographical imagination it foregrounds. As the epigraph announces, the story takes place in the tumultuous time—what historian Ibn Abi Dinar called the 'hazardous Wednesday' (*khaṭra-t al-arb'īyā'*)—following the deposition of the Hafsid Sultan Mawlay Hassan by the Ottoman army led by Khayr al-Din Barbarossa in 1534, and the latter's defeat a year later by the army of the Spanish emperor Charles V, whose help the deposed sultan had sought.<sup>48</sup> Tunis in *Barg el-Lil* is a 'Borderland city' where different cultures meet and grapple with each other, sometimes in profoundly asymmetrical ways; a mosaic of cultures and languages, of social classes, status and gendered positions, quite an antithetical image to that of a unified national identity and social sameness imposed by Tunisian nationalist discourse.<sup>49</sup> Already the early French works by Tunisians Salah Ferhat (*Poèmes*, 1918) and Salah el-Atri (*Les Chants de l'aurore*, 1931) had included references to the Berber, Phoenician, Roman and Arabo-Islamic civilizations, inscribing, as Tahar Bekri has noted, a 'broader conceptualization of Tunisia's social and cultural past'.<sup>50</sup> Yet Khreyif's historical fiction is more in tune with that of nineteenth-century Arab authors like Sa'id al-Bustani, Y'aqub Sarruf and, above all, Jurji Zaydan.<sup>51</sup> Like Zaydan, Khreyif wants his

48 Muhammad b. Abi al-Qasim al-Qayrawani, *al-Mūnis fī Akḥbār Ifrīqīya wa Tūnis* (*A Companion to the History of Ifriqiya and Tunis*, Tunisian Press: 1869), composed in 1681 or 1698.

49 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012).

50 Tahar Bekri, 'On French-Language Tunisian Literature', *Research in African Literatures* 23.2 (1992), p. 178.

51 Roger Allen, 'Literary History and the Arabic Novel', *World Literature Today*, 75.2 (2001), p. 207, and *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995), p. 62; Matti Moussa, *The Origins of Modern Arabic*

historical fiction to illuminate the popular classes, those ‘unknown protagonists’ disregarded by mainstream historians.<sup>52</sup> Modern Tunisian historians, Khreyif sarcastically noted, merely focused on ‘facts’ about kings and rulers: ‘they say “this king died, another king came, then that one died, thus this other one came, until the world ended”’.<sup>53</sup> In this regard, *Barg al-Lil* can be thought of as working against the ‘noble genres of Arabic literature’.<sup>54</sup>

The novel opens with Barg as a seventeen-year-old black man who ‘began his life [in Tunisia] as a slave of Sidi Hamid b. al-Nakhli, the scholar who devoted his life to searching the philosopher’s stone and the elixir of life’.<sup>55</sup> Barg’s owner, in other words, is the man who Miguel de Cervantes claimed to be the author of the Arabic original text of which *Don Quixote* was a translation. This intertextual gesture in the very first sentence of the novel helps locate the world Barg inhabits, a world shaped, like Cervantes’s, by a constant shift across borders and margins.<sup>56</sup> The imprint on Cervantes’ *magnum opus* evokes the notion of the ‘transcontinental Maghreb’ with its millennia-old relations and interconnections.<sup>57</sup> Arguably, inscribing this shared Mediterranean history through *Don Quixote*, one of the acclaimed masterpieces of Western literature, engenders reciprocity and symbolically challenges colonial hierarchies that are inscribed in linear conceptions of history travelling from tradition and ‘backwardness’ to modern ‘civilization’.<sup>58</sup>

Another trace of this intertextual connection and literary cross-pollination comes through the character of Barg as a *pícaro* or trickster

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*Fiction* (Colorado: Lynne Reinner, 1997), p. 213. See also Kamran Rastegar, ‘Jurji Zaydan: Avatar of the Modern Revitalization and Worlding of Arabic Literature’ in *A Companion to World Literature*, ed. by Ken Seigneurie (John Wiley and Sons, 2019), pp. 1–11.

52 Al-Zimarli, ‘Introduction’, p. 27.

53 Al-Zimarli, *Al-Bachir Khreyif*, IV, p. 221.

54 As James T. Monroe argued with regard to Badi’ al-Zaman al-Hamadani’s ninth-century *maqāmāt* picaresque in *The art of Badi’ al-Zaman al-Hamadani as Picaresque Narrative* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1983), p. 99.

55 Khreyif, *Barg el-Lil*, p. 27.

56 María Antonia Garcés, *Cervantes in Algiers: A Captive’s Tale* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002).

57 Talbayev, *Transcontinental Maghreb*.

58 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 7. Lynn A. Hunt, ‘Modernity: Are Modern Times Different?’, *Historia Crítica*, 54 (2014), p. 115.

character. It has long been argued that sixteenth-century Spanish *picaresca* echoes Arabic anecdotal narratives or *maqāmāt* and oral *zajal* poetry. The anticlerical element in the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554), the best-known prototype of Spanish *picaresca*, is ‘so manifest’, one critic argues, that it has been suggested that the work ‘might have been written by a *morisco*’.<sup>59</sup>

By casting *Barg el-Lil* the *pícaro* as an enslaved Central African young man, the novel subverts the pervasive silencing of the Maghrebi involvement in the enslavement of black Africans.<sup>60</sup> The violent uprooting and enslavement of Barg, and of virtually any Tunisian descendant of sub-Saharan slaves, is presented explicitly through Barg’s own memories:

he remembered how he was securely transported—as an innocent prey—to the caravan of turban-wearing whites [*baīd mu’ammamīn*]. There he found his mother, tied and weeping, her eyes full of tears. [...] She had resisted, then given up with resignation. [...] [When] she saw her child [...] she tried to reach him with her chest, as her hands were tied at the back. The slave trader whipped her and she screamed like a lioness, exposed her canine teeth [*‘anīyāb*] dried of all saliva, while the boy, like a fawn, tried to rebel against the abductor.<sup>61</sup>

Such violence is inflicted on Barg by ‘turban-wearing whites’, a clear reference to Bedouin slave traders. Racism underpins not just the trauma of his, and his mother’s, enslavement, but every aspect of Barg’s life in Tunis: ‘He is black. And this is the whites’ world’ (*dunīyā al-baīd*), the narrator notes.<sup>62</sup> Whiteness marks not only the slave traders but Tunisians in general—and privileged white people worldwide. We can in fact read the reference as a pun on Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (originally published in 1952) and a transposition of Fanon’s critique of the dehumanization of the black colonized by white (French) colonialism onto early modern Hafsid-Ottoman Tunisia,

59 Jareer Abu-Haidar, “‘Maqāmāt’ Literature and the Picaresque Novel”, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 5 (1974), p. 9. Also J.T. Monroe, *The art of Badi’ al-Zaman al-Hamadhani as Picaresque Narrative*.

60 For a history of Tunisian involvement in trans-Saharan slavery, see Ismael Musah Montana, *The Abolition of Slavery in Ottoman Tunisia* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013).

61 Khreyif, *Barg el-Lil*, p. 77.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

where blacks are exploited by Tunisian whites—or rather ‘white, but not quite’.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, in the passage quoted above the metaphorical animalization of Barg, and especially of his mother, associates them with instinct and aggressiveness and, disturbingly, instead of instilling a critical view towards the perpetrators of violence, it naturalizes the racist (and speciesist) tenet by which they are kidnapped, mistreated, traded, worked, sold, and exploited.

Through Barg’s memories of the caravan route, the narrative evokes some of the most notorious enclaves of the trans-Saharan trade routes: ‘From Central Africa the caravan headed to Timbuktu and Bornu. There they sold, bought and interchanged ostrich feathers, coral, shells, textiles, pottery and arms. They then continued their way to the Fezzan’.<sup>64</sup> By placing Tunisia within the ‘significant geographies’ of the trans-Saharan (slave) trade and relations, *Barg el-Lil* connects both sides of the Saharan desert and problematizes the long-standing cleavage between the so-called Bilād al-Baīḍān (the Lands of the Whites) and Bilād al-Sūdān (the Lands of the Blacks).<sup>65</sup> The action-driven narrative shifts into a reflexive mode through the memories of violence and Barg’s longing to ‘go back to the world of blacks’ (*dunīyā al-sūd*).<sup>66</sup> But if the novel illuminates the traumatic experiences of forced uprooting and enslavement, Barg is no passive victim. On the contrary, the text challenges understandings of slavery as utter victimhood, and Barg shows agency not only in managing his own life but also in shaping Tunisian history. While historical accounts attribute the withdrawal of the Christian forces to their being decimated by leprosy, in the novel it is the arsenic that Barg throws into the pond of the Citadel that kills the soldiers and forces the Christians out of the country.<sup>67</sup>

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63 Homi Bhabha, ‘Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse’ in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. by Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 153.

64 Khreyif, *Barg el-Lil*, p. 78.

65 See Leo Africanus, *Della Descrittione dell’Africa et delle cose notabili che ivi sono* (1550), which includes a translation of his Arabic travelogue (written when he was still al-Hassan al-Wazzan) in which he uses the term the Lands of the Blacks; A.R. Allen, *Leo’s Travels in the Sudan: Being the Seventh Book of Leo Africanus Simplified, Abridged and Done into Modern English from the Translation of John Pory* (London; Ibadan; Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1962).

66 Khreyif, *Barg el-Lil*, p. 76.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 137.

Barg's cultural attachment to central Africa is embedded in music and dance. Music is in fact a fundamental element of the novel and triggers narrative action. It is through music and dance that the protagonist attracts the attention of his beloved neighbour Rim while he dances to the sound of glass jars and bottles at Sidi b. al-Nakhli's (Fig. 7.4), which 'enables his ancestral musical intuitiveness'.<sup>68</sup> The sweet memories of Barg's childhood back home include dancing around the embers of the open fire before going to sleep.<sup>69</sup> This association of Barg with an intuitiveness that comes all the way from a remote past (*salīqat[u]hu al-'arīḍa*) again problematically connects him with the realm of nature and a past antithetical to modernity.<sup>70</sup> At the same time, the history and memory of black people in Tunisia are linked to rituals of trance and possession by divine spirits that are associated with a particular set of rhythms and movements and that Tunisian readers would probably connect with Stambeli musicians, the descendants of sub-Saharan slaves.<sup>71</sup> Their performances—like the Gnawa in Morocco—illustrate the current folklorization of minority cultures.<sup>72</sup>

In *Borderlands*, 'at the juncture of cultures, languages cross-pollinate and are revitalised; they die and are born', Gloria Anzaldúa reminds us.<sup>73</sup> The sixteenth-century Tunisian Borderland in *Barg el-Lil* is truly multilingual. Different registers of Arabic, Turkish and Italian are heard on the streets of Tunis, and the music and chants of the Andalusis mingle with those of Beduins, Genoese, and Majorcan

68 Ibid., p. 28. See also Samir Marzouki, 'Fiction historique et subversion: Barg ellil de Béchir Khraïef', *Revue de littérature comparée* 327.3 (2008), 368–69.

69 Khreyif, *Barg el-Lil*, p. 77.

70 On the pervasiveness of such negative associations, see Pouessel, Stéphanie, 'Les Tunisiens noirs entre stéréotype, racisme et histoire: regard sur l'actualisation d'une identité «marginale intégrée»'; in *Noirs au Maghreb. Enjeux identitaires* (Tunis; Paris: Karthala), pp. 75–98.

71 In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries these rituals were carried out in communal households (*dīyār*), which also functioned as support systems for the enslaved communities; Ismael Montana, 'Bori practice among enslaved West Africans of Ottoman Tunis: Unbelief (Kufr) or another dimension of the African diaspora?', *The History of the Family*, 16, 2 (2011), pp. 152–59; also Itzea Goikolea-Amiano, 'Gender and Sexuality in early 19th-century Tunisia: a Decolonial Reading of Aḥmad b. al-Qāḍī al-Timbuktāwī's *naṣīḥa* on the sub-Saharan diaspora', *Genre & Histoire*, 25 (2020), 1–14.

72 Richard C. Jankowsky, *Stambeli: Music, Trance, and Alterity in Tunisia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

73 Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, p. 20.

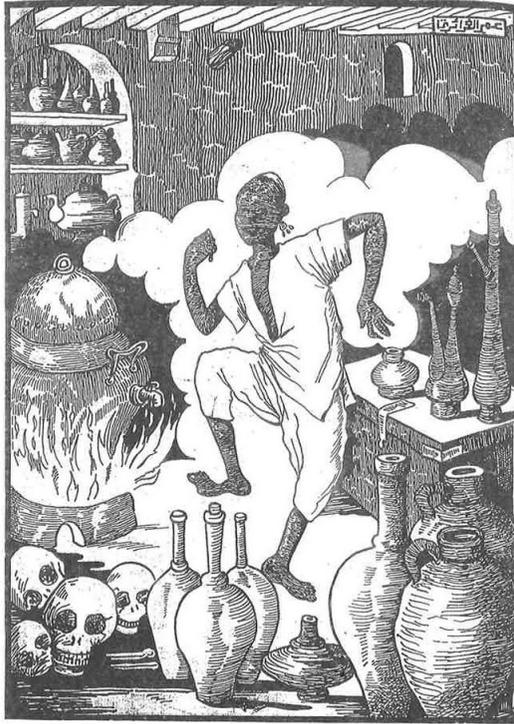


Fig. 7.4 'Barg el-Lil at Sidi Hamid b. al-Nakhli's laboratory', by Omar Ghurairy. Image provided by Salma Khreyif. From Bachir Khreyif, *Barg el-Lil* (Tunis: Dar al-Janub, 2000), p. 35.

sailors.<sup>74</sup> The port is frequented by privateers who come and go, carrying booty and captives from across the Mediterranean; captives are imprisoned in the Citadel or sold in the city markets along with Circassian and sub-Saharan slaves. A sizeable number of *moriscos* rescued from Christian harassment at the fall of the Muslim kingdoms of al-Andalus also dwell in the capital, along with Andalusí migrants, whose musical chants bring much delight; some of them join the force fighting the Spaniard invasion, eager for revenge. As the narrator notes, among the 'linguistic expressions inherited from that time and still in employ is the following: "No one knows the Rumi expulsion better than the Andalusí"'.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>75</sup> Khreyif, *Barg el-Lil*, p. 120. Rumi refers to the Christians (*al-rūm*).

If language plays a fundamental role in signalling the force of structural violence, it also highlights the agency of the slave protagonist. Barg performs a pidginized and incorrect Darija in order to avoid the legal responsibility he had previously committed to, and declares: 'let the free comply, let the free comply, I am a slave, I can't comply with anything' (أنا ما أُنزِرُ شيء).<sup>76</sup> Barg mispronounces the verb *anjaza*, meaning 'to do', 'comply', or 'carry out', as *anzaza*, the way children do; and pronounces the adjective *hur*, 'free', as *hur*. Khreyif helps the reader by placing vowel diacritics, not normally used, on the mispronounced words. This is the only instance in the whole novel in which vowel diacritics are used, showing that Barg's one-time incorrect use of language, which he otherwise masters, is intentional. His linguistic performance marks his wit and agency, and at the same time it is a reminder of the infantilizing and othering of the blacks in Tunisia.

Like Gha'ib Tu'mah Farman's *al-Nakhla wa al-jirān* (The Date Palm and the Neighbours, 1965), which mixes classical Arabic and Baghdadi dialect 'to recover scenes and anecdotes typical of periods of transition, change and challenge', especially from the point of view of the lower classes and women,<sup>77</sup> Khreyif uses the vernacular in *Barg el-Lil* to evoke the social world of his characters. Vernacular expressions like 'Yā afandī', an Ottoman title of nobility, or 'Dāda' for governess, or old toponyms like 'Mazghana' for Algiers (which Khreyif clarifies in a footnote), derived from the name of one of the Berber tribes dwelling there, pepper the novel.<sup>78</sup> When introducing Sha'shu', one of the main characters and soon to become Barg's best friend, the narrator tells us that he is 'a *karrākayī*, that is, his job consists in rowing when the wind blows, as they say', before situating this Tunisian term for a Mediterranean oarsman within the system of forced labour.<sup>79</sup>

If popular language provides aesthetic value, the historical explanations betray a pedagogical impulse that resonates with Salama Musa's conception of the writer as an educator.<sup>80</sup> Khreyif refers to

76 Ibid., p. 76.

77 Al-Musawi, *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel*, p. 11.

78 'Yā afandī' appears on p. 84, 'Dāda' on p. 91, and 'Mazghana' on p. 87.

79 Khreyif, *Barg el-Lil*, p. 43. The term derives from *carraca* (in Spanish) or *caracca* (in Italian), a specifically Mediterranean vessel, to which the Turkish suffix *-yī* is added.

80 Klemm, 'Different Notions of Commitment', 56.

institutions, city houses and gates by their sixteenth-century names, at times quoting the Tunisian historian Ibn Abi Dinar (d. c. 1699), and includes contemporary names in footnotes to allow readers to locate them: Barg ‘was outside the Qasba, where the ruins lay of the corridor built by al-Mustansir about three centuries ago so that his female slaves could traverse it without wearing the veil on their way to leisure activities in the royal hall at Ras al-Tabia. Only a few faded traces remain that tell the story—for those willing to listen to it—of the beautiful, coloured feet that lightly and merrily stepped on them’.<sup>81</sup> Here the narrator captures the reader’s attention through a story-telling formula, marked by dashes in the text, that creates suspense about the owners of the ‘coloured feet’. At one point, Sha’shu’, the *karrakayī* in the Ottoman army who Khayr al-Din Barbarossa appoints as governor of the citadel, entrusts Barg with surveying the prisoners. Barg takes the opportunity to learn their language, ‘a mixture of the languages of the nations surrounding the Christians’ sea [*baḥr al-rūm*]’.<sup>82</sup> Normally used between Muslims and Christians and between Christians of different origins, this *lingua franca* was an early-modern pan-Mediterranean *koiné* consisting of a mixture of mainly Romance languages. Khreyif’s reference to it as the language of ‘the Christians’ sea’ evokes Jocelyne Dakhliā’s notion of the *lingua franca* as ‘the locus of the overcoming of an alterity, but also a reminder of it’ due to the underrepresentation of Arabic, Turkish, Tamazight or Greek, which replicates the ‘asymmetry of the border’.<sup>83</sup> If the link between *Barg el-Lil* and *Don Quixote* establishes literary co-constitution, the *lingua franca* makes the asymmetry of the Mediterranean Borderlands explicit. And if the *picaresca* narrative of al-Hamadani worked against the prestigious Arabic genres of *ḥādīth*, *sīra*, the sermon, the theological debate, and

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81 Ibid., p. 71. Note that Rās (cape) is spelt as is pronounced in Tunisian Darija, rather than Rā’s as in standard Arabic.

82 Khreyif, *Barg el-Lil*, p. 98.

83 Jocelyne Dakhliā, ‘La langue franque méditerranéenne: Asymétrie de la frontière et illusion du creuset’, *Cahiers du Centre de recherches historiques*, 42 (2008), p. 10. For a more skeptical view, see Nora Lafi, ‘La langue des marchands de Tripoli au XIXe siècle: langue franque et langue arabe dans un port méditerranéen’ in *Trames de langues: Usages et métissages linguistiques dans l’histoire du Maghreb*, ed. by Jocelyne Dakhliā (Tunis: Institut de recherche sur le Maghreb contemporain, 2004), pp. 215–22. Interestingly, Dakhliā refers to one of the wives of the king of Bornu in West Africa who learnt the *lingua franca* before visiting Tripoli in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. This linguistic link between sub-Saharan Africa and the Mediterranean is fictionally recreated in *Barg el-Lil*.

lyrical poetry, *Barg el-Lil* challenges elite-centred historiography by making common and subaltern people the protagonists of a fairly disregarded historical event, and by using a popular language peppered with sixteenth-century terms and Tunisian Arabic.

## Solidarity and Gender Politics: Imagining the Past to Build a Better Future

*We have the power those who came before us have given to us, to move beyond the place where they were standing... We are making the future as well as bonding to survive the enormous pressures of the present, and that is what it means to be part of history.*

Audre Lorde<sup>84</sup>

If *Barg el-Lil* expands the representation of pre-colonial Tunisia and complicates understandings of slavery as utter victimhood, it is in the novel's gender politics that the debates of late 1950s postcolonial Tunisia are most evidently tackled through the form of historical fiction. How policies of state feminism were contested emerges powerfully in the novel.<sup>85</sup> As with the black protagonist, the narrative shows the power of structures, but also the power of female subaltern characters to navigate and challenge them. *Barg el-Lil* emphasizes love, particularly interracial romantic love and friendship between men, and envisions solidarity as the foundation of that 'bonding to survive the enormous pressures of the present' through which the future is made.

In the novel, women's oppression is embodied by repudiation (i.e., the thrice repeated divorce initiated by the husband in the privacy of the

84 Audre Lorde, 'Learning from the 60s' in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007), p. 144.

85 For the history of the modern debates and movement for women's emancipation in Tunisia, see Tahar al-Haddad, *Imra'tunā fi al-sharī'a wa al-mujtam'a* (Our Women in Shari'a and Society) (Tunis: al-Dar al-Tunisiyya li al-nashr, 1930). For a comparison between al-Haddad and Egyptian Qasim Amin's calls for women's emancipation, see Mohamed al-May, *Mas'ala-t al-mar'a bayn Qāsim Amin and al-Ṭāhir al-Haddād* (The Women's Issue in Qasim Amin and Tahar al-Haddad) (Tunis: Dar Sihri lil nashr, 2006). See also Habiba Menchari's 1929 lecture on 'Muslim Women Tomorrow: for or against the Veil' in Sophie Bessis, *Les Valereuses: Cinq Tunisiennes Dans l'Histoire* (Tunis: Elyzad, 2017), pp. 171–77. The Francophone periodical *Leila* (1936–1941), founded by Mahmoud Zarruk but edited since 1937 by Tawhida Ben Cheikh (best known as the first Tunisian woman doctor), targeted the elites of the capital city and was particularly critical of colonial patriarchy.

home), physical violence, and confinement within the home, as well as the state's patriarchal and repressive institutions like women's houses of correction. Some of these issues were reformed by the Tunisian Personal Status Code (PSC) approved in August 1956, less than five months after the country had attained independence. The PSC abolished polygyny, created a judicial procedure for divorce (thereby abolishing repudiation), and established the mutual consent of both parties as a requirement for marriage.<sup>86</sup> The PSC encoded modern understandings of sexual difference, family and kinship arrangements embedded in urban middle-class respectability, with the nuclear household becoming the new ideal union. It became a symbol of the postcolonial state-led reformist feminism encapsulated by Bourghiba and his project of modernity, which promoted gender equality while reinforcing an androcentric narrative of nationhood. Women's rights and the National Union of Tunisian Women (*Union Nationale de la Femme Tunisienne*; UNFT)—the primary means through which official policy related to women was translated into local practices—were instrumentalized and trapped 'between public declarations and favourable legislative measures and the effective absence from decision-making'.<sup>87</sup> As in 1950s Egypt, state feminism in Tunisia replaced intimate familial forms of male control with public patriarchy.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, the PSC aroused strong opposition among some social sectors of postcolonial Tunisia. Both the traditionalist scholars ('*ulamā'*) of the Zaytouna Mosque and the remnants of the Old Destour Party—which Bourguiba had left to establish the Néo Destour Party in 1934—rejected the provision that abolished repudiation.<sup>89</sup>

In *Barg el-Lil* Barg falls in love with Rim, a woman who lives in the building facing Sidi b. al-Nakhli's and secretly watches Barg dance to the rhythm of the instruments in the laboratory. Barg does not look at Rim

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86 Souad Chater, *Les émancipées du harem: regards sur la femme tunisienne* (Tunis: La presse, 1992); M. Mounira Charrad, *States and Women's Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

87 Ilhem Marzouki, *Femmes d'ordre ou désordre de femmes?* (Tunis: Noir Sur Blanc, 2000), p. 34.

88 Mervat F. Hatem, 'Economic and Political Liberalization in Egypt and the Demise of State Feminism' in *Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint*, ed. by Suha Sabbagh (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1996), pp. 171–93.

89 Nouri Gana, 'Bourguiba's Sons: Melancholy Manhood in Modern Tunisian Cinema', *Journal of North African Studies*, 15, 1 (2010), 105–26 (p. 108).

directly but sees her reflected in a small mirror. The ritual is repeated every night for three months while Rim's husband is away on the Hajj; before leaving, he had sealed the house door to prevent her from going out—a sign of women's cloistering which the novel persistently denounces.<sup>90</sup> When Rim's husband comes back from pilgrimage and finds out, he slaps her, beats her and repudiates her by pronouncing the divorce sentence three times.<sup>91</sup> Rim and Barg are separated, but destiny brings them back together when Barg is required to perform for her the role of the *tayyās*, i.e. marrying her and repudiating her so that she can remarry her former, now regretful, husband.<sup>92</sup> Barg accepts the role, but after spending the night with Rim he refuses to repudiate her and escapes from the legal scholars who threaten him with dire consequences by remarking, as in the passage quoted in the previous section, that as a slave he cannot comply with legal conventions.<sup>93</sup> Although the subplot between Barg and Rim focuses mostly on her mistreatment by her husband, it points to the social taboo of inter-racial love and turns both characters into new 'Antar and 'Abla, the protagonists of the pre-Islamic epic in which the romance between black and chivalrous 'Antar with 'Abla cannot be consummated due to his origin and skin colour.<sup>94</sup>

Patriarchal oppression in the novel is reinforced by state institutions. Sha'shu', the *karrakayī* in the Ottoman army, was sentenced to the oars after being jailed for assisting an unnamed woman escape from Dar Juwed, a women's house of correction.<sup>95</sup> The woman had been imprisoned for *nushūz* or insubordination, what Fatima Mernissi calls 'the rebellion of the wife against her Muslim husband's authority'.<sup>96</sup> Her *nushūz* and escape signal the woman's dissent with social and

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90 Khreyif, *Barg el-Lil*, pp. 32–33.

91 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

92 *Ibid.*, p. 72. After repudiation, if the spouses want to marry again the woman needs to get married to another man, the so-called *tayyās* (in Darija) or *muḥalil* (in Fusha) and then be repudiated by him. Arguably, this is meant to put some constraints to the thrice-repeated repudiation.

93 *Ibid.*, p. 76.

94 Touria Khannous, 'Race in pre-Islamic poetry: the work of Antara Ibn Shaddad', *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*, 6.1 (2013), p. 76.

95 Khreyif, *Barg el-Lil*, p. 44. On Dar Juwed see Dalenda Languèche, "'Dar Joued" ou l'oubli dans la mémoire' in *Marginales En Terre d'Islam*, ed. by Abdelhamid Languèche and Dalenda Languèche (Tunis: Cérès Productions, 1992), pp. 85–111.

96 Fatima Mernissi, 'Femininity as Subversion: Reflections on the Muslim Concept of *Nushūz*' in *Speaking of Faith: Women, Religion and Social Change*, ed. by Diana Eck (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1986), p. 88.

institutional sanction, while Sha'shu's act is one of solidarity: he helps her because he considers her unjustly 'oppressed' (*madhlūma*) by her husband, who is a *shaykh* and thus a religious authority.

By going back to the Hafsid period, Khreyif signals the trans-historical nature of patriarchal notions and practices and points towards the continuity between Hafsid, Ottoman, and French patriarchal systems. If by advocating women's emancipation and the need to do away with patriarchal structures and practices may seem to reinforce state-led feminist policies, the novel goes further and suggests that the so-called 'woman question' is as much about men and masculinity. Through Sha'shu' and Barg's friendship and discussions on women and gender relations, the novel presents a more complex and layered picture of how men's worlds and interactions are gendered, arguably reflecting the range of male attitudes in post-independence Tunisia.

The friendship between Sha'shu' and Barg begins after the latter escapes from Sidi b. al-Nakhli, who beat him for crashing the laboratory, distracted by music and by Rim's gaze.<sup>97</sup> When Sha'shu' bravely defends Barg from a general, who asks why he's defending a black slave, Barg claims to be Sha'shu's slave.<sup>98</sup> Their friendship thus begins with an act of reciprocity between a local free man and a black slave, which signals how solidarity need not be unidirectional. From then on, the two men share hazardous adventures and intimate conversations. Despite the differences in race and status, they have many things in common, and both intervene on behalf of women suffering gendered forms of oppression. At the same time, Sha'shu' also comes across as a womanizer who boasts of having a woman in every port and holds misogynistic ideas about women.<sup>99</sup> When Barg confesses his love for Rim to him and cries because a reunion seems impossible, Sha'shu' laughs and tells him that '[women's] weakness is a false appearance that they use over men. Their tricks are sublime'. Sha'shu' then apologizes for laughing at his friend in a moment of vulnerability. Barg accepts his apology but counters his words saying that 'women deserve all attentions'.<sup>100</sup> Such retort may be said to represent an instance when male patriarchal solidarity breaks. Bonds of camaraderie between men

97 Khreyif, *Barg el-Lil*, p. 18.

98 *Ibid.*, pp. 42–43.

99 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

100 *Ibid.*, pp. 92–93.

are key to perpetuate the patriarchal system that awards men privileges for the simple fact of being men. The *lack* of solidarity between Barg and Sha'shu' is thus politically meaningful.<sup>101</sup>

Moreover, despite being depicted as disenfranchised by patriarchal society, throughout the novel women display strategies to overcome gendered forms of oppression. They communicate with each other through the rooftops or employ coded taps on the walls separating them.<sup>102</sup> One becomes a spy for Spain and exploits her position as a concubine, thereby shaping history and politics.<sup>103</sup> Enslaved women—Circassians, Christians from Calabria and Valencia, and sub-Saharan women from Abyssinia and Sudan—build mutual bonds in the lodging houses before they are sold, and by sharing stories their 'sadness turn[s] into joy and happiness'.<sup>104</sup> One explains how she managed to seed discord among her abductors; another confesses that she fell in love with her master and had to use tricks to avoid being sold; yet another explains that she associated with a robber to whom she handed over her masters' valuable objects; together they sing, laugh and dance.<sup>105</sup> Women also display solidarity with men and, by doing so, their position shifts from objects to subjects of solidarity. At one point an unnamed woman saves Barg from being tortured to death after he refuses to repudiate Rim. She shelters him in the basement of her house, treats his injuries, and hides him from her own husband, to whom she gives a potion so that she can spend the night with the black hero. Barg abruptly ends this relationship and leaves when he notices some possessiveness (*saiṭara*) in her. While denouncing the oppressive patriarchal structure within which womanhood is constructed as subaltern and as a uniform social category, *Barg el-Lil* constantly de-essentializes the category of 'woman' (*al-mar'a*, in singular, as it was used then) by highlighting women's heterogeneity. 'Are all women the same?', Barg asks himself. 'No way!' is his answer.<sup>106</sup>

If patriarchal institutions and ideas are to be abolished, *Barg el-Lil* suggests that human bonding will occur through solidarity with those

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101 See bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: Pluto Press, 1981), pp. 87–117.

102 Khreyif, *Barg el-Lil*, p. 100.

103 *Ibid.*, pp. 121–22.

104 *Ibid.*, p. 54.

105 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

106 *Ibid.*, p. 104.

most vulnerable in the structures of power. The novel shows the power of love—especially Rim and Barg’s inter-racial and taboo love—but it does not valorize romantic love alone. On the contrary, *Barg el-Lil* is an homage to friendship, particularly that between men of different social status and race like Sha’shu’ and Barg. As such, this fictional past provides a blueprint for gender and race relations in postcolonial Tunisia.

## Conclusion

The second Arabic Novel Forum hosted in Tunisia in March 2019 was dedicated to racism and slavery in Arabic novels. The guest of honour, Lebanese novelist Elias Khoury, affirmed that these issues are ‘often silenced’ and emphasized the role of culture ‘in breaking taboos and tackling the real issues of Arab societies’.<sup>107</sup> The poster of the Forum featured *Barg*, the first enslaved black protagonist in a modern Arabic novel, as illustrated by Hassan Ta’rit for the 1961 cover of the novel (Fig. 7.5).



Fig. 7.5 *Barg* on the poster of the second Arabic Novel Forum. From Bilal Ramadan, ‘Launch of the Arabic Novel Forum in Tunisia with Elias Khoury as the guest honor’, *al-Youm al-Sabi’* (The Seventh Day).

107 Roua Khlifi, ‘Novelists Debate Racism in Arab Literature’, *The Arab Weekly*, 4 July 2019.

Just how exceptional *Barg el-Lil* was in its time is even more apparent considering the new generation of Maghrebi and Arab writers who have started to break the silence around the history and legacies of trans-Saharan slavery, also in the context of the movements and discussions opened up by the Arab Springs and strengthened by the 2020 global anti-racism protests. Among recent works are Libyan Najwa Binshatwan's *Zarā'ib al-'Abīd* (Slave Pens, 2017), Moroccan Rachid El Hachimi's *Dhākira-t al-Narjis* (*The Daffodil's Memory*, 2018), Mauritanian Samira Hammadi's *Asmāl al-'abīd* (*The Slave's Rags*, 2019), and Omani Jokha Alharthi's *Saīyydāt al-Qamar* (*Celestial Bodies*, 2010). According to Alharthi, whose novel won the 2019 International Man Booker prize, '[s]ome people feel that touching upon a sensitive topic like slavery is stirring up the past in a way that isn't appropriate now'. And yet, according to her 'that's what literature does': it enables us 'to think about the past, to think about history'.<sup>108</sup>

*Barg el-Lil* is indeed an invitation to think about the past, to wonder about how peoples lived, struggled, loved, or strolled in the streets of sixteenth-century Tunis. Set in the context of a violent imperial clash between the Ottomans and the Spaniards, Khreyif's novel is endowed with what Muhsin al-Musawi calls 'a postcolonial consciousness', in that it tackles the thorny postcolonial issue of contacts between Europeans and Muslims, but resists 'contaminated discourses like the strictly nationalist and even the reformist that succumb to colonialist compartmentalization of the colonial subject'.<sup>109</sup> There is little doubt that *Barg el-Lil* discusses issues that were pressing in late 1950s and early 1960s' Tunisia, especially gendered and racialized subjecthood and the patriarchal nature of state institutions, society and culture, as I have argued. But Khreyif also aimed at complicating mainstream historical narratives in which the past is limited to the rulers' deeds. His historical novel pivots around a key event of early modern Tunisia from the point of view of subaltern characters, especially the Central African *pícaro* Barg. The multilingual and multicultural character of

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108 Aida Edemariam, 'Jokha Alharthi: "A Lot of Women Are Really Strong, Even Though They Are Slaves"', *The Guardian*, 8 July 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/jul/08/jokha-alharthi-a-lot-of-women-are-really-strong-even-though-they-are-slaves>.

109 Al-Musawi, *The Postcolonial Arabic Novel*, p. 6.

Hafsid Tunisia in *Barg el-Lil* prevents colonialist compartmentalization and resists the homogenization of the postcolonial state. At the same time, cultural heterogeneity does not mean that the sixteenth-century Tunisian Borderlands contains no asymmetries—indeed, the fact that the protagonist is an enslaved young man who was forcedly uprooted from his homeland and family is perhaps the clearest antidote to any idyllic depiction.

*Barg el-Lil* thus connects North and sub-Saharan Africa through the atrocious practice of slavery, but also makes the defeat of one of the strongest imperial powers of the time the slave's deed when Barg poisons the pond of the citadel and forces the Christian forces out of the country. If central Africa constitutes an important 'significant geography' in Khreyif's novel, Barg's *pícaro* character and the intertextual link to *Don Quixote* through Sidi Hamid b. al-Nakhli situate the Mediterranean as another polyvalent 'significant geography', a 'world' in which inter-connection, literary cross-pollination and the asymmetry of the linguistic border coexist.

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## 8. Euforia, Desencanto

### Roberto Bolaño and Barcelona Publishing in the Transition to Democracy

*Paulo Lemos Horta*

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Published in Barcelona in 1998, *The Savage Detectives* (*Los detectives salvajes*) begins with the young narrator accepting an invitation to join the 'visceral realists' in Mexico City in the 1970s. In many respects the novel, including its polyvocal form channelling the voices of characters based on real-life poets such as Bruno Montané and Mario Santiago, is a love letter to ephemeral literary circles and their manifestos, magazines, carbon-copied pamphlets, and poetry scribbled on the margins of stolen books, in Mexico City and in the Barcelona to which Montané and Bolaño relocated to in the late 1970s.

Bolaño (1953–2003) lived over half his life and composed all his fiction in Catalonia (1977–2003), publishing 18 books, from *Distant Star* (*Estrella Distante*) and *By Night in Chile* (*Nocturno de Chile*) through to *The Savage Detectives* and *2666*. In Barcelona Montané and Bolaño collaborated in editing literary magazines in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Bolaño, who had toyed with a polyvocal generational panorama before in *The True History of Science Fiction* (*El espíritu de la ciencia-ficción*), a manuscript penned in the 1980s, revisits this material with humour in *The Savage Detectives*. But it is not parody, at least not without great doses of wistfulness. The scene when Bolaño and Montané arrived in Barcelona in 1977 from Mexico City was defined by the transition to democracy that followed the death of Franco in November 1975 and lent a radicalized edge to broader ideological conflicts of the Cold War

in the late 1970s and 1980s. It is difficult to gauge how much is lost in interpreting the novel, in Spanish and in translation, without taking into account the print culture in Barcelona at this time, in which Bolaño and his friends participated after they moved to the city from Cold War regimes in Latin America, and where they lived through the post-Franco transition. To forget this Cold War history is to lose the thread that bound the fictional movement to those who inspired it, even as they disbanded in the diaspora. It is also to miss out on the political possibilities that were very much alive in the 1970s for the real-life models of Belano and his friends. Cold War print culture provides a framework to unearth Bolaño as a lapsed Trotskyite and provocateur in Barcelona in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a figure mostly invisible and misunderstood.

Bolaño despised what he saw as the cosy relationship of Latin American writers of a previous generation with power and government cultural policies (García Márquez with Cuba, Paz with Mexico), and it is against the foil of the committed Latin American authors of the sixties and seventies that a mythology has been spun of Bolaño in exile in Catalonia (1977–2003). Yet Bolaño, as he emerges from this time, defies the opposition of the writing of engagement to romantic preoccupations with literary autonomy. The ephemeral archive of his early collaborations and editing eludes such clichés, and attests to other forms of international solidarity underneath the radar of the documented Left, Right and Non-Aligned circles of Latin American Cold War authors. In his writing in Barcelona as later in Girona and Blanes, Bolaño espoused sympathy for clandestine forms of fellowship such as that among underground Latin American artists in Europe and in Latin America. To understand such a solidarity, one must sort out the basic facts of the trajectory in Catalonia of a writer too often considered as if hovering in exile, out of time and out of place. Little wonder, given this scholarship, that Rebecca Walkowitz enlists Bolaño in her case for a form of writing ready to be consumed by a global marketplace. Nothing could be further from the case.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Rebecca Walkowitz, *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in an Age of World Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

## Bolaño in Barcelona

It was in the Raval and the margins of society that Bolaño found himself when he moved in 1977 to post-Franco Barcelona, where his mother, sister, and Montané had established themselves. Concepts deployed to frame Bolaño's status in the Catalonia of his paternal grandmother—'cosmopolitanism' and 'exile'—evoke privilege and give little indication of the labor the drop-out pursued in Barcelona: garbage collector, waiter, dishwasher, and nightwatchman in Castelldefels.<sup>2</sup> Curiously missing in half a thousand academic articles indexed by the MLA on Bolaño are the terms closest to Bolaño's status in the city: undocumented migrant, and economic refugee. More fitting would be the experience described by Brazilian writer Silviano Santiago under the rubric of the cosmopolitanism of the poor.<sup>3</sup> Bolaño's experience was cosmopolitan perhaps only in the sense described by Santiago, as was that of most friends he made for almost all of his life. As Ignacio Echevarría would note, they were primarily waiters, manual laborers and drifters; it was only in the last five years of his life, with the publication of *The Savage Detectives*, that Bolaño began to be received in literary circles.

Implicit in portraits of Bolaño as post-national is the dating of Bolaño as a post-Cold War author to the era of globalization of the early 2000s. Bolaño's reception in English after 2003 skews the perception of an author born in 1953 who had honed his distinctly countercultural preoccupations by the late Seventies. In the early Eighties, the author completed his first fictions, including *Antwerp* (*Amberes*, 1980), *Monsieur Pain* (1982), *The True History of Science Fiction* (1984), and the untranslated *Consejos de un discípulo de Morrison a un fanático de Joyce*, co-authored

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2 Scholarship on Bolaño, as indexed by the MLA, tends to present him as a displaced, postnational writer, as evidenced by the most frequent keywords: 'Del fin de las literaturas nacionales'/'beyond the nation', 'Nación? Que Nación?', 'subjectividad pos-estatal', 'literatura transnacional', 'el exiliado', 'la voluntad de exilio', 'entre patrias', 'travel between worlds', 'Bolaño extraterritorial', 'la literatura extraterritorial', 'extraterritorialité', 'displacement', 'escritura global', 'arts of homelessness', 'commodification of exile', 'in the wake of cosmopolitanism', 'discrepant cosmopolitanism', 'el cosmopolitanismo del mercado'; *MLA International Bibliography* (search: 30 March 2020).

3 Silviano Santiago, 'The Cosmopolitanism of the Poor', trans. by Magdalena Edwards and Paulo Lemos Horta, in *Cosmopolitanisms*, ed. by Bruce Robbins and Paulo Lemos Horta (New York: New York University Press, 2017), pp. 153–68.

with A.G. Porta (1984). Works dating before the end of the Cold War in 1991 also include *The Skating Rink* (*La Pista de Hielo*, 1989), *The Third Reich* (*El Tercer Reich*, 1989), and drafts of *Woes of The True Policeman* (*Los Sinsabores del Verdadero Policía*), which shares plot threads and characters with 2666.<sup>4</sup>

Rather than confirm the received narrative of Bolaño's smooth entry in a global market in the 1990s and 2000s, an immersion in the print culture of Bolaño and his collaborators in Barcelona in the 1970s and 1980s yields the question of how he came to be published in Spanish at all. An iconic photograph of long-haired Bolaño in his countercultural days included in the American edition of *The Savage Detectives* has long been credited with branding him as 'the Kurt Cobain' of Latin-American letters and stamping his passport to the world literary scene. In a Spanish context, this rootedness in the underground scene depicted in the photo speaks to barriers of class, ethnicity and belonging that for all his late success, Bolaño never succeeded in vaulting over. As he embraced the underground scene in Barcelona in the 1970s, Bolaño was very much aware of the 'repellent' effect of his publisher Xavier Sabater's dress and status as a 'lost addict,' precisely the kind of mythos critics have (mistakenly) claimed would have helped the Chilean author with publishers.<sup>5</sup> And reflecting back on the 1970s in *The Savage Detectives*, Bolaño knew the poor impression, sartorial and otherwise, he made to literary gatekeepers. If anything, Bolaño held his choice not to court the mainstream as a badge of pride.

In the testimony of his time in Catalonia by writer friends, success had come too late. Bolaño lacked the necessary cultural capital. Latin American authors in Barcelona still start with a difficulty of finding readers in Spain, and many get by, as journalist Xavi Ayén notes, at the lowest rungs of the publishing profession, completing reader's reports for pennies.<sup>6</sup> Bolaño did not even get that far. Bolaño lacked any cultural currency that might have been provided by a diplomatic upbringing (Carlos Fuentes, Valeria Luiselli), academic credentials (Jorge Volpi, Andres Neuman), journalistic contacts and earnings (García Marquez,

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4 See 'Cronología Creative, 1979–2003', compiled by Valerie Miles, in *Archivo Bolaño* (Barcelona, Centro de Cultura Contemporánea, 2013), pp. 28–29.

5 Bolaño, 'Xavier Sabater', *A la intemperie* (Madrid, Alfaguara, 2019), p. 369. All translations are mine.

6 Interview with the author, June 2021.

Rodrigo Frésan). Until the last year of his life, he saw little international consecration. His publisher recalls numerous impediments to a literary career Bolaño faced as a boxer's son who had never learnt the etiquette necessary to survive the dinners of Barcelona publishing.<sup>7</sup> Arguably, even now that his literary estate has in its corner a powerful agent, Andrew Wylie, old prejudices against Bolaño remain.

### *Euforia y desencanto: Barcelona, 1977*

The underground scene Bolaño felt drawn to and its publishers, to the left of the historical socialist parties that would contest the election of 1977, experienced two distinct phases during the transition to democracy: euphoria and disenchantment. As the product of this countercultural scene from his residency in Barcelona from 1977 through 1980, Bolaño's longstanding ambition through his relocation to Girona and then Blanes would become to be published by an upstart press with credibility in that milieu, Jorge Herralde's Anagrama. But his first Barcelona publisher in the late 1970s would have none of the pedigree now retrospectively associated with Anagrama as a literary press, and was entirely a creature of the underground: Xavier Sabater's La Cloaca. Bolaño arrived in the year of greatest political and social expectations, 1977, in which Spain held its first free election since 1936, and the Communist Party which had formed the main opposition to Franco's regime was expected to fare well. Anticipating a radical political transformation, Barcelona and its underground scene teemed with possibility. In the summer of 1977 the CNT, the National Labor Confederation, held four days of action which welcomed half a million people to Barcelona. Young anarchists reconnected with old in 'ateneos liberatorios' throughout the city. The Frente de Liberación Gay de Cataluña had just been established in 1976. Communes sprang up in and around Barcelona, challenging traditional patriarchal notions of marriage, gender roles, and the nuclear family.<sup>8</sup> Bolaño and his publisher Herralde would later recollect the novelist's

7 See Jorge Herralde, *Un día en la vida de un editor* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2019).

8 Pepe Ribas, Canti Casanovas et al., 'El underground y la contracultura en la Cataluña de los 70: un reconocimiento', exhibition, Barcelona, Palau Robert, May–November 2021. For a broader overview of the scene in Spain, see Germán Labrador Méndez, *Culpables por la literatura: imaginación política y contracultura en la transición española (1968–1986)* (Madrid: Akal, 2017).

attraction to the free love and counterculture of Barcelona upon his arrival in 1977, but those terms do not capture the radical social and political possibilities open at that moment and which the young Chilean fully embraced and explored.

In the realm of publishing proper, euphoria resulted from the relaxation of censorship laws after Francisco Franco's death in 1975. The Press Law of 1966, which superseded an earlier law dating to the Civil War in 1938 that placed publishing in a wartime state of exception, had already expanded the realm of free speech. It allowed the publication of leftwing literature and the founding by Herralde of Anagrama in 1969, which shared with seven other Avantgarde and anti-Franco presses a paperback imprint and a distributor, the target of a rightwing bombing in 1974. After censorship was lifted in 1975, writers and readers were able to confront the facts and legacy of the Civil War of 1936–1939. Civil War history dominated publishing lists across Spain in this transition period, providing the framework for the interventions of authors of various persuasions and Cold War affiliations.<sup>9</sup>

Anagrama carved its niche far to the left of mainstream electoral politics, in the heterodox Left of Che Guevara, the International Situationists, anarchists, Maoists, and trotskyites. 'Rupture, not Reform', was the rallying cry of this radical Left, and revolution rather than bourgeois democracy the goal, a goal that a passionate cohort of youth believed tantalizingly within reach. Anagrama's books spoke to the urgency of armed struggle, from *Los Tupamaros* (1971) and two books by Che Guevara in the year of the death of Franco (1975) to Ulrike Meinhof of the Baader Meinhof group and Antonio Negri in the years of the Red Brigades. In retrospect, the historian may find the appeal of such radical literature naïve, as does Julia Lovell's in her *Global History of Maoism* (2019). Decades later Bolaño himself came to regard as such his youthful flirtation with armed struggle in his journey to and from Chile in 1973. Yet in its time this literature had its purchase. In 1975, Mao provided Anagrama with the house's first bestseller. Anti-imperialism went hand-in-hand with radical communism for a press like Anagrama, which followed the French Minuit in publishing books critical of the Algerian war (see also Srivastava's essay in this volume) and in defence of the PLO and the Mozambican Liberation Front (FLM). This

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9 See Herralde, *Un día en la vida de un editor*, pp. 42–68.

anticolonialism helps explain why when Herralde cultivated a literary list from the 1980s, he prioritized Indian authors in English: Amitav Ghosh, Pankaj Mishra, Hanif Kureishi, Vikram Seth, Gita Mehta, and Arundhati Roy, having been outbid for Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*.<sup>10</sup>

A rung below, the underground Bolaño was immersed in was alive with the euphoria of the questioning of sexual mores long patrolled and held in place—prohibitions against extramarital sex and homosexuality (illegal until 1970)—and the embrace of radical projects for the elimination of capitalism and private property. And its publishers and magazines—including Xavier Sabater, the first to take an interest in Bolaño—were active in supporting anarchist workshops, feminist and homosexual liberation movements, and the union-sponsored days of action of 1977. To immerse oneself in the world of these underground publications is to find preoccupations that dominate Bolaño's fiction: a fascination with violence, particularly authoritarian, and transgressive sex and sexuality; the rejection of institutions and authority, in all realms, from writing, education, and the arts, through politics and psychiatry; and an investment in communes and utopias. Bolaño in this scene was very much a young man of his place and time.

In the summer of 1977, rejection of the system seemed to presage its overthrow. When the revolution did not materialize, the mood quickly soured. The radical Left experienced a profound let down. In many ways, it was an asynchronous manifestation, delayed by the belatedness of the endurance of Franco's regime, of the disillusionment that followed the student protests of 68 in Paris, Mexico City, and elsewhere (the Paris protests had been among the subjects still forbidden by Spanish censors through 1975). In the victory of Adolfo Suárez's centrist coalition in the parliamentary elections of June 1977, the communist party fell woefully short of expectations, while Felipe Gonzalez's socialists did better than foreseen. In the election's aftermath, many proponents of the radical Left and readers of its texts became disoriented and disinterested in politics, seemingly overnight in the recollection of Anagrama's editor Jorge Herralde.<sup>11</sup> This is the *desencanto* remarked upon by historians and cultural commentators on Spain during this threshold moment in the transition to democracy — disenchantment.

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10 *Ibid.*, pp. 118, 119, 169, 189, 200, 308.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 182.

In the more radicalized underground, disappointment and ennui gave way to anger. The radicalization of the scene had already been a response to the perceived pact made between Franco's regime and tolerated opposition parties in the first half of the decade, as a recent exhibit documents.<sup>12</sup> Before the election of June 1977, the counterculture could have dreamt that anything was possible. All of a sudden, dreams of utopia were shattered, and the underground fragmented into tribes in the peripheries of Barcelona. Many in the scene advocated violence and armed struggle. As this recent exhibit on the Barcelona underground in the late 1970s emphasizes, partisans of radical change did not want to let go of the anger felt in the election's aftermath, but cultivate it. Provocation became the imperative of the day, and *feísmo*—'the cultivation of the ugly.'

It was thus with bitterness that Barcelona's underground by the autumn of 1977 continued to make its own the music, fashion, attitude and slogans imported from American and European countercultural scenes and Paris and May 1968. Under the sway of *desencanto* the accent could fall on the 'aggressive and demonic side' of these international scenes.<sup>13</sup> This edge was notable in the local reception of Allen Ginsberg, and the appeal of his casting of Moloch as the god of the bourgeoisie, guilty of burying the visionary powers of imagination. In an interview with a local critic, Ginsberg warned that the circuit of money-machine-car-bank-family-office-airplane obscured the circle of existence, and that 'man,' afraid his safety depended on money, repressed his nature to become a robot.<sup>14</sup> When printed alongside sympathetic portraits of Baader Meinhof in magazines, Ginsberg's musings might appear to resonate with campaigns of urban terror across Europe. Thus for Bolaño to have written verses in the margins of his copy of Ginsberg in Barcelona in 1977 had a different charge than if he had done so as an American in California. Likewise his early use of Burroughs and the Beats, and adaptation of plot devices borrowed from novels like Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, for the purpose of justifying fantasies of anti-bourgeois mayhem in Barcelona.

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12 Ribas et al., 'El underground y la contracultura'.

13 Ibid.

14 Interview with Maria José Ragué, cited *ibid.* Texts by Ginsberg were set alongside Baader Meinhof, and their names appeared next to each other on the cover of the adult comic *Star*.

In the realm of underground letters and art, this embittered rejection of authority accentuated the rejection of the legitimacy of tastemakers and their established institutions. This rejection of the literary and artistic establishment formed the very *raison d'être* first for the magazine and then the press *La Cloaca*. 'The business of ART affects many of us who, like it or not, suffer its consequences,' Xavier Sabater wrote as a statement of the magazine's intent in November 1976. Seeking the worst pejorative to describe the workings of international capitalism of the mid-1970s, Sabater complained that Barcelona's publishing houses behaved like 'oil companies.' To shock the city's galleries and publishers, he invoked the sewer ('cloaca'), to found a magazine to give a voice to those 'creatures' that skulked about 'in the underworld' of the little world ('mundillo') of art. *La Cloaca* press, which would publish Bolaño as a Barcelona poet, would be established in 1978. Magazine and press were not just alternative—they remained adamantly *against the system* ('*antisistema*').<sup>15</sup>

The rejection of the publishing and art worlds and their corporate values was philosophical but extended to modes of dress and address, to the trappings of the artistic establishment, drawn, like the publishers themselves, from the most privileged in the Barcelona elite. 'The sewer'—the name captures well the '*feísmo*' in vogue in the underground, as part of the rejection of the art world's privileged aesthetics. In time, Sabater's interest in sound poetry, as a pioneer of 'cassette' poetry, would mark his presence in the alternative scene. But when Bolaño first met him and hung out together playing pinball machines in cheap cafés, it was Sabater's attitude rather than his knowledge of French poetry that made an impression. The Chilean was impressed with his stories of working on ships in the Northern Atlantic and the then rare tattoo Sabater sported from his time in Antwerp, part of his affected '*feísmo*'. Above all he was taken by Sabater's ability to produce his magazines and books from the 'rotten' youth of Barcelona: 'Xavier constructs magazines with the worst and the cheapest and the most rotten of Barcelona's youth literature'.<sup>16</sup>

And it was in this 'rotten' youth culture of the Barcelona underground in 1977 and 1978 that Bolaño found and furthered the collaborations that would see him into print. The Spanish poet Inma Marcos, a friend

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15 Xavier Sabater et al., *La Cloaca*, 1 November 1976, cited in 'El underground y la contracultura'.

16 Bolaño, 'Xavier Sabater', *A la intemperie*, p. 369.

of both Bruno Montané and Xavier Sabater, bridged the world of the recent immigrants from Chile by way of Mexico and the local scene. In this circle, Bolaño found the Barcelona poet A.G. Porta, with whom he would finally achieve a breakthrough in the realm of prose publication half a decade later with their co-written *Consejos de un discípulo de Morrison a un fanático de Joyce* (1984). In the late seventies Sabater was the only publisher to take any interest in Porta or Bolaño. It was his anthologies that afforded them harbor, and his makeshift production of 'rotten' magazines that enabled the editing of their own, with the same principals: Marcos, Montané, Bolaño, Porta. What Bolaño and Montané would share with Sabater, and the underground scene in general, was the rejection of the system—political, economic, literary, artistic.

However indebted to Anthony Burgess, the anti-bourgeois mayhem of *Consejos*, started in the desencanto of 1978–1979, may not readily translate for an Anglophone context. As a recent exhibit on the Barcelona underground culture of the 1970s notes more generally of the scene, news and trends from other countercultural scenes arrived in Barcelona in a fragmented fashion, without context. From the last years of Franco's regime in the early seventies, taking advantage of the relative proximity to Paris and distance from the surveillance of Madrid, youth programs such as *Radio Juventud* and magazines like *Fotograma* snuck in what snippets they could from movements elsewhere. Well into the transition, post-Franco, these samplings seldom offered a sense of the whole picture.<sup>17</sup> Whim shaped the connections made between different cultural artifacts. This is a key insight into the intellectual make-up and editorial practice of writers like Bolaño imprinted by this scene.

In this context Bolaño was hardly alone in mashing high art, the poetry of Baudelaire with popular genres from not only crime, sci-fi, and Eastern esoterica, through pulp and borderline exploitation true crime and erotica. The same points of reference in high and low art inform this scene and his fiction: anthologies of American feminist poets, H.P. Lovecraft, Arthur Rimbaud, Jim Morrison, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, William Burroughs, Hunter S. Thompson, Truman Capote, Werner Schroeter and Wim Wenders. Bolaño was of this underground scene in his fear of the revival of fascism only a couple of years after the death of Franco, and rebellion against an ultra-conservative expression

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17 Ribas et al., 'El underground y la contracultura'.

of family and bourgeois morality as it was still very much in place in Spain. And he was also representative of the scene in terms of some of the specific iconography and rhetoric deployed, from the Nazi iconography recurrent on the covers of the adult comic *Star*, to the grab bag of currents of sexual liberation that interested this scene and Bolaño, from gay liberation through radical lesbian separatism. Some of these clusters of images and associations may appear garbled from the vantage point of a cultural history that distinguishes with precision among countercultures in London and on the West and East coast of the United States. But they snap back into place if one steps into the archive of the underground Barcelona scene where Bolaño and others had knitted them together and spoken of them in the same breath.

### Bolaño as Editor in Cold War Barcelona

Bolaño and Montané, Chileans arriving in Barcelona by way of Mexico City after the fall of Allende and the repression of the student movement, found another term to describe what they saw in the elections in Spain in 1977: counterrevolution. In their first literary magazine, in November 1977, they found common cause with the Spanish radical Left disillusioned by the move toward the centre of the parties contesting the election. The 16-page magazine *Rimbaud, vuelve a Casa* borrowed its subtitle from Lenin's *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, and for its conclusion his denunciation of the social democrat for taking from Marxism only what the bourgeois and liberals found tolerable, and excising what they could not — revolutionary violence. The magazine was aimed at fellow travellers not only in Peru and Mexico but also in Barcelona and Madrid.<sup>18</sup>

Montané and Bolaño were convinced the reaction against the revolutionary Left in the countries they had lived in had crushed incipient forms of the popular exercise of power and destroyed the utopias of their generation. Registering the mood of the more radical Left in Spain, they believed 1977 to be an important crossroads for the commitment to revolution. They were clear about the path they opposed — art for art's sake, a retreat into the office of the writer, away from the public sphere. They sought to witness the potential for a revolution even as they felt it

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18 Roberto Bolaño and Bruno Montané, *Rimbaud, vuelve a Casa* [1977].

to be lost. Less defined were the contours of poetry of disenchantment. In their preamble letter to *Rimbaud*, Montané and Bolaño, spied common challenges in Spain and Latin America and saw need to resist the 'brutal' routine enacted by 'bourgeois and fascist states'. But how? 'Emerging nervous and tense from solitude and clandestine phone calls', they wrote, 'our only poetic certainty is that life—suffered, lived, enjoyed—is ever more distant from attempts to reflect it, to change it through verbs and images'.<sup>19</sup>

The two Chileans addressed the Hora Zero movement in Peru. In Barcelona in 1977 Bolaño remained intrigued by the possible affinities that veterans of Mexican *infrarrealismo* like himself might find with those of other Latin-American avantgardes of the 1970s. The Peruvian group by then was known for its proletarian poetry and committees for cultural production. Both movements had traversed a common path, defined by dictatorships and the oppression of student movements of the 1970s in Latin America. Distinct from but not atypical of Barcelona *desencanto* after 1977, Bolaño expressed the hope that those who had trodden a common Marxist path might bring that radical energy to aesthetic projects. Bolaño succeeded in persuading Jorge Pimental of Hora Zero to collaborate on the anthology, which would include the work of eleven young poets and be printed in Mexico in 1979 under the new title *Naked Boys under a Rainbow of Fire* (*Muchachos desnudos bajo el arcoiris de fuego*).

An attitude and what Bourdieu terms a habitus defined the movement that Montané and Bolaño had been involved in in Mexico City, *infrarrealismo*.<sup>20</sup> Bolaño had coined the term *infrarrealismo* from Soviet sci-fi author Georgi Gurevic's 'Infra Draconis' (1959), the account of a cosmonaut crew's encounter with dark stars (in Spanish, 'infrasoles'), planet-stars in which the light and heat produced is drawn back to the stars, which remain dark. Gurevic relates the story of a fourteen-year interplanetary expedition to a dark star seven light days from Earth. The crew must abandon its mission after an initial approach determines that the surface is made up of dark water and affords no spot to land. The oldest crewman resolves to descend by himself in a journey without

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19 Bolaño and Montané, 'Rasgar el Tambor, la Placenta (carta al Movimiento Hora Zero de Perú)' in *ibid.*, n.p.

20 There as many *infrarrealists* as *infrarrealists*, and scholars have sketched genealogies emphasizing a link or break with Surrealism.

prospect of return, transmitting to other cosmonauts the details of his descent through the planet-star's outer layers, at the last sighting in an abyss a city. 'There are four light-hours until the end of the solar system; four-light days to the closest star', Bolaño's manifesto begins, 'But can we be sure it is a void? We only know that in this space there are no luminous stars, if they do exist would they be visible? What if there were bodies neither luminous nor dark? Couldn't it be in celestial maps, just like those of earth, that we mark city-stars but not citytowns?'<sup>21</sup> Bolaño picked out the image of the old cosmonaut's mission, and his making out, in his last transmission, the contours of a city that reveal the shape of a cupola, the light from illuminated streets, and fantastical beings.

Reaching out in November 1977 to members of Peru's Hora Zero, but also to young poets in Barcelona, Bolaño wrote out of the conviction that aesthetic affinities might survive among veterans of 1970s avantgardes. From the underground he would dismiss as sterile the work of young mainstream Spanish poets during this 'shared disenchantment'.<sup>22</sup> He held more faith in the insights informed by the university protests of Mexico in 1968. The challenge in the aftermath of such moments is to capture 'the ambiguity that lingers in the streets — as astonishment and a desire to bite and be bitten — ... the savagery of one who realizes that to be [present at this time...] is to be sitting on a powder keg, and is able to express it'. What is needed he suggests are 'other forms of risk' that 'could unite the revolutionary moments of history with a personal life story in terms and realms... not only unknown but dangerous'.<sup>23</sup> He held hope for a poetry of 'total experience' that was yet to be published: 'Che Guevara and Jules Verne, an adventure of the body, in space, of revolution'.<sup>24</sup> The unknown Bolaño doubled down, in the sci-fi realm of Verne, on a revolutionary energy in the realm of aesthetics.

In the Barcelona underground scene Bolaño found common cause against the co-option of revolution by bourgeois democracy. This was a hot topic in Spain, but also across socialist circles in Europe. And though it runs counter to the consensus of how Bolaño was discovered, it was in a small publication by an anti-fascist committee that his work first

21 <http://manifestos.infrarrealismo.com/primermanifesto.html>

22 Bolaño, 'De la inutilidad', *A la intemperie*, p. 390.

23 Bolaño, 'Apuntes sobre la poesía de Orlando Guillén', *A la intemperie*, pp. 381–83.

24 Bolaño, 'Islas a la deriva, por José Emilio Pacheco', *A la intemperie*, p. 353.

travelled. Counter to assumptions of the appeal of Bolaño's writing to, or even its production for, a world literary market, this first recognition took place in Eastern Europe, behind the Iron Curtain. From this flicker of recognition the impetus for exiled authors to contact him arose, and allowed him to benefit from networks established by authors in exile in his magazine editing in the early 1980s.

That Bolaño was first included in a collection in East Berlin before entering the radar of the literary scene in Santiago, Barcelona or Paris should not surprise. Bolaño's *infrarrealismo* was inspired by Soviet science fiction, and the *Hora Zero* movement he admired partial to Marxist-Leninism. If the literary historian pans out and maps the travel of the writing of his closest coauthors in the late 1970s and 1980s—Bruno Montané and Barcelona author A.G. Porta—one observes it was also first exported to Central and Eastern Europe. By 1977, Montané had already been translated into German, Polish and Czech. And by the mid-1980s, Porta's writing was translated into Hungarian and included in anthologies of contemporary international literature.<sup>25</sup> The vector of the first international travel of this underground writing is clear and points across the Berlin wall.

Bolaño appeared alongside Montané with two co-written poems in *Los poetas luchan contra el fascismo*, published in 1977 by the Chilean anti-fascist Committee in the German Democratic Republic.<sup>26</sup> The collective volume took a long historical view of Chilean writing against fascism, including Gabriela Mistral and Pablo Neruda, Nobel laureates who had witnessed the rise of *falangismo* and Franco and the beginnings of the Civil War teaching at Madrid's *residencia de estudiantes* and serving in the Chilean diplomatic corps in the 1920s and 1930s. Editor Sergio Macías made unmistakable the testamentary purpose of the volume: 'we will not concern us with the romantic, epic or descriptive, nor the anti-poem nor lyric or intimate verse'.<sup>27</sup> The goal was unveiling the horror of Pinochet's military regime.

25 A.G. Porta, *Textos en español* (Budapest, Tankönyvkiadó, 1986) and *Égtájak 1984. Őt világrész elbeszélései* (Budapest: Europa, 1984). Porta also placed the story 'Elektrosokk' in the magazine *Nagy Világ*, 10 (1985).

26 'Carta' and 'En el pueblo' in *Los poetas chilenos luchan contra el fascismo*, ed. by Víctor Contreras Tapia and Sergio Macías Brevis (Berlin: Comité Chile Antifascista, 1977), pp. 264, 271.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

In form and content, Montané and Bolaño's chapbook *Rimbaud* (1977) dovetailed with the anti-fascist collection. All three poets included are presented as Communists and sympathizers of *Hora Zero*. Inma Marcos, identifying as a revolutionary feminist, contributes a poem where the narrator describes night as 'an electrocuted ghost' and tires of 'dreaming in morse / photocopying echoes / the repeated gestures in countless sequences / pores that are the corridors of torture'.<sup>28</sup> Darío Galicia presents himself as a disciple of 'the feminist poet Diana Bellesi' and the first to have attempted to found 'a homosexual communist party' and a 'homosexual proletarian commune' in Mexico. He is represented by a poem which imagines a future where the automatization of harvests and factories has freed workers from labour and 'the children of abundance' are free to break with gendered norms.<sup>29</sup> And Montané envisions a world where the war has ended, atomic bombs are shown in open air museums, and 'where tortures are the memory of disillusion, towards certain pieces of the past'. The narrator imagines in the ruins of great cities violent entertainments 'where not a single drop of sisterly blood will be spilt'.<sup>30</sup>

After being listed by Sergio Macías and the Berlin committee as an anti-fascist author in 1977, the following year, 1978, Bolaño appeared in *Literature Chilena en el Exilio* as a poet 'first exiled in Mexico, now exiled in Spain'.<sup>31</sup> Why should we not remember him as such? The overlooked three issues of *Berthe Trépat* (1983) helps explain why Bolaño did not seek the mantle of exiled author, and refused to inhabit that profile in his subsequent literary career.<sup>32</sup> An impetus for the publication was provided by sociologist Soledad Bianchi, who as editor, from her exile in Paris, of Chilean poetry of the diaspora resisted the military regime in Chile. Yet though Bianchi provided the first issue's editorial and connections with prominent poets, the magazine was not hers. Edited in Barcelona by Montané with help from his artistic family and friends and via correspondence with Bolaño in Girona, *Berthe Trépat* reflects, from its title to its content, a conscious choice on behalf of the two Catalonia-based poets to eschew the profile of the political exile magazine.

28 *Rimbaud, vuelve a Casa*, biography, p. 15, and poem, 'Flujo Violento', p. 7.

29 *Rimbaud, vuelve a Casa*, biography, p. 15, and poem, 'Velocidad, Vapor y Sueño', p. 4.

30 *Rimbaud, vuelve a Casa*, 'La Guerra ha Terminado', pp. 8–14.

31 See Roberto Bolaño, 'Bienvenida, in *Literature Chilena en el Exilio*, 8 (1978), p. 17.

32 See <https://culturadigital.udp.cl/index.php/documento/revista-berthe-trepat-1/>

Named after the pianist in Julio Cortázar's novel *Rayuela* (*Hopscotch*, 1969), *Berthe Trépat* presents itself as an eclectic venue 'for pleasure, like a game, like hopscotch' (*rayuela*), with an emphasis on irony and humour along with 'solidarity, hope and skepticism'.<sup>33</sup> Enrique Lihn anchors the 47-page issue with poems that play on Odysseus, his own memories of Cincinnati, Lewis Carroll, and Kandinsky ('I travel but not to an Eldorado of my choosing, with no confidence in objective fate').<sup>34</sup> Like the Spanish poet Inma Marcos, Bolaño contributes verses of solitude, romance and eros, evoking 'the dirty windows of the port of Barcelona'.<sup>35</sup> From Rome, the Chilean exile Antonio Arévalo writes a poem for Pier Paolo Pasolini, while from Barcelona, Víctor Esteban contributes an apocryphal history of a necromantic late eighteenth-century French cult. Guillermo Nuñez, a Chilean painter exiled in Paris, muses if there is a way to write about the native peoples of the Americas he identifies with that is not archaeological, wondering at one point what the native peoples think of the murals devoted to them. Typical of the underground, the politics are of sexual liberation. A certain cultural dislocation permeates some of the contributions, but it would be a strain to interpret them all through the prism of exile.

The editors made this clear by anchoring the magazine's second issue in 1983 with Enrique Lihn's letter to the poets of Rotterdam.<sup>36</sup> Lihn's letter provided cover for Montané and Bolaño.<sup>37</sup> Placed as an introduction to the volume, Lihn's letter to the poets of Rotterdam pre-

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33 Soledad Bianchi, 'Divaga Introducción imprescindible sobre a Berthe Trépat', *Berthe Trépat*, 1 (1983), pp. 3–5.

34 Enrique Lihn, 'Souvenir de Cincinnati', *ibid.*, p. 13.

35 Roberto Bolaño, "El Aire," *ibid.*, p. 23.

36 Enrique Lihn, 'Carta a los poetas en Rotterdam', *Berthe Trépat*, 2 (1983), pp. 3–13. Lihn referred to the exiled poets gathered who had in that city and were anthologized by Bianchi in an anthology published in Rotterdam in 1983, *Entre la lluvia y el arcoiris: algunos jóvenes poetas chilenos* (Rotterdam: Instituto para el Nuevo Chile, 1983).

37 The second issue of *Berthe Trépat* (1983) mostly included Chilean authors. Luis Herмосilla imagines an installation to enact exile, 'an event that violently rips him from his surroundings, that separates him from his neighbourhood, his house, his friends, his family, his furniture, his objects, etc' (pp. 24–26). Soledad Bianchi referenced the poets who spoke at the Rotterdam meeting, captivated by Gonzalo Millán's concept of counter-exile to describe those who face a remote reality, after almost ten years of absence from their home country in contact with 'other tongues, customs, arts, cultures'; (pp. 14–23). The inclusion of an apolitical poem by the Mexican infraredrealist Mario Santiago, breaks the spell of the selection of Chilean authors.

empt the spell of exile, and actively makes a case against its allure. He warns poets of reducing cultural labour to a strictly partisan end, remarking on the coincidence of Allende's fall and the persecution of writers and intellectuals in Cuba. Lihn dismisses magazines and prizes for politically committed literature as stalwarts of political utopias built by dictators. He bristles at the presumed moral superiority of exile, venturing that not all those who could return would do so, and not all who wanted to leave, could.<sup>38</sup> Lihn is skeptical of the stated project of the poets who had gathered in Rotterdam: to pick up the thread of their national poetic tradition, hoping to reach their 'natural' readers. Lihn would rather the Chilean exile become a good poet in an adopted country than 'cultivate an artificial, popular Chilean identity, in search of 'national' readers'.<sup>39</sup> It is tempting to see echoes of Lihn's piece in Bolaño's own famously ironic meditations on the literary pretensions of exile of a decade and a half later.<sup>40</sup>

Montané and Bolaño chose, in contrast with Bianchi's anthologies of Chilean exile poetry, to represent their corner of the Barcelona underground. For this reason they included local alongside Latin American contributors. Rootedness in this scene is evident in the first cover, a photograph of a mysterious city square superimposed upon a map of the Born neighbourhood in Barcelona. The break with exile writing is clearly signalled by the inclusion of the work of Bolaño's frequent coauthor, A.G. Porta, in Catalan. Porta used a 'cut-up' method, mixing words and phrases from Joaquim Mallafré's Catalan translation of Joyce's *Ulysses* from 1981.<sup>41</sup> Porta's experiment, enabled by this first translation of the novel into Catalan, serves as a reminder that eclecticism was a guiding editorial principle of *Berthe Trépat* in 1983, with less of a link, relative to 1977's chapbook *Rimbaud*, between ideology and form. In this Montané and Bolaño's editorial practice in

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38 Lihn is not at all convinced that exile will produce better poetry, suggesting rather that censorship had provoked the development of new formal responses and devices in poetry penned in Chile, and that, in any event, the best work of the younger generation of poets had already been published by 1973 almost like 'prefigurations' or 'premonitions', 'Carta a los poetas de Rotterdam', *Berthe Trépat*, 2 (1983), p. 12.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

40 Roberto Bolaño, 'Exiles', *The New York Review of Books*, 13 April 2011, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2011/04/13/exiles/>

41 A. G. Porta, 'Outsider — Pàgina 338', *Berthe Trépat* 1 (1983), pp. 30–33.

the mid-1980s resonates with the whims of countercultural publishing in the Barcelona of their time.

In drafting *The Savage Detectives* and *2666*, Bolaño would continue to care about what his fellow Marxists read, even after what he saw as the pendulum swing to counterrevolution, in Spain as it had done in Mexico and Chile. The young radical's contempt for the bourgeois Left never entirely faded, nor his interest in the political violence of those years, a violence imposed by states (viewed with horror), and deployed by guerrilla groups fighting them (viewed with some sympathy). Jorge Volpi dismisses the visceral realists of *The Savage Detectives* and their quest for cult poets as juvenile, faulting their real life models and Marxist magazines for 'slumming'.<sup>42</sup> To understand Bolaño in his time, I counter, one has to take small Marxist magazines such those Bolaño published with Montané in Barcelona seriously, with their earnest statements of solidarity with the communes set up by young poets in Sabadell, outside Barcelona—a sign that rather than 'slumming', Bolaño remained genuinely drawn to such social commitments and experiments upon his move to Spain. Slumming was not really an option for an author from a modest social background never able to make a living from his writing, and whose experiences of and friendships made via manual labour were genuine.

Decontextualized, it is also easy to dismiss the Beat leanings of the '70s generation the novel portrays. But contexts matter. Bolaño and his circle read Kerouac, Bukowski, Burroughs, and, for that matter, Patricia Highsmith in a highly charged environment, published by underground and literary labels, Star Books and Anagrama, known among young readers for its radical credentials. Porta recalls that Bolaño was very much attuned to the intellectual inheritance and radical profile of Anagrama as a press that had established itself first by publishing the work of favourite intellectuals of his like Hans Magnus Enzerberger.<sup>43</sup> For an aspiring author mired in the 'rotten' underground of horribly photocopied chapbooks, reading Kerouac or Highsmith in Anagrama editions would hardly have constituted an act of intellectual slumming. And reading Noir in the 1980s and experimenting with the form in

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42 Jorge Volpi, 'Bolaño, epidemia', *Revista de la Universidad de México*, 49, marzo 2008, pp. 197–98.

43 Email, Antoni García Porta to Paulo Lemos Horta, 5 July 2020.

fictional and screenplay form, as Porta and Bolaño did together, hardly need be seen as an apolitical act. Spanish Noir was strongly imbued with the history and politics of the *desencanto* that coincided with its revival as a genre in Spanish letters in the 1980s. While A.G. Porta himself preferred classic authors like Highsmith, which he read in French, he recalls his Chilean friend having a much deeper interest in contemporary Spanish Noir authors,<sup>44</sup> perhaps, I would venture, because of the way it handled political disenchantment, an insight useful to interpret not only early Bolaño but other plays on the genre through to 2666.

In the alternative and underground scenes represented by Herralde and Bolaño, it is difficult to mistake the persistence for readers of the *habitus* of their subculture, the carrying over of a set of dispositions, even as this evolves from manifestoes and calls to action and expands into fiction and art. The genius of Anagrama was to encourage a readership that had been built from 1969 to 1977 on Guevara and Baader-Meinhof, and had found its first bestseller in Mao in 1975, to embrace a wider range of issues and sensibilities, first women's and gay liberation, then the countercultural scene of Bukowski and Burroughs, under the fold of a radical politics and attitude, uncompromising with bourgeois values. In Bolaño's underground scene one observes a similar shift, on a more aspirational level, with the chapbook *Rimbaud* in 1979 with its selection of three poets who prioritize (only two years after Herralde had done so in Anagrama) the dovetailing of feminism, gay liberation, and revolutionary politics. It is important to recognize common countercultural influences at play in both scenes: in 1983 Montané and Bolaño publish poems riffing on Burroughs, the same year Anagrama launches its first literary imprint that would be anchored by the work of Burroughs, Bukowski, Thompson and Highsmith. But it is important also not to underestimate the barriers that a stubbornly underground and anti-commercial author like Bolaño would find as he turned to fiction in the 1980s and sought to find a foothold on Anagrama's list, a press that over the course of the decade would accrue increasing literary prestige. It is quite a jump from Sabater's rotten chapbooks to the Spanish house of Kazuo Ishiguro, Martin Amis, Julian Barnes, Graham Swift, and Vikram Seth.

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44 Ibid.

The correspondence of Jorge Herralde puts to rest any claims that the publisher positioned or produced Bolaño for an international audience, or that the nature of Bolaño's writing somehow made it appealing to the publisher commercially, in any language. Herralde is convinced of the minor market potential of Bolaño's writing throughout, from the first approach by Bolaño in the second year of the existence of Anagrama's literary list, 1984, through his reading of the novel he would publish to critical acclaim, *The Savage Detectives*. As late as 2000, the year *after* Bolaño scooped up the Rómulo Gallegos Prize, Herralde would find himself defending in the press the decision to publish fiction by the Chilean's that was '*militantemente minoritario*,'<sup>45</sup> a phrase that captures well his sense of Bolaño as a partisan, a soldier in the defense of the literature for the few against the demands of commercial publishing.

## Conclusion

The received narrative of Bolaño as a writer of and perhaps for the world market does not accord with the record of the archive of his collaborations in Barcelona at the tail end of the Cold War and of Spanish *desencanto*. But why should one automatically look at Bolaño from New York, as if it is his passage into English that first marks his entry into world letters? Such a spatial and temporal view produces distorting assumptions about the nature of his appeal to an American audience. If one looks at Bolaño from Barcelona and Catalonia, where he pursued his literary career and penned all his fiction, a different constellation emerges—of literary actors, activities, collaborations, magazines. From a radicalized and disenchanting Barcelona underground scene at the tail end of the Cold War a different world was viewed, a distinct set of contacts across borders and hence mode of internationalism. Chilean exiles reached out to him, drawing Bolaño into the sphere of the oppositional writing gathered by the Chilean anti-fascist committee in East Berlin. Bolaño engaged the broader community of exiles from South American dictatorships in Europe and elsewhere, but was also grounded in the experience of Latin American manual labor in Barcelona which he partook of (not 'slummed' in).

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45 Jordi Gracia, *Los Papeles de Herralde: Una historia de Anagrama 1968–2000* (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2021), p. 375.

This existence was very far from the literary circuits, networks, and festivals of prestige, what Bolaño's friend from his brief years of recognition Enrique Vila-Matas calls 'music for underachievers'.<sup>46</sup> It is difficult to map onto the models inherited from Pierre Bourdieu, because Bolaño was not an author propelled to world recognition by awards that might have allowed his publisher to transmute symbolic into commercial capital. In Spain, prizes from the most lucrative (Planeta) to Anagrama's own Herralde prize work in effect as advances.<sup>47</sup> And the Herralde prize hardly guarantees translation into English, much less attention from FSG or *Time*. Bolaño's writing was militantly anti-commercial, in Herralde's apt summation, he was a guerilla or underground author, the belatedness of his recognition the regret of his publisher and his friends, for all the fixation on his somewhat fortuitous posthumous postscript in Anglophone letters.

From the Barcelona underground scene Bolaño and Montané sought to tap into less a circuit than a patchwork of contacts, defined by the gaps between and the looseness of the connections, not quite the *network* of literary models. The thrilling and ephemeral quality of these contacts is beautifully illustrated by the image of an international underground surrealist collective recruiting passers-by by cold calling pay phones, recently rescued from Bolaño's vault in *Cowboy Graves (Sepulcros de Vaqueros)*. Most of their desired anthologies of writing in exile and the diaspora and the imagined communities between the remnants of avantgardes scattered across Latin America would never materialize. A few magazine issues were published in Barcelona, and contributions made to a chapbook in Mexico. But some of the oppositional political quality of the early Bolaño survives in *Distant Star*, the first book he would publish with Anagrama, and *By Night in Chile*, the first book to be translated into English, both books of Pinochet's Chile. And more of that world of avantgarde dreams and poetic utopias survives in the literary circles evoked in *The Savage Detectives* and *2666*. Without this context, Anglo-American readers might be forgiven for recognizing in Bolaño's writing only a mirror of what they know: Kerouac, hardboiled Noir, American sci fi, rather than Soviet cosmonauts, the more radicalized

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46 Interview with the author, 2017.

47 Bolaño himself disparaged national literary prizes in 'Sobre la literatura, el Premio Nacional de Literatura y los raros consuelos del oficio', *A la intemperie*, pp. 261–64.

noir of Spain in the early 1980s, and Latin American takes on Georges Perec and French poets such as Rimbaud who gives Bolaño his first name, Arturo.

Barcelona in the 1970s and 1980s was also a place where the radical left that admired the Red Brigade overlapped with support for anticolonial struggle, not only in the lists of Anagrama, but the trajectories of characters of what became the polyvocal middle section of *The Savage Detectives*. In a book devoted to literary movements and circles born of anticolonial struggle, I offer this case study of Bolaño hoping to bring into focus resonances, from the attention to South Asian and Latin American contexts, and comparable forms of solidarity.

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# Afterword

## A World of Print

*Peter Kalliney*

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In *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World*, Vijay Prashad says the Third World 'was not a place. It was a project'.<sup>1</sup> Invoking an idea or an intervention, not a set of boundaries or even material conditions, Prashad thus begins his narrative about the hopes and disappointments of the independence movements that transformed the world in the middle decades of the last century. For decolonizing regions, this project's main aims included self-determination, a more egalitarian economic system, an end to racism, and the development of cultural independence. Understanding the nature of these claims requires us to study political history, to be sure, but it also invites us to revisit the documents and other written records that outline the movement's shared principles and objectives. Echoing Prashad, Christopher J. Lee, Pheng Cheah, and Adom Getachew all describe decolonization in terms of 'worldmaking', a process during which anticolonial activists launched efforts to overcome 'international structures of unequal integration and racial hierarchy'.<sup>2</sup> The Third World was a project of collectively thinking 'freedom time', in Gary Wilder's formulation, happening as much in articulations of solidarity and in imagining 'alternatives that might have been' as in demonstrations of revolutionary praxis.<sup>3</sup> To write of the Third

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1 Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2007), p. xv.

2 Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), p. 2.

3 Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), p. 16.

World is to participate in the reconstruction of this intellectual legacy, a movement based on ideas as well as a history of places and events and political figures.

This collective imaginative effort happened, in large part, through the vibrant print networks described in the foregoing essays. As a field, postcolonial studies has taught us a great deal about how cultural production in the decolonizing world has been determined by lingering forms of imperialism. Without negating the force of this critique, the current volume adds layers of complexity to this account by showing how Third World intellectuals used Cold War cultural networks both to reach new audiences abroad and to add a range of voices to their local literary cultures. The Cold War's cultural diplomacy initiatives sometimes built upon colonial print networks in the Third World, but just as often they created new infrastructures to support different patterns of literary traffic. Most intriguing, perhaps, is the realization that the Cold War superpowers did not unilaterally dictate terms of exchange to Third World intellectuals, who proved to be nimble and adaptable operators, willing to collaborate with various interest groups to make their projects viable. This collection of essays also complicates the simplistic parcelling of Third World print culture into antagonistic, ready-made spheres of influence, with writers from the decolonizing regions pledging allegiance to one ideological bloc or expressing unequivocal preference for one aesthetic doctrine. Without denying or negating the real ideological pressures faced by Third World intellectuals, this volume suggests that intellectuals in the decolonizing world pursued their own agendas with more success than a straightforward conspiracy narrative would suggest.

As Neelam Srivastava's contribution reminds us, figures such as Amílcar Cabral, Frantz Fanon, Che Guevara, Nelson Mandela, and Mao Zedong were leading political figures of an international anticolonial vanguard because they were practicing intellectuals, too. Their speeches and writings circulated widely through overlapping networks of transnational exchange. Sometimes, as Srivastava shows us, these networks were geared to transmit ideas generated by intellectuals from the Global South to readers in the Global North: European audiences consuming the fruits of anticolonial intellectual labor. What Feltrinelli and Einaudi publishing houses accomplished in Italy was mimicked

in places such as the United States with Grove Press, which brought anticolonial radicals to expectant university students in North America.<sup>4</sup> It is important to remember that dissidents in metropolitan regions were nourished by their reading of Third World intellectuals.

Laetitia Zecchini's essay, on the Indian branches of the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) and International PEN, approaches this problem of north-south relations from a different perspective. Zecchini argues for the significance of liberalism in the context of the anticolonial struggle, suggesting that Indian intellectuals used cultural diplomacy networks to bolster spaces of dissent and 'creative Non-Alignment' that included both radicals and their less revolutionary cousins. In *Transition* magazine in 1966, the CCF's Ugandan periodical, Rajat Neogy defined his editorial philosophy as 'aggressive non-prejudice', calling it a 'disciplined permissiveness' that encourages different points of view to engage one another.<sup>5</sup> Neogy believed that ideological as well as cultural diversity were important for developing Ugandan independence through autonomous political structures but also through a functioning intellectual community. Shielding a decolonizing people from conflicting political viewpoints and different cultural traditions would ultimately stunt development by denying Ugandans the ability to learn from the experiences of others. Believing that cultural decolonization could be facilitated by tactical engagement with, rather than withdrawal from, the wider world, Neogy feared populist nativism and isolationism more than he worried about Africans being overrun by exogenous influences. Without the coercive structures of imperialism, Ugandans would be free to learn from other decolonizing nations as well as from the metropolitan cultures that once held most of the Global South in bondage.

It would be easy thereby to speculate that this movement of ideas between Third and First Worlds was part of a neo-colonial attempt to defuse the spark of revolutionary movements. There are a number of scholars who argue that Cold War cultural diplomacy initiatives helped adapt colonial structures of domination to global literary culture (Andrew Rubin; Caroline Davis). But such a conclusion underestimates the sophistication of Third World writers and readers, who were never

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4 Loren Glass, *Counterculture Colophon: Grove Press, the Evergreen Review, and the Incorporation of the Avant-Garde* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

5 Rajat Neogy, 'Do Magazines Culture?', *Transition*, 24 (1966), pp. 30–32 (p. 31).

passive, uncritical consumers of cultural products and ideological messages from their First World counterparts. Likewise, it downplays the extent to which civil rights campaigners and other social activists in the Global North learned from their deepening acquaintance with the anticolonial struggle. The ideas of Third World intellectuals spilled across cultural and ideological boundaries, influencing activists and dissidents in a wide variety of contexts. As Michael Denning shows us in *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, it is possible to write a transnational literary history of the twentieth century by putting Global South writers at the center of a Novelists' International, peaking in the 1960s and 1970s. A story written from this perspective acknowledges the enormous impact of anticolonial worldmaking without then ignoring the unequal terms of cultural trade between First, Second, and Third Worlds. The political and cultural dominance of the First World was not uncontested during these decades, and it is part of this collection's ambition to show how the Global South's print cultures nurtured alternative points of view.

Cultural exchanges between Third and First Worlds, however, are only part of the picture we see developing in this collection. Following Katerina Clark's work in *Moscow, the Fourth Rome* and Rossen Djagalov's research in *From Internationalism to Postcolonialism: Literature and Cinema between the Second and Third Worlds*, we know that the Soviet Union fabricated its own cultural diplomacy networks that were attractive to many Global South writers. This story stretches back to the first Union of Soviet Writers conference of 1934, when, as Steven Lee remarks, more than half of the attendees came from Soviet Asia. The work of the All-India Progressive Writers' Association in the 1930s refitted some of the principles of the Soviet model to an anticolonial literary project. These efforts laid the groundwork for the 1956 Asian writers conference in New Delhi, close on the heels of which followed the first Afro-Asian conference in Tashkent, in 1958. Complementing research on the Afro-Asian Writers' Association by Monica Popescu, Duncan Yoon, and myself, this collection of essays suggests that Beirut, Cairo, New Delhi, Luanda, and Tunis challenged the London-New York-Paris axis that dominated routes of cultural exchange at mid-century. The AAWA held up Soviet Asia as an example to decolonizing peoples, arguing that growth of literatures in the languages of the Soviet Union's 'national minorities', as they were sometimes called, could be replicated

in other parts of the world. The appeal of this argument to decolonizing writers was enormous. Furthermore, as Lydia H. Liu points out, this message about cultural development was backed by the world's largest translation industry, facilitating exchange between writers who did not work in the preeminent global literary languages, English and French. Paulo Lemos Horta's research on Roberto Bolaño in this volume shows how a South American dissident writer could be spotted first in (East) Berlin before earning recognition in the wider hispanophone world. Simply because these forms of cultural exchange did not survive the end of the Cold War and the breakup of the Soviet Union does not mean they were not integral to the development of Third World print cultures, stimulating literary production throughout the Global South during the decolonization movements.

Not all literary production in the decolonizing world depended on superpower sponsorship. *Présence Africaine* and *Tricontinental Bulletin* provide two examples of important international anticolonial publications that did not emerge out of cultural diplomacy programs orchestrated by global powers. Anne Garland Mahler's research on the sprawling Tricontinental project shows how antiracist and anticolonial movements informed print culture in a multilingual Third World, influencing the Black Arts Movement, Third Cinema, and progressive literature from the southern cone. Launched in the mid-1960s and published simultaneously in several languages, the *Tricontinental Bulletin* was an explicit attempt to connect the anticolonial movement in Africa and Asia with a loose coalition of leftist movements in the Americas, including the Cuban revolution and the civil rights struggle being waged by African Americans (see also Srivastava's essay in this volume). Patrick Iber's research on the cultural Cold War in Latin America also demonstrates how Cuban cultural projects such as Casa de las Américas and the magazine *Humanismo* were designed to promote Latin American solidarity through support for intellectuals and the arts.

*Présence Africaine* began life almost two decades before the Tricontinental movement began, in 1947, when the political fault-lines of the Cold War were just emerging. The magazine's editors and main contributors regarded these developments, with client states and proxy wars throughout the Global South, as a new form of imperialism. On the eve of the 1er Congrès International des Écrivains et Artistes

Noirs, convened in Paris in 1956—often called the cultural Bandung conference—the magazine’s editors, who served as hosts for the event, reminded their readers that they viewed superpower maneuvering in the Third World not as a new problem, but instead as a continuation of older imperialisms:

But the crushing weight of colonialism is now to be doubled. Europe, overshadowed by two giants, sees her prestige and power condemned by the excessive development of these two great nations. European culture is in turn experiencing colonialism. It is threatened, for culture is linked with power. It is therefore turning now to the African continent to seek a guarantee of its survival and security, if not of its lost hegemony. [...] The situation is aggravated by the appearance of new appetites, those of the non-colonizing nations which call for a « more equitable » sharing out of African resources. It is not hard to foresee the future of insecurity, violence and exploitation that such European national cupidity holds out for us.<sup>6</sup>

Formerly non-colonizing nations, especially the United States and the Soviet Union, this editorial argues, were making their designs on the decolonizing world clear. In response, the journal fought hard to maintain its ideological independence. The journal’s focus on the cultural autonomy of the Black Atlantic world was notable for its stubborn nonalignment. Cultural development in the Third World did not need to follow the patterns designed by either of the dominant ideological blocs. Precarious but vibrant connections between Global South writers, forged outside or beyond the ideological traps of the Cold War, were yet another major part of the Third World’s burgeoning print culture during this period. As the essays by Supriya Chaudhuri, Jia Yan, Karima Laachir, and Itzea Goikolea-Amiano show us, Third World print cultures were developing their own models of cultural exchange based on mutual interests and a desire to know more about other literary traditions. Travelogues and friendship narratives provided flexible generic types for articulating cross-cultural exchange among Global South writers.

Francesca Orsini’s research on Hindi (little and not-so-little) magazines gives us a sense of what these ideological alternatives looked like in literary practice. Eric Bulson’s description of the little magazine

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6 Foreword, *Présence Africaine*, 1–2 (1955), p. 9.

as a world form anticipates some of the generic attributes Orsini finds in the Hindi periodicals. Bulson depicts the literary magazine's infinite regional variety not as a liability but as a source of imaginative capacity, showing the little magazine's ability to adapt to local contexts without sacrificing its specific qualities. As Orsini demonstrates in her essay, Hindi periodicals were instrumental in bringing short stories from all over the world to Indian readers. Some periodicals showed clear ideological preferences by confining themselves to stories from either First or Second Worlds. It was more common, however, to discover 'multiple and competing visions of world literature [...] in the same magazine at the same time'. Magazines such as *Nai Kahaniyan* and *Sarika* turned to many foreign literatures as means of producing a 'Third World internationalism' for domestic consumption. As a result, these magazines built a readership that could be more worldly and more ideologically savvy than their counterparts in either First or Second World blocs. This is what *Transition* editor Neogy has in mind when he insists that a good magazine develops its audience, providing access to conflicting political ideas and diverse literary traditions. Surprisingly, perhaps, Third World readers were more receptive to this kind of political and cultural heterogeneity because they were engaged in the project of imagining new possibilities rather than defending an international order. They could see and absorb more because they were less invested in maintaining a status quo.

If Third World print cultures were more vibrant than existing theories of global literature have readily acknowledged, these networks of cultural production were also susceptible to manipulation and interference. First- and Second-World cultural diplomacy were major sources of external pressure. Censorship and intimidation of intellectuals were other recurrent threats. Neogy's editorship of *Transition* and Yussef El-Sebai's editorship of *Lotus* illustrate how foreign patronage and political intimidation of intellectuals could lead to precarity for print networks in the Third World. Although Neogy launched *Transition* with no major investors, South African exiled writer Es'kia (known then as Ezekiel) Mphahlele convinced him to accept relatively small subventions from the CCF after a few successful issues. The funding came with few strings attached, the main requirement being cross-promotion of other magazines in the network. Neogy was well aware of the CCF's

position on intellectual freedoms and the Communist Party, but an attentive reading of the magazine suggests that Neogy was willing to give a range of political partisans the space to air their views.<sup>7</sup> When news of the CIA's involvement broke in 1966–1967, Neogy found himself in the position of defending his editorial integrity. Not long thereafter, Ugandan dictator Milton Obote, despite being a staunch US ally in the Cold War, detained Neogy on unspecified charges. The funding scandal and Neogy's detention broke the magazine. Relocating *Transition* to Ghana and Neogy stepping down as editor could not preserve it. New editor Wole Soyinka, who even tried to revive the flagging publication under a different name, could not salvage it.

The *Lotus* story, though different in the details, reflects many of the same threats to cultural autonomy for Third World intellectuals and their cultural institutions. After a decade as editor of *Lotus*, El-Sebai was assassinated during a trip to Cyprus in 1978. As Egyptian Minister of Culture, El-Sebai had been a vocal proponent of the Palestinian cause until Anwar Sadat's visit to Israel in 1977, which opened the door to US military aid for Egypt in exchange for détente. El-Sebai backed his government's stance, leading to his death at the hands of a militant Palestinian group that killed him during a meeting of the Afro-Asian solidarity group he chaired alongside his editorial duties. *Lotus* headquarters were transferred to Beirut in the aftermath of the assassination. Publication of the magazine became more irregular, worsening throughout the 1980s. In 1982, editorial headquarters were relocated to Tunis following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the destruction of the magazine's offices. *Lotus*, already struggling to maintain its relevance, would not survive the breakup of the Soviet Union.

By far the most common form of external pressure on Third World print culture was state intimidation of intellectuals themselves. The list of writers who were censored, spied on, imprisoned, deported, and even executed is depressingly long. Through 1990, South Africa was probably the Global South state with the worst record on censorship, as Peter D. McDonald shows in *The Literature Police*. But South Africa's apartheid regime was hardly unique in its stance toward intellectuals. Third World writers faced harassment at home and abroad, from independent

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7 'Rajat Neogy on the CIA', Interview with Tony Hall, *Transition*, 32 (1967), pp. 45–46.

postcolonial states as well as from colonial and semi-colonial regimes. Trinidadian intellectuals C. L. R. James and Claudia Jones were both targets of an FBI surveillance program in the US and were eventually deported. Doris Lessing was a subject of MI5 surveillance for years. Israeli security forces assassinated Palestinian activist-poet Ghassan Khanafani. The Nigerian Soyinka, the Kenyan Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, the Egyptian Nawal El-Saadawi, the Malawian Jack Mapanje, the Pakistani Sajjad Zaheer, and the Cuban Heberto Padilla are some of the most well-known writers who spent time in prison under postcolonial or post-revolutionary regimes. Pablo Neruda's death shortly after Augusto Pinochet's coup may have been orchestrated by forces loyal to the new regime, of which Neruda was an outspoken critic. Ken Saro-Wiwa was imprisoned several times and ultimately executed by the Nigerian government. As this very abbreviated list demonstrates, a number of writers from the Global South faced the most extreme forms of state terror and violence.

In *The Mute's Soliloquy*, the great Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer tells a story that is all too familiar to students of Third World print culture. Imprisoned in the 1940s under Dutch colonial rule, Pramoedya was detained, without charge, for a further fourteen years in the 1960s and 70s, two decades after Indonesia had declared its independence. He spent more than ten years in the Buru island penal colony, where he first drafted what has become known as the 'Buru Quartet'. The four novels narrate the history of the anticolonial movement through the experiences of a nationalist journalist, Minke. The fourth volume takes an interesting turn by utilizing a collaborationist policeman, who monitors the journalist's activities, as a narrator: a stark reminder that the Dutch colonial apparatus always had its eyes on writers, just as the postcolonial Indonesian state would in its turn. This culminating volume reminds us, by way of an analogy with the colonial period, that the postcolonial state and its security apparatus had an outsized role in determining how the story of decolonization might be narrated.

The conditions Pramoedya and his fellow political detainees met at Buru were harsh. He says that imprisonment at the hands of the Dutch authorities had been like 'heaven' compared to the hell he found in the penal colony. There, detainees were left to fend for themselves on an undeveloped area of the island: scavenging for food in the rivers and

dense forests, clearing brush for planting, laying roads and footpaths, fabricating tools, harvesting wood for the profit of the prison guards, and even the tasks of building shelter were left mostly to them. Disease and malnutrition were endemic in the camp but medical provisions virtually non-existent. Prior to his Buru ordeal, Pramoedya writes, he had been 'detained a number of times before, visited the Nazi concentration camps of Ravensbruck and Buchenwald'. He had seen the Indonesians who had been detained by the Japanese during their relatively short occupation and had also 'toured Siberia' where he got a sense of the gulag system. 'I, too, was going into exile, entering yet another barbed-wire dominion', he wrote,<sup>8</sup> suggesting that his imprisonment made him part of an international cohort of writers who faced political pressure. Denied writing materials for several years, Pramoedya developed the narrative of the 'Buru Quartet' by reciting what was in his mind to fellow detainees. He writes very touchingly of the support and encouragement he received from the other prisoners, many of whom did not survive their time on the island. Paper and permission to write were granted towards the end of his stay, but even after his release his publications were banned in Indonesia for years.

The damage to Third World print cultures caused by state intimidation of writers and of the publishing apparatus is not something we can quantify easily. We know from what has survived that there are gaps, absences, holes in the literary record: novels and poems and essays not written, destroyed, or not published because of political restrictions on literary production. This stunting of literary culture represents another form of underdevelopment inflicted upon the peoples of the Third World. When the contributors to this volume speak of the form of ideology, these gaps and deformations are part of their reckoning, too. Just as short stories and travelogues could be squeezed into particular forms as they traveled to different contexts, we must keep in mind that state coercion also stunted the development of writing and writers in many parts of the decolonizing world.

One of the lasting ironies of this pattern of state intimidation is that political interference in literary production also helped internationalize Third World print culture. Although Pramoedya could not be published

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8 Pramoedya Ananta Toer, *The Mute's Soliloquy: A Memoir* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 25.

in Indonesia for some time after his release, he found publishers and translators and readers overseas, many of whom were interested in his story as a humanitarian cause. This is not a simple story of redemption or overcoming. Third World print culture is not better because it was forced in many places to seek audiences beyond the nation-state. The consequences and distortions of this situation each have their place in this story: Pramoedya's wide international readership does not compensate him for his suffering, or even for the difficulty of reaching an audience in his native tongue. But political interference in Third World literary production—through positive inducements, such as state-sponsored cultural diplomacy programs, or through prohibitions and restrictions, such as censorship and detention of writers—means that the story of postcolonial nation-building often happened in an extranational context. The 'Buru Quartet's' narration of the Indonesian anticolonial movement speaks both to domestic audiences, imagined in a future of which Pramoedya could not be certain, and to an international readership. There is a kind of syncopation at work as these texts move in and out of different contexts. This complicated relationship between Third World print cultures and the anticolonial nationalist movements out of which they emerged helps explain the startling mixture of vibrancy and trepidation that these texts communicate to us even still.

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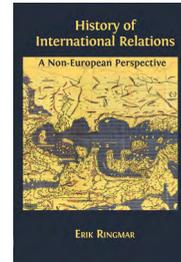
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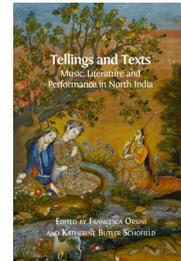


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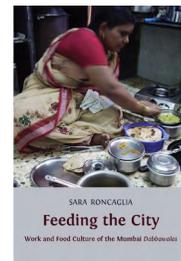


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