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TEXTS TRAVELLING BEYOND THE WEST
INTRODUCTION

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At the core of this special issue, lies the editors' own fascination with and research on travelling literature in African languages. We often do not find it represented in postcolonial debates about "contact zones" as well as recently growing discussions about textual entanglements fueled by notions of World Literature, although, as we believe, it can make an important contribution in reflecting about literary connections not only in our specific area, but about literary connections on a global scale. Africa is a part of the world, whose literary networks have a long history of being sidelined. This special issue brings together contributions by scholars working on literature in other "minor" languages from the Far East, the Middle East, India, Papua New Guinea – and East Africa. They can remind us of the relativity of Western categories and Western disciplinary organization of literary studies of the last 200 years, which are, however, often taken as universal.

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In contrast to African language literatures, the engagement with the so-called Oriental literary traditions of Asia has a long tradition of fascinating the West. In the 18th and 19th century in particular at around the same time when Goethe first made use of the term "World Literature", Arabic, Persian, Chinese and Japanese literature, for instance, became a source of scholarship and inspiration for many of the best authors all across Europe. For instance, literatures from parts of the British Empire, for instance, Persia, Egypt and India found a huge echo and markedly enriched British Victorian poetry, as Annmarie Drury argues in her book *Translation as Transformation in Victorian Poetry* (2015). In a similar vein, Jin Yun Chow shows in this issue how the 19th century French poet Judith Gautier found a new poetic voice in recreating classical Chinese poetry from the Tang period in French. Her work led to a whole wave of creative retranslations, building a growing intertextual web, which would continue the circulation of Chinese poems beyond their point of origin.

Par contre, African language literatures have, if at all, mostly attracted the interest of informed missionaries and scholars in the 19th and 20th century. They have often been considered as static and locally confined in both reach and relevance not moving beyond the immediate realm of an utterly local face-to-face community.[1] However, this notion does not correspond to our own experience with literary traditions at the East African coast. In the following, we will throw a glimpse on textual circulations in East Africa as an entry point into the further considerations of travelling

[1] For a criticism and more extended argument, see Larsen's *Ocean of Letters. Language and Creolization in an* Indian Ocean Diaspora (2009) and Clarissa Vierke's "Other Worlds: The 'Prophet's Ascension' as World Literature and its Adaptation in Swahili-speaking East Africa" (forthcoming). For a consideration of how African literature is conceived in the early discussions about World Literature, see Thomas Geider's article (2005) "Afrika im Umkreis der frühen Weltliteraturdiskussion: Goethe und Henri Grégoire". The latter article also highlights the particular nature of oral literature, which has hardly been considered as a source of African intellectual tradition.

literature beyond the West.

We have both mostly worked on Islamic poetic traditions, which have been adapted into Swahili at the East African coast, which has been a zone of contact for many centuries. Far-reaching literary contact did not start with the arrival of the colonial masters. Ships following the monsoon winds to Indian and Arabia and back to East Africa did not only carry precious goods, like ivory and porcelain over the Indian Ocean, but also stories, poetry and songs. For instance, episodes from the Arabian Nights' as well as Abunawasi stories, originally stories from the court in Baghdad, which fused with Bantu trickster tales can be traced in Swahili folktales.[2] And particularly epic poetry, the most reputed field of literary expression in East Africa, has been enriched by Islamic narrative traditions: For instance, the truly global "Story of Joseph" – Yusuf in the Qur'ān –, has been adapted into Swahili verse at the East African coast from the second half of the 19th century onwards, drawing mostly from various Arabic and Persian sources – and it has also been adapted into other African languages, like, for instance, Berber languages of the Maghreb.[3] In East Africa, many legendary Arabic narratives of early battles during the Prophet's lifetime were turned into breath-taking and suspense-driven epics and local history was turned into chronicles by Swahili authors in the 19th and 20th century, who committed poems and historical accounts both to memory but also to

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[2] See, for instance, Thomas Geider's "Alfu Lela Ulela: The Thousand and One Nights in Swahili-speaking East Africa" (2004) and Ernst Dammann's "Die Quellen der Suaheli-Dichtung" (1942: 253ff.). In "Poetic Links across the Ocean: On Poetic 'Translation' as Mimetic Practice at the Swahili Coast", Clarissa Vierke (2017) provides more reflections on Swahili poetry drawing on Arabic sources." In "Swahili Palimpsests: The Muslim Stories beneath Swahili Compositions", Annachiara Raia (2018) focuses on the venues through which the Arabic "Stories of the Prophets", the *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, arrive on the Swahili coast and how Swahili Muslim poets appropriate these stories and forge them into new narrative discourses.

[3] See Raia's dissertation "The Utendi wa Yusufu. A Critical Edition of the Utendi wa Yusuf and a Study of its Adaptation on the Swahili Coast".

paper: A manuscript culture started to flourish next to oral performance practices firstly on the Lamu archipelago at the northern end of the Swahili coast, before it spread to Zanzibar. In the 20th century, pamphlets and booklets printed mostly in Bombay and Cairo as well as increasingly on local printing presses – the Zanzibari Sultan established his own printing press in 1875 – did not destroy, but rather add to existing practices of handwriting and oral recitation extending the repertoire of narratives and poetry adding to the movement of ideas in the region.[4]

Also in other parts of Africa, manuscript cultures in African languages flourished particularly in the 18th and 19th century. At the Horn of Africa, Cushitic languages, like Harari, and in West Africa, far-reaching vernacular languages used particularly in far-reaching trade connections before, like Fulfulde, Hausa, Kanuri, Bambara, but also Wolof with long traditions of oral poetry, turned into languages of writing – and particular of Islamic poetry composition.[5] This development has its roots mostly in Islamic reform movements spearheaded by a number of Sufi brotherhoods, connected over long distances, which did not make their first entry in West or East Africa, but who, at that time, started to question existing forms of Islamic scholarship, which excluded large parts of the population, which did not understand Arabic. Arabic had been and continues to be a language of Islamic scholarship since the first millennium in West and East Africa, used by an elite of scholars, who were widely connected with the rest of the Muslim world. To make Islamic scholarship and beliefs more widely

[4] Literary connections across the Indian Ocean have changed, but continue up to now in various media: Bollywood movies, books of Arabic poems and prose texts continue to feed into the literary imagination of East Africa, often in coexistence with Western narratives, films and other – often oral – East African literary traditions.

[5] For an overview and an analysis of one poetic tradition found in both East and West Africa, see Clarissa Vierke’s article “When the Emperor Travelled the Continent. On the Cosmopolis of Islamic Literature and its Adaptation into African languages” (forthcoming).

accessible, they introduced new religious practices, but also promoted the adaptation of Arabic canonical texts into local poetic forms and local languages, which were easier to memorize and better fit the nomadic style of learning while walking. A wave of reform movements, which also occasionally led to bloody confrontations with established elites, swept West Africa and East Africa in the 19th century, and met and merged with a variety of local cultures and languages. Classical poetic texts, like the *Umm al-Qurā* or *Hamziyya*, praise poetry traditions of the Prophet, the *miʿrāj* on the Prophet's ascension to the heavens or the "The Stories of the Prophets", the *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ*, became adapted into a variety of languages and genres in Swahili and Chimiini in East Africa and Fulfude and Hausa in West Africa. Also writing in African languages increased at that time and Arabic script became adapted to write more and more, structurally very different, African languages: a number of poems and commentaries of the Qur'ān were copied again and again and treasured in libraries, like the famous ones in Timbuktu, or in scriptoria in northern Kenya, like Pate.

In the 20th century, the colonial education system introduced new books and plays without simply overriding literary genres and recitation practices in African languages and in Arabic script. First under German and later under British colonial authority in the protectorate of what is now Tanzania and parts of the crown colony Kenya, Schiller's "Wilhelm Tell" appeared in Swahili in abridged form in the newly established newspaper, while later Shakespeare's plays in English accounted for a huge part of the school curriculum in Kenya's high schools. The British literary canon of *Alice in Wonderland*, *David Copperfield* but also Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* became translated into Swahili – and also found an echo in early Swahili novels written in the 20th century.[6] Translation and the circulation of texts

[6] For an overview of all translated works into Swahili, see Serena Talento's dissertation "Framing texts/Framing social spaces: The Conceptualisation of Literary Translation and its Discourses in Three Centuries of Swahili Literature."

did not merely take one direction. In Tanzania, for instance, where the first state president, Julius Nyerere made Swahili the national language, symbol of the socialist, economically and culturally independent state, he translated Shakespeare's plays into Swahili in an effort for "reconsecration" (Talento, 2014: 45-64). To both prove the potency of Swahili and to show equivalence with any other literary language he promoted an idea of a quasi-cosmopolitan exchange of literatures, meant to invigorate each other with fresh narratives and different forms.

Like Arabic, English or Mandarin, also in the 20th and 21st century, Swahili has been a transregional language, surpassing the boundaries of the nation state, reminding us of the relativity of colonial boundaries. Swahili literature has been in wide, transregional circulation in East Africa, reaching audiences in the Francophone countries of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Ruanda, but also in Anglophone Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda as well as in the northern parts of Lusophone Mozambique. Looking at East Africa from a perspective of Swahili literature suggests a different view on literary connections compared to a view suggested by categories like Franco-, Anglo- or Lusophone East African literature. From the former perspective, East Africa presents itself as a huge transnational area, in which the language Swahili was first spread through caravan and maritime trade, connecting mainland Africa with places like the Comoros, Oman and Madagascar, and continues to be used as a transnational vernacular. From the point of view of the former colonial language and the present nation states, the Eastern part of Congo and Burundi, for instance, are Francophone, while Kenya and Uganda are Anglophone. However, it is the Swahili translation of Victor Hugo's *Le Roi s'amuse* by the Congolese scholar Marcel Kalunga Mwela-Ubi, which is accessible to a Kenyan readership rather than the French original, as much as the Swahili translation of *The Beautiful Ones are not Yet Born*, originally written by the Ghanaian author Ayi Kwei Armah and translated by the renowned Kenyan

poet Abdilatif Abdalla, which a Congolese reader could appreciate much better than the English original. In other words, the multilingual reality of many contexts in Africa can open up perspectives for parallel zones of literary circulation. So far, the circulation of African language literatures and their directions have more often than not been neglected.

Apart from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's marked position to write only in his mother tongue Gĩkũyũ as the only way to "decolonize the mind" (Thiong'o 1986), the choice of literary giants, like Wole Soyinka, Mongo Beti and Pepetela, to write in English, French or Portuguese respectively, has added to the concept that literatures in African languages are merely a precursor to modern literature – mostly the novel – in wide circulation. It is a dichotomy which has also been reproduced and enhanced in scholarship and by the disciplinary boundaries of national philologies. While African language literatures in African and the West has mostly been a niche and appendix to anthropology and linguistics, Anglophone but also Franco- and Lusophone literatures have been typically considered apart from each other echoing the Western national philologies. And in a truly ironic way, these boundaries are also upheld at African universities by the staff and the students themselves, who, however, more often than not navigate between two or three languages in their everyday life and also read across languages.

While in many contexts, the question about literary languages other than the excolonial ones are not addressed by scholars as well as readers and African languages have lost in visibility in comparison to the years after independence, literature from Africa, however, has received a growing attention in literary studies in recent decades. Not only the first generation of post-independence writers, like Nuruddin Farah or Sembene Ousmane, have been increasingly read, studied and discussed globally, but also more recently, the success of the "Afropolitan" diaspora authors, like Taiye Selasi, Teju Cole, Alain Mabanckou and Chimamanda Adichie, who proudly combine reference to African roots with their cosmopolitan sophistication,

reflect a shift in perception.[7] An increasingly global literary market hunting for "new" authors with mobile biographies reflecting an increasingly globalized world has added to it.

Decolonization and its conceptual echo of postcolonialism opened up a perspective on a larger world and its literary diversity as well as a complex (transnational) biographies of authors. Building on third-worldism and a rhetoric of liberation, which gained in momentum in the 1960s and 1970s, postcolonial approaches have enhanced a perspective on previously "muted" positions from the "periphery," (Barber, 1995: 3-7), as the contribution by Marlo Starr on literary magazines in Nigeria and Papua New Guinea in this issue shows. From its inceptions in Birmingham under Stuart Hall, postcolonial studies have added to a global perspective of literary networks, questioning the previously restricted canon and celebrating creative bricolage. It virtually discovered the literatures of the world, given that hardly any zone of the globe had remained untouched by colonialism. Opening up a perspective particularly on areas which had been considered the merely passive periphery, it has been primarily concerned with critiquing long-lasting power inequalities and unearthing subversive tendencies in literatures of mostly English (eventually French and Portuguese) expression. Other languages, like, for instance, Swahili, Hausa, but also Hindi, Malay, Tamil, Urdu and Arabic, whose literary productions not only of poetry, but also novels flourished in the 1960s and 1970s as part of creating new nations, remained largely out of focus – and largely continue to be ignored by literary studies outside of their specialist area studies. In a paradoxical way, though the main target of postcolonial criticism, the West as the center has been reproduced as point of reference,

[7] While the term was originally coined by Achille Mbembe to challenge readings of Africa as utterly backward in an increasingly transnationalisating world, it became popular through the essay, "Bye-Bye, Babar (Or: What is an Afropolitan?)" by the author Taiye Selasi, whose novel writing also celebrates a transnational life with an explicit African identity.

"block[ing] a properly historical, localized understanding of any scene of colonial and post-independence literary production in Africa" (Barber 1995: 3). It has reproduced a binary understanding of European-language writing, on the one hand, and literatures in other languages, foremost "non-classical languages", like African languages, but also Hindi, Urdu, Malay or Tamil, on the other.[8]

Though coming from a largely different background and mostly drawing on other frames of reference, the more recent discussions on world literature overlap with postcolonialism in their interest in the global connections of literature beyond the confines of the nation state and disciplinary boundaries of national philologies. At the beginning of these more recent debates around two decades ago marked by Casanova's *World Republic of Letters* (2004) and Moretti's application of world system theory in his *Distant Reading* (2013) as a models of literary diffusion on a global scale, the West, Europe and the US, presented the pivot and epicenter, where any significant literary innovation takes its beginning, as Moretti would highlight, and where literary quality, even if produced far away from the center, is measured and "consecrated", from Casanova's perspective. Criticism of the clear-cut center-periphery model with a unidirectional flow of literary influences and a normative tenet did not fail to arrive quickly. More recently, particularly scholars specialized in languages outside of the West considered peripheral in these models, have raised their voice. The critical response highlighting the historically and geographically limited perspective of these debates came, for instance, from scholars, like Alexander Beecroft considering premodern, classical literature, like Greek, Chinese as well as Arabic. Also scholars, whose "objects of research" are

[8] For a criticism of postcolonial scholarship and world literature sidelining African-language literatures, see Sara Marzagora's contribution "African-language literatures and the 'transnational turn' in Euro-American humanities" (2015).

often subsumed under "area studies", have made important contributions – including those in this special issue. The Indologist, Francesca Orsini has explored (2014) the "traces of a multilingual world" of Hindi, Urdu and Persian in an article with the same title. Karen Thornber analyzed the changing historical interfaces of Japanese, Chinese and Korean "texts in motion". On occasion of a conference held in Morocco in 2015 and titled "Ifrīqiyya ka'ufuq li-l-tafkīr" ('Africa as a horizon for thoughts'), the South African historian Shamil Jeppie made a plea for 'connected histories' (in Arabic, *tarīkh murtabiṭ*) which may transcend space and time, particularly of the nation state, and look at human beings as well as objects such as books, coins and weapons as "agents of connectiveness", in his article "A Timbuktu Bibliophile between the Mediterranean and the Sahel: Ahmad Bul'arāf and the Circulation of Books in the First Half of the Twentieth Century" (2015: 65-66).[9] In all of these exemplary studies, the West has not been the (only) literary and intellectual center and the novel and drama not the only literary forms; They have brought in a more multidirectional and polyfocal perspective of the circulation of literatures in a multitude of languages as well as multilingual literary practices.[10]

Scholars and authors of Indian roots or specialists of the literatures of India have been most prominent in emphasizing the "polyglot" repertoires of their society, like Amitav Ghosh in his lecture with the telling title "Speaking of Babel". Francesca Orsini, whom we already mentioned, has also played an important role in demanding for a more nuanced picture of literature traditions and contexts as well as their entanglements, considering

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[9] See also his speech on youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFnohK44RhA

[10] For an early advocacy for the inclusion of African and Asian literature into the study of world literature, see Etiemble's essay "Faut-il reviser la notion des 'Weltliteratur' (1964) and Riesz' article "Weltliteratur zwischen 'Erster' und 'Dritter' Welt. Die Verantwortung der Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft (Komparatistik) heute" (1983).

"multiple literary geographies" (Orsini 2015) rather than neatly defined territories. Focusing on Northern India, she does not exclude English from the picture, but rather shows that for the "multilingual local", it has not been the only literary language invested with power and far reach by literary institutions, but has rather coexisted and intermingled in various ways with Hindi, Urdu, Persian and Sanskrit, which all circulated in different but overlapping spheres (2015: 348). In this sense, she provides a counter-picture to what Mufti (2016: 3) in his programmatically critically book *Forget English!* has called the colonially entrenched idea of a "one-world". Mufti (*ibid.*) hints at the paradox of world literature, which both unifies all literature into a "universal library" reflecting the idea of a world without borders while at the same time, by doing so, it also rigorously stresses difference and a neatly defined identity, summing up works produced in different languages like, for instance, "German, English, Bangla, Spanish, Arabic and Turkish literature", suggesting that there are clear-cut boundaries of literary traditions and areas which they belong to. From our point of view, a way of overcoming his "paradoxical manner of conceiving of human diversity", as Mufti (2016: 3) puts it, is to focus not on inert categories or a canon, but rather on literary practices in context and the circulation of texts, which suggest a different and more flexible view of literature – and this is the topic of this special issue.

The contributions in this special issue, which focus on different parts of the world, all follow the circulation of texts across space and often also across time. The sinologist Lena Hennigsen reverses the perspective of "Orientalism" and studies the reception of literature in China. She considers reading practices during the Cultural Revolution in China, where, unexpectedly, a wide range of books from the Soviet Union but also Europe (foremost France) were read and copied secretly and also found their way into Chinese literary narratives. Marlo Starr opens up a perspective of literary transfer in the third world by way of "little magazines". She shows

that the magazine "Kovave" edited in Papua New Guinea creating a new idea of a common network of islands was heavily influenced by "Black Orpheus", the avantgarde magazine of the newly independent Nigeria in the 1960s and 1970s. The initiative to found both magazines came from Ulli Beier, an uprooted German Jew, who initially set out to teach English literature in Nigeria, but became completely fascinated by the thriving local cultural production and the search for new forms of expression. Also in the article by Jin Yun Chow, the fascination is the starting point for Judith Gautier to start her creative translation of classical Chinese poetry into French. Her *Le Livre de Jade* in turn travels widely and becomes a major inspiration for many artists across Europe. In her fascinating multi-sited account, Sahar Ishtiaque Ullah follows the circulation of a popular devotional poem, the *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah*, originally composed in 13th century Egypt, but later travelling to most parts of the Islamic world, being translated into various languages and practices of recitation. Godwin Siundu's contribution critically revisits boundaries of nation states and languages by focusing on the literary works of the acclaimed East African English writer Moyez Vassanji who is of South Asian descent. He draws our attention to the fact that it is the nation state suggesting an idea of confined limits of identities, languages and cultures, which needs to be questioned.

A number of interesting topics emerge from the topic of polyfocal circulation, which are also echoed in the contributions and which we will explore further in the following.

Literatures in Circulation and Areas of Circulation

This special issue brings together contributions by scholars, who have been working on circulating literatures, providing contextualized case

studies of travelling texts. Circulation does not take place from one well-defined center to its respective peripheries, but rather consists of various zones of diffusion or areas of circulation, which might also overlap. This does not mean to rule out the West and the nation states completely, but rather to consider them as one possible area of literary circulation and adaptation next to many others. As, for instance, the example of the *Qaṣīdat al-Burdah,* in this special issue reminds us of, the Islamic world has had its own widely circulating corpus of primarily poetic texts, which became widely distributed also outside the Arabic-speaking Middle East. As we know from our own work on Eastern Africa, where the poem has also been adapted into Swahili, Sufi devotional poetry has been widely circulated accounting for a "literary network" of Islamic texts in translation, as Ronit Ricci (2011: 2) calls it in her study of South Asian textual practices of translation, which echo far-reaching religious bonds. In the whole Islamic world, which is far from having one scholarly center or doctrine, the *lingua sacra* Arabic has been a binding force and language of religious learning and scholarly exchange – the renowned libraries in private homes and mosques from Central Asia to West Africa speak of it. As described before by turning to our own research, Arabic, the Qur'ān, canonical scholarly texts, but also recitation practices and a body of devotional poetry, have linked an elite of well-trained scholars, who participated in what the Sanskritist Sheldon Pollock called a "literary cosmopolis", i.e. a vast, transcultural, translingual and transpolitical space within which a single literary language – in this case Arabic – predominated. Like Sanskrit, found in stone inscriptions in a region stretching from Afghanistan to Java, also Arabic has co-existed with other languages and has been used in the restricted field of mostly written scholarly exchange – very much like Latin in Medieval Europe – but was also used to mark one's Muslim identity.

Accordingly, a topic emerging from the special issue is the flexible relationship between literature and space. What is the relationship between

literature and the world it circulates in and imagines? As Dieter Lamping (2017: 115ff.) has pointed out with respect to the international reception of Kafka, whose reading has continuously been inspiring new literature all over the world, it is the reading which through intertextual links initiates a continuously growing network of texts transcending boundaries of language and nation state. Consequently, Lamping (2018: 136) concludes in his article "Was ist Weltliteratur": "Die Reichweite dieses Begriffes von Weltliteratur ist groß, historisch und geographisch." ('The range of this notion of world literature is big, historical and geographical').

However, as also the contributions in these special issue show, travelling beyond nation states does not mean that there is just one world without boundaries, in which all texts are equally recognized all the time. It is the definition of the "world", which is a constant question; it is flexible, permanently in change and views on the world can also differ in one and the same place. Godwin Siundu focuses on South Asian writers, who do not belong to one world and one language but to many which also inspire their literary imagination. As he shows, Moyez Vassanji's way of belonging to various worlds increasingly brought him into a troublesome relationship with the African nation states founded after independence. In these contexts, essentializing concepts of the nation built on ideas of autochthony as well as Pan-Africanism excluded and alienated South Asian communities. To give another example, as Marlo Starr shows in her contribution, little magazines offered a new medium to connect locales as far away as Papua New Guinea and Nigeria at a time, when not only Pan-Africanism transcended the newly independent nation states and postcolonialism paved the way for the recognition of a larger Anglophone literary world, but also the "third world" explored new ways of what Beecroft (2015: 105) calls "aesthetic self-representation". Drawing on Pollock's works, Beecroft (2015: 148ff.) engages in a large comparative project to map the changing "ecologies" of various literatures in world history, which can range from a broad area of

intellectual exchange, that typically foremost an intellectual elite would engage in to projects that would give up “a view on the wider world for its more immediate surroundings”, as the emergence of vernacular literatures in medieval Europe, but also Asia shows. As Sahar Ishtiaque Ullah shows in her contribution, the devotional poem, the *burdah*, has been variously used to either symbolize an Egyptian national identity, or to stress the belonging to a wider Muslim cosmopolis by a diasporic community of various origins in Cape Town or a prayer community in Indonesia. Thus, as Venkat Mani (2017: 244) emphasizes, world literature is not only a “conscious disarrangement of national literatures”, but the configuration of world literature also reacts to and imagines new political realties (2017: 249; 33; 246).

While it does not come as a surprise that world literature has become such a huge topic in this post-Western world of changing power balances in an era of expanding capitalism, as, for instance, Mufti would underline in his book *Forget English!*, another important “world” of literary production and circulation before the end of the cold war was the socialist sphere, as Lena Henningsen’s contribution reminds us of. In the binary world order of the Cold War, the CIA did not only secretly sponsor the Mbari group of artists in Nigeria to prevent the intelligentsia to side with the enemy (see Starr’s article), but the Chinese Communist party destroyed and put a ban on Western literature, while promoting, for instance, Russian heroic novels, which would never reach the West. Importantly, however, Lena Henningsen’s contribution also urges us not to hastily confound political systems and literature, considering the latter merely as a symbolical token and reflex of the other. She draws our attention to carefully differentiate between politically promoted canons and actual reading practices, which are not merely preconditioned by world orders or political systems, even if any aberration can lead to severe punishment. From a different perspective, Beecroft stresses the fact that practices of using a cosmopolitan language

for literary practice, once ritualized can continue over centuries, while the actual political situation which gave rise to it has long disappeared: For instance, the fact that kings in what is now Afghanistan build of Greek-style theatres hint back to the time of the conquest by Alexander the Great (Beecroft, 2015: 106). Similarly, the French 19th century novels strongly at odds with the context of the Cultural Revolution, which figure so prominently among the secretly read literature, speaks of a previous phase of modernisation in China in the early 20th century, when also the modern Chinese novel was born. Thus, it is not only space and the reach size and membership of a community which is constantly defined and redefined in literature, but it also opens up a possibility for an incongruence in time: the political present must not condition the present and presence of literary works.

“An Empire of Books”? The Media of Circulation

Another important aspect is the question of form and media. Literature travelling transnationally does not only travel as abstract ideas, but in very concrete and material form. Far-reaching networks are fostered through the exchange and consumption of texts, which allow for a temporal and geographic distance between author and reader in different ways, as it seems, than orality, where the immediacy of performance, the *hic et nunc*, is key and memory subsidiary. So far, debates on world literature have often largely focused on the novel, whose distribution depends on the printing press, which also makes private reading and quick circulation possible, while also marking new territory. Marlo Starr emphasizes the often neglected importance of “little magazines”, like *Black Orpheus*, which had as their agenda to ensure a broad circulation of African poetry across language barriers. Also Lena Henningsen in her contribution reminds us of the material conditions of circulating texts. As she shows, however, print is

not a precondition for circulation: narratives can also travel as handwritten copy or through memorisation. Often, as our research on manuscript cultures in Africa underlines, print does not merely supplant handwritten copies and oral performances, but rather complements them – which speaks both of the robust nature of media as well as their versatility. As Chih, Mayeur-Jaouen and Seesemann (2015: 18-22) highlight in their volume on literary production in the Sufi world in the 19th century, it is the railway, the postal service, the printing press and increasingly the radio, which did not mark the doom of the recitation of oral devotional Sufi poetry in various regions of the Islamic world, but, rather on the contrary, fostered its oral renderings and translation into local languages and forged a new understanding of a Pan-Islamic community in the early 20th century.

In written or print form, circulating books or pamphlets also take *nolens volens* the form of a delineable and definable corpus of works, which reminds us of the canon of books, a notion of world literature which has been recurrently criticised. Stressing the interrelationship between the availability of books, on the one hand, and the notion of world literature, on the other, B. Venkat Mani (2017: 67) speaks of an "empire of books", in which "bibliomigrancy", i.e. the "physical and virtual migration of books", provides the material basis for the development of the notion of world literature in Europe around 1800 (2017: 33). Also the colonial "library" of works from the parts of the empire often took the form of a physical library and archive. Mufti (2016: 2-4) highlights the importance of the library not only as a metaphor of gate-keeping and power imbalances, for instance evoked in novels by Orhan Pamuk and Tayeb Salih, but also emphasizes the concrete colonial libraries and archives, which took possession of exquisite Urdu, Persian and Sanskrit literature. This, however, also does not mean that the library and the canon are stable. Many libraries fall into disuse or are demolished, as, for instance, in China during the "Cultural Revolution" (see Henningsen's contribution) and media also keep on changing. As the

article by Sahar Ishtiaque Ullah shows, social media and platforms, like *youtube*, with an overall broad (but not equal) accessibility and hardly no publication costs comparable to can be considered new and quickly changing archives of literary practices, where particularly oral practices can travel widely. They foster a newly emerging Muslim public sphere which, as Dale F. Eickelman and Jon W. Anderson (2003: 1) put it, “exists at the intersections of religious, political and social life”.

Two Sides of the Coin: The Universal and the Particular / Circulation and Adaptation

Considering widely circulating texts brings in two complementary complexes of questions which address the universality of a widely circulating text, on the one hand, and its specific, distinct characteristics in its specific context(s) and thus also its alterity, on the other: Firstly, what makes texts travel so widely “beyond its culture of origin”? Or, put differently, are there characteristics which make a text more easily leave its context and more prone to travel speaking to broader audiences? Secondly, how do texts take specific form in relation to the new language, its genres, sounds and imagery, but also in relation to the specific needs and ideas in the context where they arrive?

With regard to the first question, why some texts move beyond their culture of origin, one could reiterate the argument of media facilitating travelling, flexible literary “ecologies” in relation to changing ideas of community. Religion, for instance, like Islam, has created a binding force beyond nation states, as Sahar Ishtiaque Ullah’s example of poetry recitation in Indonesia and South Africa shows. Additionally, echoing Dieter Lamping’s reading of Goethe (2018: 133), one can wonder about the

quality of the literary works as such, where some seem to address fundamental human concerns better than others and thus have the capacity to become a template (*Muster*) also for later generations and for others outside their place of origin. Here we are back to the normative and much discredited concept of the canon of world literature based lastly on "aesthetic judgement about the relative or absolute importance" of a work (Lamping, 2018: 133). It is a truism to highlight that there is no unanimity about such a canon: it differs not only from one place to the other and from one generation to the other, but is even object of constant debates among contemporaries in one place. However, the idea as such of a list of texts most relevant to read recurs in the contributions: While, for instance, the *burdah* is one of the most widely circulated Sufi text suggesting a body of practices as well as texts that are essentially part of Sufism (see Sahar Ishtiaque Ullah), Mao Tse Tung makes a deliberate effort to destroy a library of mostly novels, which a previous generation has made such an effort to carefully translate also to inject new blood into Chinese literature (see Henningsen's contribution). Ulli Beier made an effort to start a Pan-African library of poetry, which would soon turn into a project of creating a new canon for the Third World (see Marlo's contribution).

Considering the second question, adaptation is a decisive aspect to consider. David Damrosch (2003: 27) acknowledges it as necessarily complementing a view on circulation, since "even a global perspective is a perspective from somewhere, and global patterns of the circulation of world literature take shape in their local manifestations." In her study of Judith Gautier's creative renderings of Chinese poetry from the Tang dynasty, Jin Yun Chow stresses, on the one hand, the liberty taken by the poetess towards the Chinese poem. As Jin Yun Chow argues, in recreating the poem, Gautier turned to existing genres of her wider literary repertoire, namely the so-called *alba*-genre of medieval troubadour lyrics from Southern France, composed in Occitan. Her choice demands some reflection. Writing in the

late 19th century at the dawn of modernism, a contemporary of Baudelaire and Mallarmé, she re-explored medieval poetry to make the poem from the Tang dynasty resound in French. As Jin Yun Chow points out, it might have been the similarity in topic of lovers departing after a love night as well as the short and scenic diction which have set the ground for exploring it as analogical form. In sending her knowledgeable readers to the *alba* genre, she adds an orientation to the poem and brings in undertones and associations, like the secrecy of the love night, which is part of the genre. And still, the poem does not just sound like an *alba* poem – the European readers have praised the Chinese tone in the poem. There is a different quality in it, which speaks of the enriching role of the foreign text, for which the translator both falls back on existing means of expression, but, at the same time, finds his or her repertoire enriched and expanded. In his essay “The Task of the Translator” Benjamin (1992) highlights the necessary inner form of the foreign text, its tone, ironies and associations and particularly its form, which needs to be recreated in a language differently from the original one, but also different from 19th century French poetry – this is the main challenge for the translator. Translation is essentially tied to exploring literary form. Given that it is poetry, the aim can never be accuracy, but rather the recreation of the poem within a new language, which the translator struggles for in interrogating the means at hand.

On the one hand, the Western adaptations of Eastern artworks, including Gautier’s translations, have been utterly criticized as a violent exercise since the pioneering work by Edward Said on “Orientalism”. The problem lies in the inequality of power and the one-sided construction of alterity defined by the West. In his book *Forget English! Orientalisms and World Literatures*, Mufti warns us not to forget the ongoing inequality of economic, cultural and epistemological power involved in the Orientalist projects of writing “Oriental” literature into a canon of World Literature. Brushing both over

the contextual and linguistic specifics of literature from outside of the West as part of the "one-world thinking" (Mufti, 2016: 5), while at the same time presenting it essentially as 'the other', the study of Oriental literature as part of world literature does not take place in a world of equal exchange. It is the hegemony of English as "global literary vernacular" (Mufti, 2016: 17), enhanced by structures of global capitalism, which readily engulfs all literatures, imposing its views, judgements of quality and scholarship particularly on Oriental texts, streamlining and flattening literature into a digestible format in translation. And in this sense, it is an ongoing project of colonization.

Mufti is certainly right in criticizing the increasing ignorance of and towards languages other than English, particularly in World literature programs. Emily Apter (2013: 17) speaks of the emerging "translationally translatable monoculture", which particularly haunts the academy. On the other hand, to treat all translation of and philological work on "Oriental texts" as carrying "a hint of criminality", as Pollock (2009: 946) puts in his article "Future Philology?", firstly, has already had a devastating effect on Oriental philology, but also, secondly, presents such a poor and distorted picture of intellectual and literary exchange. To consider all deep engagement with other languages and their textual worlds only as a continued exercise of colonialism is sad. What about the poetry by Ezra Pound or Goethe, which drew so much on other literary traditions? Jin Yun Chow shows the magic of the poetry by Gautier, who learnt Chinese. Denying the West its fascination with texts from outside its territory would again make us fall into dichotomies of essential cultural difference, whereas literature as such is much more prone to travel widely, more often than not disrespecting boundaries of politics and language. Lena Henningsen reminds us that literature travels even under conditions of censorship and that also "the East" has not only been a supplier of texts, but has been re-exploring even "bourgeois" French 19th century novels in a time of

socialism, which provided the readers with new patterns of imagining life.

As also the example of the *burdah* invites us to consider the world as more polyfocal. It has more areas of textual circulation, where the West might not even figure or at least might not play a prominent role. In many parts of the world, where the nation state is a more recent troublesome invention, multilingual realities and reading practices are the norm rather than the exception. Thus, for instance, one can imagine thinking of the Muslims gathered in Capetown and reciting the *burdah* in a living room, that English, Afrikaans (popular with the so-called Cape Malays), Arabic, and other African or Asian languages are part of their everyday life. For them, reading across languages and texts from other parts of the world is part of their reality. In this sense, one could also say that adaptation of texts is an everyday practice. Rather, adaptation in this context might not even be the right concept, since people can also unconsciously switch between different languages without translating them, since they do not privilege one language over the other – a perspective, which also prevails in many of Moyez Vassanji's English novels, which transgress cultural and linguistic references (see the contribution by Godwin Siundu). Languages and literatures occupy different niches in the life of multilingual readers and authors. In Sahar Ishtiaque Ullah's case study, for instance, Arabic as the sacred language and poetic language of the poem is not translated into any other language. Travelling does not necessarily involve practices of translation but include more subtle forms of referencing and reperformances. Listening in and plunging into a text, particularly poetry or holy texts, can also imply to recite the original in an effort to make it resound in one's own locale while evoking the "elsewhere" of the text's origin and its sacredness.

For many parts of the world and human history, the coexistence of languages and the flexible move from one to the other as well as a variety of practices of verbal art, ranging from epic recitation to ritual song which many would not have even subsumed under literature, has been the rule

rather than the exception. From this point of view, the argument of some scholars for a new transnational world literature seems at odds, since the world has been transnational most of the time. For instance, Elke Sturm-Trigonakis (2007: 44) has sought to make an argument for a recently evolving "New World Literature" in the context of increasing globalization and the transnational biographies and multilingual competences of authors, like Salman Rushdie, Gloria Anzaldúas or Hanif Kureishi, who have also become bestselling "global" authors. For many parts of the world, the boundary of a nation state which is at the same time a linguistic boundary is a recent and more often than not difficult or illusive concept – as also the works by Moyez Vassanji show (see the contribution by Godwin Siundu). Mufti, for instance, highlights the diversity on the Indian subcontinent, by imaging a European visit to a scene "fifty or one hundred years" earlier: He evokes "many distinct cultures of poetic expression even in the same town or city, based in a variety of languages and dialects with no clear connections to ideas about the language of a people, let alone a nation. Some of these bodies of writing may have been alien or opaque and even possibly unknown to each other even in the same locale. In other cases, the same individual may have written in more than one language or dialect according to the very different aesthetic standards that were extant in each of them" (Mufti, 2016: x).

This is the beauty of a perspective of world literature, which highlights diversity and the multiple circulation of texts.

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