Part II: **Scale**

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Significant Geographies: Scale, Location, and Agency in World Literature

1 Significant Geographies, Space, and Location

> World literature invariably invokes the question of totality. Ben Etherington

World literary studies, Ben Etherington (2018, 56) notes, have turned decisively away from the critical humanism of Eric Auerbach or Edward Said, who took the literary work as the point of entry and of departure (*Ansatzpunkt*) for explorations into world literature. Instead, they have embraced social science models which posit the empirical existence of world literature – whether as a capitalist world system (WREC 2015) or as a world literary field (Casanova 2004 [1999]) – with a universally recognized currency of value.[1] In the process, the world of the global capitalist system simply becomes the world of world literature, with global consecration measured in the number of translations or major literary prizes.[2] The world itself is posited as an empirical reality rather than as something that looks very different depending on one's location and perspective. "World literature invariably invokes the question of totality," Etherington writes, and it raises expectations of plenitude, connectivity, broad recognition, and wide reach (2018, 62). Yet the postulate at the basis of the South-South comparative literature project that I have just concluded, called "Multilingual Locals and Significant Geographies" (MULOSIGE), has been that neither the world nor world literature can in fact ever be a totality but are always, inevitably, partial. There is no single world or world literature, we have argued, but many criss-crossing significant geographies, i.e. geographies, stories, and references that recur and that matter to texts and people (as in "significant others") in specific locations, whether these locations be concrete places or intellectual, ideological, and aesthetic orientations (Orsini and Zecchini 2019). Even when we call these significant geographies "world," they always include and exclude: they make visible some connections and some parts, texts or traditions of the world while actively invisibilizing others (Laachir, Marzagora and Orsini 2018b).

Consciously anti-systemic, our project aimed for neither completeness nor closure. Rather, our attempt was to open new ways, archives, and methods of "doing

1 For a "literary standard that is universally recognized," see Casanova (2004, 17).
2 Etherington (2018, 57). See James (2005) and Sapiro (2009).

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world literature" from our located and multilingual perspectives.[3] In the process, several keywords have emerged, many to do with space and location, like significant geographies and multilingual locals. Taking the cue from geographer Doreen Massey (2005) and historian Sebastian Conrad (2016), we consider space a dynamic and pluralising concept. For Massey (2005, 5) space is, at whatever scale, "the product of interrelations": it is "constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny". It is "the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; [. . .] the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist". "If space is genuinely the sphere of multiplicity, if it is a realm of multiple trajectories," she continues, "then there will be multiplicities too of imaginations, theorisations, understandings, meanings. Any 'simultaneity' of stories-so-far will be a distinct simultaneity from a particular vantage point". Massey's plural understanding of space (as stories and trajectories) and her insistence on particular vantage points (locations) lie at the basis of our understanding of world literature. They underwrite our understanding of multilingual locals as local but heterogeneous literary spaces whose actors often move in different circles that may or may not overlap (Laachir, Marzagora, and Orsini 2018a). And they underwrite our notion of significant geographies, which immediately raises the question – significant *for whom*? Significant geographies urges us to consider which geographies, circuits, and references recur and/or matter for specific authors, texts, groups, or traditions. As a result, questions of location and agency interest us more than the questions of hierarchy, connectivity, and consecration foregrounded in systemic approaches.[4] Significant geographies (always in the plural) implies that geographies and circuits will always be many, that the larger ones will not necessarily be the most important or meaningful, and that there will be some geographies and circuits that are not, or no longer, significant.[5] "Recur" acknowledges the persistence of specific positions and imaginaries, while "and/or matter" stresses the imaginary possibilities of reinvention and reorientation that literary texts offer. Finally, if recent world literary and global history studies have tended to focus on dynamics of integration, the plurality of locations

3 The project aimed at rethinking world literature "from the ground up" and from the located and multilingual perspectives of northern India, the Maghrib, and the Horn of Africa. This immediately invalidated the premise of Eurocentric comparative literature that equates language with nation, thereby conceiving of comparative literature as traffic between languages and literatures through border-crossing translations; see http://mulosige.soas.ac.uk.

4 For the question of individual agency in the visibilisation, circulation and translation of literary texts across borders, see Roig-Sanz and Meylaerts (2018).

5 This chimes with Beecroft's observation that the nodes of transnational *literary* circulation are often not the largest global publishers but small publishers who specialise in translations.

and significant geographies draws attention to lines of connection but also of disconnection, and to processes of invisibilisation as well as visibilisation. The result, we think, is a more "modest, honest, and accurate" account of world literature, which an "increasingly integrated world demands" (Lewis and Wigen 1997, 10).

This essay asks how the concept of significant geographies may help us revisit the question of scale within world literature "from the ground up". How do texts, authors, and literary institutions imagine and make the world visible in ways that are always partial and located? What do they include and connect, but also exclude and invisibilize? How do texts shift scale so as to represent their significant geographies and connect multiple scales of place and time? In order to answer such questions, the essay itself shifts scales while thinking through examples drawn from our research project. It starts with a novel that reflects on the imaginative and cognitive process through which geographies become significant and one finds one's place in the world. It next moves to narrative scale to reflect on how narratives shift scale and connect specific significant geographies, for instance by interlacing several simultaneous stories in one larger narrative through plot (*entrelacement*).[6] It then considers scale in relation to an author's location, understood as intellectual orientation, and shows how shifts in their political position also shift their orientation to the world, thereby making different geographies significant. Finally, the essay considers two examples of literary magazines that show how their remarkable literary activism produce new and expansive visions of world literature that nonetheless foreground location and some significant geographies. As such, these magazines produce their own visions of the world and of world literature rather than simply plugging into an already existing global network.

2 Scale in World Literature

Scale was first raised in relation to world literature as an epistemic problem – "The question is not really *what* we should do, the question is *how*," Franco Moretti (2000, 54–55) suggested, before offering two simple "laws" that together explained the evolution of world literature (Moretti 2006). "*How* can we know something so big?," echoes Etherington (2018, 52). The first serious reflection on scale was by Nirvana Tanoukhi (2010), who urged literary scholars and comparatists to ponder

6 Beecroft (2015, 286) uses *entrelacement* to describe contemporary novels that employ the "plot of globalisation". These, he notes, are not necessarily bland or devoid of a thick sense of and commitment to local spaces; rather, they tell "global stories, each with a localised focus but larger implications".

on the different meanings geographers attribute to the term: cartographic scale refers to the level of a map's abstraction; methodological scale is determined by the research problem and available data; and geographic scale refers to the dimension of a particular physical or human landscape. Moretti's *Atlas of the European Novel* (1997), for example, matches narrative and cartographic scale to locate, but also to gauge the horizons of nineteenth-century realist novels; his *Graphs, Maps, Trees* (2005) reflects on scale in terms of analysis and critical method. When thinking about distances and large scales, Tanoukhi (2010, 85) adds, comparative literature must "develop both a critique of *scale* [. . .] and, eventually, a phenomenology of scale which would help us grasp the actually existing landscapes of literature". This phenomenological and critical project was brilliantly undertaken by Alexander Beecroft in *Ecologies of World Literature* (2015). His treatment of the largest, global scale combines an empirical discussion of the finite and shrinking number of world literary languages (in the light of "minimum viable" population theory, 243) and of the asymmetry between numbers of speakers and translation flows within the "emergent global literary ecology," with some points about global scale within texts, or what he calls "the plot of globalisation".[7] Finally, Harsha Ram (2016) has intervened on the question of scale in world literature by suggesting that a single scale is insufficient to account for local manifestations of global phenomena. For example, the earlier emergence of Georgian poetic modernism in Tbilisi compared to Russian modernism in Moscow and St. Petersburg/Leningrad can only be explained, he argues, by combining a global scale, which focuses on transnational circulation and on vertical flows between local epiphenomena and global phenomena, and a local scale, which frames Georgian modernism horizontally in the context of other regional linguistic and cultural traditions within the Caucasus.

On the whole, though, the question of scale in relation to world literature has largely been considered in terms of transnational circulation and consecration (Sievers and Levitt 2020). This is understandable, but it does reduce the scope of world literature to those few authors and works that manage to obtain such consecration (while at the same time excluding the most widely circulated texts from the purview of literature). In the field of history, for example, are there appropriate units, sites, locations for global history, is the global a "distinct sphere"?, Sebastian Conrad asks (2006, 133). No, is his definite answer, which

7 In keeping with the speculative-predictive tone of this chapter (rather than descriptive, since the object is an elusive one), Beecroft (2015, 279) ends by suggesting two possible landscapes: one dominated by some kind of homogenization (as predicted by Erich Auerbach and more recently lamented by Tim Parks and Vittorio Coletti), or a landscape of "greater connection without greater homogenization". For world novels that resist the violence of globalisation, see Ganguly (2016).

will come as a surprise to world literature scholars: "no unit is by definition better suited to study global processes than another," and "different units direct our attention to different processes" (133). "The global is not a distinct sphere, exterior to the national/local cases: it is rather a scale that can be referenced even when we look at individual lives and small spaces" (140).[8] Even microhistories can be global history, since "micro-perspectives are able to reveal the heterogeneity of the past and the stubbornness of historical actors" (131).[9] In fact, Conrad continues, the most innovative studies have *not* been total histories but have sought to locate their objects of study in historical spaces alternative to the nation. Some have constructed large transnational regions like oceans (Armitage, Bashford, and Sivasundaram (2017); this is also true of literary studies to an extent, see e.g. Hofmeyr 2007; Ganguly 2021). Other studies have used the paradigm of "following," typically a commodity or a question, to connect people, ideas, and processes and link often distant and disparate locations in the process. As Conrad notes, such studies "are able to capture the regularities of large transborder processes, while remaining attentive to the local levels" (2006, 123).[10] The collective volumes on global modernism, or those that map poetic genres like the ghazal and the qasida that cross many languages over a very long period of time, come closest to this paradigm.[11] For Conrad, in fact, "the most fascinating questions are often those at the intersection between global processes and their local manifestations" (129), though in fact the scales can be multiplied.[12] And since "the forces that make each space cannot be found entirely within the unit itself," and "different scales of inquiry are mutually constitutive" (137) in the historical process, he advocates that one shifts scales, as Harsha Ram shows in the context of Georgian and Russian modernisms.[13] In this essay I shift the scale not in order

8 Conrad's book includes a chapter on "Global History for Whom?," which points out that while global history is particularly popular in the US, NW Europe, East Asia, historians outside the Anglosphere actively avoid using "global" (218) and are quite suspicious of its totalizing ambitions. He also notes, usefully for us, that global literature "has to move beyond the fetishization of mobility" (225).

9 On microhistory, see also Ginzburg (1993).

10 This is what our book on local print cultures in the Cold War context also shows: Orsini, Srivastava, and Zecchini (2022).

11 Eatough (2010). The qasida is a poetic panegyric, the ghazal is a poem comprised of couplets all ending in a shared refrain, with the exception of the first (Sperl and Shackle 1996; Bauer, Neuwirth et al. 2006). Ram (2021) "follows" the genre of the physiology in Paris, St. Petersburg and Tiflis.

12 Thornber (2009) "scale ups" literary history on a regional level in her study of the East Asian literary nebula.

13 The point was already made by Revel (1996).

to shed light on a single historical process or literary work or phenomenon, but as different scales of analysis. Together, they show how location as orientation and space as the "multiplicity of stories and trajectories" produce multiple and (to a point) disjointed significant geographies rather than a single, "combined and unequal," world literature. But first, how do places become significant?

3 How do Places Become Significant?

For the narrator and protagonist of Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* (1989), who grows up in middle class, postcolonial Calcutta obsessed with the Tresawsen-Price family in far-away London, family friends for three generations, and who is ostensibly provincial compared to his well-travelled and well-read cosmopolitan cousins, places acquire reality and meaning only after they are narrated by others and imagined by him, often several times, even before they are experienced directly:[14]

> Tridib [his elder cousin] had given me worlds to travel in and had given me eyes to see them; [Ila, another cousin], who had been travelling around the world since she was a child, could never understand what those hours in Tridib's room had meant for me, a boy who had never been more than a few hundred miles from Calcutta. I used to listen to her talking [. . .] about the cafés in the Plaza Mayor in Madrid, or the crispness of the air in Cuzco, and I could see that those names, which were to me a set of magical talismans because Tridib had pointed them out to me on his tattered old Bartholomew's Atlas, had for her a familiarity no less dull than the lake had for me and my friends. (Ghosh 1989, 26)

Familiarity dulls the mind, while curious ignorance excites it and transforms distant toponyms into "magical talismans". Whether Tridib is or isn't a reliable narrator, as a passage just before this quote suggests, is in fact of no consequence. What matters is that he can conjure places and the histories and stories that are connected to them, making them alive and meaningful to the listener. At a more general level, this and Ghosh's subsequent novels make the case that *any* process of learning and discovery – of the world, and of the self in the world – requires an investment of the imagination beyond the familiar; it involves reckoning with one's position and realising that distance and closeness are relative and subjective. It also means remembering forgotten histories, actively looking for resonances and connections, and – particularly in his climate novels – (re)orienting one's entire life.[15] As such, *The Shadow Lines* lays out what we may

14 This section draws on Orsini (2021).

15 Amitav Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *Gun Island* (2019).

call Ghosh's poetics of space, and provides a wonderful example of how geographies become significant.

Space, time, and self in the novel are always mirrored, reflected or refracted through others. To the other characters, and to Ila in particular, the narrator's ability to recognize places in London he has heard about only through Tridib's stories though he has never been there appears pathetic and reflects the typical tendency of a provincial subject to live life vicariously. In other words, it is a product of his location. (By contrast, cosmopolitan Ila, who "had been travelling around the world since she was a child" (Ghosh 1989, 26) lives intensely in the present). We can read his stance as a subjective characteristic or as a narrative strategy. But we can also view it as an epistemological argument about the process by which any space, event, or person becomes significant, and hence real and close, through stories and emotional investment:

> I could not persuade her that *a place does not merely exist, that it has to be invented in one's imagination*; that her practical, bustling London was no less invented than mine, neither more or less true, only very far apart. (Ghosh 1989, 27, emphasis added)

Yet while the imagination invents places and makes them real, it is nurtured – in this novel and one could say in Ghosh's whole *oeuvre* – by prolonged research and attentive observation. "The sights Tridib saw in his imagination," the narrator recalls, "were infinitely more detailed, more precise than anything I would ever see" (35). In this sense, imagining is not phantasising but rather, literally, archaeology, an excavation of historical layers to recover buried knowledge, as Foucault would put it.[16]

Resonance is the other element at work in the equation. Events and places become significant and impose themselves upon the imagination not directly or through a single encounter, but rather refracted through other events – "looking glass events" (Ghosh 1989, 225). This is as true for public as for private events. The riot that kills Tridib in 1964 in Dhaka (when it is still part of East Pakistan) gets finally narrated, years later and at the end of the novel, first through a dream by Tridib's younger brother Robi and then by May Price (Ghosh 1989, 244, 250). It resonates powerfully with the narrator's own childhood memory of another riot in Calcutta at the same time, though it takes him fifteen years to realise that the two events were in fact not just coeval but connected, linked to the unrest following the theft of the sacred relic of Prophet Muhammad's hair from a

16 "I tried telling Ila and Robi about the archaeological Tridib, the Tridib who was much more contemptuous of fairylands than she would ever be; the Tridib who pushed me to imagine the roofs of Colombo for myself, the Tridib who said that *we could not see without inventing what we saw, so at least we could try and do it properly*" (Ghosh 1989, 37, emphasis added).

shrine in Kashmir. In what is for him a startling insight, he discovers that the terrible Dhaka riot which wrecked his entire family barely registered with his friends in Delhi:

> Suddenly, for no reason that I can remember, I said: What about the riots [. . .]?
>
> Which riots? said Malik. There are so many.
>
> Those riots, I said. I had to count the years out on my fingers. The riots of 1964, I said.
>
> Their faces went slowly blank, and they turned to look at each other.
>
> What were the riots of 1964? Malik said with a puzzled frown. I could tell that he really had no idea what I was talking about.
>
> I turned to the others and cried: Don't you remember?
>
> They looked away in embarrassment, shaking their heads. It struck me then that they were all Delhi people; that I was the only person there who had grown up in Calcutta.
>
> Surely you remember, I said. There were terrible riots in Calcutta in 1964.
>
> I see, said Malik. What happened?
>
> I opened my mouth to answer and found I had nothing to say. All I could have told them about was of the sound of voices running past the walls of my school, and of a glimpse of a mob in Park Circus. The silent terror that surrounded my memory of those events, and my belief in their importance, seemed laughably out of proportion to those trivial recollections.
>
> There was a riot, I said helplessly.
>
> There are riots all the time, Malik said.
>
> This was a terrible riot, I said.
>
> All riots are terrible, Malik said. *But it must have been a local thing. Terrible or not, it's hardly comparable to a war.* (Ghosh 1989, 221–222, emphasis added)

This exchange prompts a meditation on the different scales of history: History with a capital "H," the history of wars and political events that everyone remembers, against local events that are remembered only by the individuals involved. All the friends remember the border war with China in 1962, whereas riots in Kashmir, Calcutta, Khulna, and Dhaka in East Pakistan are local events not "comparable to a war" even when they reverberate across national borders. "Khulna [in East Pakistan] is not quite one hundred miles from Calcutta as the crow flies: the two cities face each other at a watchful equidistance across the border" (Ghosh 1989, 242), and yet in the old Calcutta paper that the narrator consults in the archive "there was not the slightest reference to it to any trouble in East Pakistan, and the barest mention to events in Kashmir. It was, after all, a Calcutta paper, run by people who believed in the power of distance no less than I did" (228). Even in the case of public events, he discovers, emotional and imaginative investment are necessary for them to register and become significant. The shock of the missing hair of the Prophet in Srinagar reverberated immediately among Muslims in Karachi and Dhaka, and its recovery prompted riots in Khulna,

Dhaka and Calcutta irrespective of the real distance and of borders ("a land outside space, an expanse without distances; a land of looking-glass events," Ghosh 1989, 225). Ideological and affective investments acknowledge the reality of national borders, but also transgress them; and imaginative investment in significant geographies works not just for individuals but also for groups or communities, who experience places as relatively close when they are significant to them, however geographically distant they may be.

This realisation prompts the narrator to undertake an experiment with a compass that pits objective, cartographic distance against an orientation to the world honed by *habitus*. That Muslims in Khulna should react to an event in Srinagar does not strike him as strange since "the space between the points of my compass was 1200 miles, nearly 2000 kilometres. It didn't seem like much". But it is the same distance "as Tokyo is from Beijing, or Moscow from Venice, or Washington from Havana, or Cairo from Naples" (Ghosh 1989, 232) – cities that in his mind are not only very far but belong to completely different worlds. He then draws a circle "with Khulna at the centre and Srinagar on the circumference. I discovered immediately that the map of South Asia would not be big enough. I had to turn back to a map of Asia before I found one large enough for my circle". "It was an amazing circle," which begins in Srinagar, takes in half of Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Indian Ocean up to Sumatra, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, half of China and Inner Asia – "more than half of mankind must have fallen within it" (232). Yet this map has little to do with world geography as actually experienced:

> Chiang Mai in Thailand was much nearer Calcutta than Delhi is; [. . .] Chengdu in China is nearer than Srinagar is. Yet *I had never heard of those places until I drew my circle*, and *I cannot remember a time when I was so young that I had not heard* of Delhi or Srinagar. It showed me that Hanoi and Chungking are nearer Khulna than Srinagar, and yet *did the people of Khulna care at all* about the fate of the mosques in Vietnam and South China (a mere stone's throw away)? I doubted it. But in this other direction, it took no more than a week . . . (Ghosh 1989, 232–233, emphases added)

This realisation leads to a further experiment, which confirms the contrast between significant geographies – geographies that matter – and the cartographic world of "states, and no people at all":

> In perplexity I turned back through the pages of the atlas at random, shut my eyes, and let the point of my compass fall on the page. It fell on Milan, in northern Italy. Adjusting my compass to the right scale I drew a circle which had Milan as its centre and 1200 miles as its radius. (Ghosh 1989, 233)

This is "another amazing circle" that cuts through Helsinki, Sundsvall in Sweden, Mold in Norway, takes in a large chunk of the Atlantic Ocean till Casablanca

in Morocco, the countries of the Maghreb, the Mediterranean, Crete and Turkey, the Black Sea, the then USSR till Crimea, Ukraine and Estonia, and back to Helsinki. "Puzzling over this circle," he tries an experiment about scale:

> With my limited knowledge, I tried to imagine an event, any event, that might occur in a city near the periphery of that circle (or, indeed, much nearer) – Stockholm, Dublin, Casablanca, Alexandria, Istanbul, Kiev, any city in any direction at all – I tried to imagine an event that might happen in any of those places which would bring the people of Milan pouring out into the streets. I tried hard but I could think of none.
>
> None, that is, other than war.
>
> It seemed to me, then, that within this circle there were only states and citizens; there were no people at all. (Ghosh 1989, 234)

We may read this passage in several different ways: as another critique of History with a capital "H" and the arbitrariness of nationalism and national borders that dictate that we should feel belonging towards a particular territory and not care at all about what befalls others. Or we may read it as a reflection on how things are: Chiang Mai *may be* nearer to Calcutta than Delhi is, or Chengdu nearer than Srinagar, but it does not *feel* that way, and that is, according to the narrator, a "more real" level of reality than the map. Or we can read this experiment as a call to reorient and scale-up our spatial attachments so that they incorporate more and different places – people in Milan should care as much about Casablanca, Alexandria and Kiev as they do about Rome, Paris or London. Either way, the passage once again shows how it is emotional and narrative investment that makes places real and significant, and it does so always for particular, located subjects. It is a very different – located, oriented, subjective, creative – understanding of the map and the atlas from the objective understanding of the globe and of cartography that support systemic models of world literature.

Every space in *The Shadow Lines* – whether in Calcutta or in London – is "the product of interrelations" (Massey 2005), and every story is pieced together by multiple narrators across several interactions. And although the postcolonial axes of Calcutta-London and Calcutta-Dhaka loom largest, and index the two inter-related histories of colonial entanglement and of the "long partition" of Bengal, there are other geographies that briefly surface and hint at other histories and entanglements, some of which Ghosh would take up in later novels. There is Lionel Tresawsen's imperial career as an overseer in Malaysia, Fiji, Bolivia, the Guinea Coast, and Ceylon (Ghosh 1989, 56), mirrored in a minor way by the narrator's grandfather career as a civil engineer in Burma (137). Then there is the diplomatic geography of decolonization with the (mostly) Non-Aligned postings of Tridib's diplomat father: Colombo, Algiers, Indonesia, Addis Ababa, Conakry, and Dhaka (150); and the geography of World Bank economic interventions of Ila's economist father (Dar as Salaam, 157). These significant geographies

speak to the geopolitical and economic alignments of post-independence India and its leading role in the Non-Aligned movement and decolonisation, which is also a history of economic ties and new opportunities, signalled by the brief but telling anecdote of the narrator's father's trip to Conakry due to his "rather sudden professional success" (46). In his other novels Ghosh would go on to unearth the involvement of Bengalis in imperial trade and imperial wars (Burma in *The Glass Palace*; China and the plantation colony Mauritius in the *Ibis Trilogy*), as well as the transnational history and geography of the Ganges Delta (*The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*), to great effect and acclaim. But already in *The Shadow Lines* he shows us that the world is not one map with centres and peripheries but is crisscrossed by multiple trajectories and significant geographies. In the novel, the world is neither just the postcolonial metropolis nor the bland cosmopolitanism of non-places (the international schools and airport lounges associated with young Ila) or of the narrator's atlas daydreams. It is unearthed, imagined, produced, evoked, and narrated by located subjects through recursive acts that make geographies significant as they unmask and unmake established cartographies and query the relative weight of memories and events.

4 Plotting Scale

Significant geographies are places that recur and/or that matter to texts and authors, and plotting and characters are usually the way by which texts draw and connect them. This is Franco Moretti's "geography of plot": drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's fundamental distinction between the epic and the novel, in his *Atlas of the European Novel* Moretti argues that "*what* happens depends a lot on *where* it happens" (1998, 70). By contrast, Bakhtin had argued, in Greek romances spaces are interchangeable, and "what happens in Babylon could just as well happen in Egypt or Byzantium and viceversa" (Bakhtin, "Forms of Time," cited in Moretti 1998, 70). But distant or famous toponyms in epics, romances, and story cycles still create significant geographies, whether it is the Holy Land of the Italian and Yiddish *romanzo cavalleresco,* or the mixture of real and fantastic toponyms in the *Arabian Nights* (Baumgarten 2005, 183–192; Mazolph and Leeuwen 2004, 567–570).

In Moretti's *Atlas* scale works in the "geography of plot" in relation to genre (Hellenistic novels, pastoral novels, gothic tales, colonial romances, the picaresque, the *Bildungsroman*), to specific authors (Jane Austen, Walter Scott), and to the different literary and political fields: "Where the symbolic role of the national capital is strongest (as in France), travels abroad have a peripheral function

([Stendhal's]*The Red and the Black* [*Le rouge et le noir,* 1830], [Gustave Flaubert's] *Sentimental Education* [*L'Education sentimentale,* 1869]), or are completely absent ([Honoré de Balzac's] *Lost Illusions* [*Illusions perdues,* 1837]). By contrast, foreign journeys play a major role in [Fernando Gómez de Bedoya's] *The School of the Great World* [*La escuela del gran mundo*, 1849], [Ippolito Nievo's] *Confessions of an Italian* [*Confessioni di un italiano*, 1867], and especially [George Eliot's] *Middlemarch* [1871], where the encounter with Europe transforms in depth the three central characters, making them impatient with the narrowness of provincial life" (1998, 67).[17]

Critics have posited the emergence of the global novel as a twenty-first century sub-genre that effectively plots the connectivity, challenges, and butterfly effects of contemporary globalisation.[18] As already mentioned, Alexander Beecroft points to multi-strand narration or *entrelacement* as the key narrative strategy of the global novel. He also notes that some of these novels offer "more nuanced versions of the globalisation plot" by shifting between global and local scales: their stories "are global in reach" but the texts "are also strongly committed to notions of place" (2015, 283, 286–287). Beecroft singles out Roberto Bolaño's *2666* (published posthumously in 2004) and Amitav Ghosh's *Ibis* trilogy (*Sea of Poppies,* 2008, *River of Smoke*, 2008, and *Flood of Fire*, 2015) – to which we may add *Gun Island* (2019), which connects climate change in the Bay of Bengal, Venice, and California to the migrants' boats perilously crossing the Mediterranean.

We may also read the *Ibis* trilogy as an exercise in "following" (Conrad 2006) opium and revealing – through intense research and an oceanic imagination – the hidden significant geographies of the British opium trade and other colonial commodities like sugar. Similarly, Paulo Lemos Horta (2022) urges us to read Bolaño not as a "born translated" global novelist but as a child of the Latin American and Catalonian avantgardes, whose novels shift between intense and very local group narratives and long-distance travelogues, thereby tracing and connecting very specific significant geographies. Reading *2066* or *The Savage Detectives* (*Los detectives salvajes*, 1998) through the prism of location and of significant geographies instead of globalisation draws attention to the late-Cold War political

17 "On the other hand," Moretti continues, "the protagonists of the *Bildungsroman* seldom embark on long-distance journeys, and travel outside Europe is usually left to their alter egos" (67). In his book, the European novels operating at the largest geographical scale are colonial romances (69).

18 Barnard (2009); Kirsch (2016); Ganguly (2016). Other critics, like Coletti (2011), have instead defined the global novel in terms of circulation and easy translatability, what Parks (2010) famously called "The Dull New Global Novel".

context of their author and of the marginal and countercultural radical protagonists, their movements and their brand of internationalism.[19]

Works that seek to reconstruct the experiences and travels of African peoples engulfed by the slave trade, or whose histories have been written by others, require "critical fabulation" (Hartman), involving intense research and an oceanic imagination that conceives of the ocean "as material force and a conceptual frame" (Ganguly 2021, 431). *Entrelacement* here works both geographically and generationally, and often combines significant geographies and scale shifting between the micro-personal and the macro-historical. Maryse Condé's masterpiece *Segu* (*Segou*, 1983–1985) is a broken family saga, an exploration (and explanation) rather than a celebration, as Condé herself has declared. The Francophone novel spreads out from its original centre in the Bambara capital Segou in western Africa, and sends its characters, members of successive generations of the disgraced patriarch Dousika, to Timbuktu; to the slave fortress on Gorée island on the west African coast; on the transatlantic slave passage across to Brazil and back to the "free coast". One character becomes a successful trader in Fez, another socialises in London. While moving the characters over this large geographical expanse, *Segu* mostly stays close to them and their immediate locales, occasionally scaling up in brief passages that insert historical information and commentary. For example, Dousika's second son, Naba, is trapped by slavers and becomes a gardener for the mistress of the fort on Gorée Island:

> He stood up now and took the bowl of tomatoes into the kitchen, where the slaves had resumed their gossiping. Now he had to go to the public garden which had been founded some years back by Dancourt, a director of the trading company. [His mistress] Anne Pépin allowed Naba to hire his services out for a small sum – enough to buy a few leaves of tobacco and a drop of brandy. (Condé 2007, 99)

The narration then scales up to provide a broad historical overview:

> Gorée had developed considerably over the years. When the French captured it from the Dutch, who had taken it from the Portuguese, there were only two forts, mere stone redoubts some forty-five yards square with seven or eight cannon [. . .]. Then the French turned Gorée into the headquarters of the Senegal Company, which succeeded the West

19 "[W]hy 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 radicalised and disenchanted 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" (Horta 2022, 296, emphases added).

> India Company and gave priority to the slave trade. The latter, though it did not enrich the companies themselves, did enrich the individuals in them who falsified accounts, made fake customs declarations and employed false weights and measures (99).

Such an expansive and precise "geography of plot" (Moretti) and shift of scale from individual characters and family relations to brief historical overviews allow the narrative to connect the overlapping histories of Islamic as well as colonial expansion and the slave trade, and to link them to the creation of new and multiple (gendered) subjectivities. Given that the slave trade and colonialism underpin modern capitalism, one can indeed call *Segu* a global novel.[20] But, again, reading it through the prism of location and significant geographies alerts us to the precise workings of scale, but also to the author's own problematic positionality as an Antillais from Guadeloupe who, after moving to Paris, experimented with "going back" to Africa in the 1950s and lived in various newly-independent African countries – a positionality she reflects on in a book of essays and interviews (Condé 2017). It is interesting, for example, that the significant geographies of *Segu* do not just include the movement from the inland empires to the coast and across the Atlantic to the American plantation colonies.[21] The long narrative sections devoted to Gorée island, Timbuktu, and Fez in the novel implicate French colonialism, signal the longstanding cultural and religious centrality of Timbuktu, and adumbrate the trade links between the Maghreb and Subsaharan Africa.

The last two sections of this chapter retain the emphasis on location and the production of significant geographies while shifting scale. The next section expands on the idea of location as orientation to the world by presenting former MULOSIGE project member Sara Marzagora's reading of the Ethiopian writer Käbbädä Mikael (c. 1914–1998), whose books trace the trajectory of his political and historical thought while realigning his orientation to the world and producing different significant geographies.

20 The same is true of Yaa Gyasi's *Homegoing* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2016), another broken family saga which follows the different paths taken by the descendants of two sisters, one enslaved and sent to America, and the other free but nonetheless touched by the slave trade; the narrative linkages across generations and across the two lines are left implicit here, with each new chapter switching to a new character from the next generation.

21 And to the later migration of African students and workers, like Gyasi's *Homegoing*, for example.

5 Location as Orientation

As already mentioned at the beginning, significant geographies stress that the world is not a given but is discursively produced by different, embodied, and located actors. Location is for us the starting point of an exploration, a way of looking at and being in the world that is always partial and limited (though it may be surprisingly far-reaching), or that may be far-reaching and ambitious even from a peripheral locality (Orsini and Zecchini 2019). The latter is the case of the Amharic writer and public intellectual Käbbädä Mikael, whose education (in Ge'ez and French) was disrupted by the Italian invasion, but who rose through the ranks of the Ethiopian civil service after WWII to become director-general in the Ministry of Education, director of the National Library, and founder of the Addis Abäba Archaeological Museum. "Many of his works became school textbooks and were very well known by all those who attended school in the post-liberation decades" (Marzagora 2019, 108).[22]

Thanks to Emperor Menelik II's activism in international relations and the European scramble for Africa, between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth "Ethiopia had been catapulted upon the modern world stage. [. . .] Such a planetary scale offered a dazzling and exciting potential for cultural, literary, and geopolitical alliances and affiliations" (Marzagora 2019, 112). During Käbbädä's long life, "Ethiopia's symbolic geographies shifted and were the object of intense debates" (107). Until the Italian aggression and occupation (1936–1941), the Ethiopian educated intelligentsia "drew confidence from Ethiopia's victory against Italy at the battle of Adwa (1896) and from their country's membership in the League of Nations," and imagined Ethiopia, as a "millenary and Christian nation," the smallest of the great nations, lagging behind only in economic terms (Marzagora 2019, 107 and 115, citing Käbbädä Mikael's *Ityopyanna*). But disillusionment with international inaction over Italy's aggression and concern over the "fraught power relations" between old European colonialism and the new Cold War led intellectuals like Käbbädä Mikael to test through their writings the different possible configurations in which Ethiopia could belong (Marzagora 2019, 112).

Käbbädä Mikael thought about the world through both historical and fictional genres. In the first major work, *Ityopyanna Məəhrabawi Səlәṭṭane* (Ethiopia and Western Civilization, 1948/49), he critically appraised Ethiopia, as the title

22 As Marzagora notes, "Käbbädä's initial relation to Western colonialism contained several elements of ambiguity, as he famously started his career as a radio broadcaster for the Italian occupiers" (2019, 122) before being promoted as part of Haylä Səllase's post-liberation policy of making use of the skills of those who had served the enemy.

says, primarily in relation to Europe. Although he argued that "Ethiopia, in her present march towards a greater civilization, [. . .] has not yet reached that evolutionary stage which produces the men of genius" (Käbbädä, *Ityoṗyanna*, quoted in Marzagora 2019, 113),[23] he also considered Western civilization imperfect, and asserted that "the Ethiopian people, granted that they have progressed less in material civilization, keep abreast of the others and may be ahead of all of them when it comes to *moral* civilization" (115, emphasis added). Moreover, Käbbädä blamed the great powers that were "blaming us for not having modernised" but were "hampering our advance towards progress and trying to make us stumble," for example by maintaining Ethiopia's geopolitical and economic isolation through the colonial occupation of the coastal areas of the Horn (116). As Marzagora argues, "The West was a central concern for him, but he often displaced its centrality in his arguments and refused to define his positionality in peripheral terms" (2019, 126).

So in his second major work of civilisational comparison, *Japan Əndämən Säläṭṭänäčč* (How Japan Achieved Civilization, 1953/54), Käbbädä harked back to the significant geography of the interwar generation of the "Japanizers" (see Bahru Zewde 2008). Japan, which had successfully hybridised Western technological modernity with local traditions (both "material" and "moral civilization" in Käbbädä's terms), held particular appeal for Ethiopian intellectuals as a model for "successful top-down, monarchy-driven progress" (Marzagora 2019, 119). The book deals mostly with the similarities between Japan's and Ethiopia's histories – their ancient and putatively uninterrupted ruling dynasties, their successful repulsion of Catholic conversion, their long-standing international isolation, the political decentralisation during the Tokugawa era (1600–1868) and the Ethiopian "Age of the Princes" (Zämänä Mäsafənt, the 1769–1855), and the reassertion of centralised imperial power with emperors Meiji and Mənilək II (Marzagora 2019, 120). Japan had lost its appeal for Ethiopians, though, after it allied itself with Mussolini's Italy, as Marzagora notes, so the timing of Käbbädä's work is odd. Why did he turn to the Japanizers again? Marzagora reads it as a way to escape the negative vertical comparison with the West and to "circumvent the peripheralization of Ethiopia in the bipolar world of the Cold War" (120). Unlike the West and more like Ethiopia, in Japan "hard work was not aimed at individual success and gain" but "for the wellbeing of the nation," a trait that had allowed Japan to modernise much more quickly than Europe (121).

23 Indeed, Marzagora notes, all the named "men of genius" (Socrates, Homer, Aeschylus, Virgil, Horace, Shakespeare, Milton, Michelangelo, Tasso, Corneille, Racine, Molière, Chopin, Spinoza, Newton, Beethoven, Mozart, Goethe, Schiller, Nietzsche, Pushkin, Galileo, Columbus, Leopardi) are European (if the ancient Greeks can be considered thus).

Finally, Käbbädä's 1955 historical verse-play *Hannibal* reveals another significant geography. It stages Hannibal's defeat at the hands of Rome as the result of internal betrayal, indirectly suggesting that Haylä Səllase's defeat had been caused by the lack of support from Ethiopian leaders. The play stages the contest, proleptically, as one between white Europeans and black Africans. Before the decisive battle at Zama, one Carthaginian soldier explains to another:

> There is, moreover, the question of race and posterity. If the Romans are victorious, the whites will rule. They will possess all wealth and knowledge, and their power over the world will be eternal. They will guide the world. Europe will be the mistress of all nations. To her will go prosperity, science, and power. On the contrary, if Hannibal triumphs, then prosperity will change camps, leave Europe and come to Africa. If splendour, intelligence and grandeur are transferred to the other continent [i.e. Europe], this will lead to the decay of our [African] people. Think of it: this war between Rome and Carthage, this merciless struggle, does not concern the two cities only. The victory of one or the other side will decide the fate of the peoples of the world. If Rome resists successfully, she will be able to break the development of Africa and to block Africa's way to the future. (English translation adapted from Gérard 1971, 325–326, cited in Marzagora 2019, 124)

Again, the timing is interesting, since the play was written several years before Ethiopian political elites fully embraced anticolonial Pan-Africanism.[24] Käbbädä's identification of Carthage/Ethiopia with black Africa departs from "decades of intellectual production characterising Ethiopia as Europe's kith and kin," though it also claims Haylä Səllase/Hannibal as the leader of all Africans (Marzagora (2019, 125).

The shifting significant geographies of Käbbädä's works – Europe, Japan, Carthage/Africa – draw our attention to Ethiopia as the tip of the compass, to rehearse the example from *The Shadow Lines*. This raises the question of motivation, not just for the shifts, but for the orientation to the world in the first place. "The 'world' was not a globalist cosmopolitan endeavour for Käbbädä, but rather a strategy for particularist nation-building," Marzagora (2019, 112) concludes. Instead of inserting Ethiopia within a global system, "he looked at 'outside' geographies in ways that were, for the most part, assimilationist and reductionist" (126). Orientation to the world need not speak of a desire to integrate or to form or join an international network, but may rather aim to mark one's difference.

24 Jane Plastow remarks that Annibal "is highly unusual, in that it emphasises the need for pan-Africanism at a time when the Amharas tended to see themselves as isolated from, and superior to, the majority of Africans" (Plastow 1996, 59), cited in Marzagora (2019, 125).

This takes me to the final section, which considers location and world-making by literary magazines. Literary magazines typically combine local, national, and transnational scales. At the same time, their production of world literature is more provisional and situated than, for example, that of world literature anthologies. The first case I consider may be read in terms of action-network theory, since the two magazines concerned forged and fostered literary networks that were both local and transnational, and multilingual.[25] The second case instead shows the magazine editor drawing freely but selectively on available translations to put forward his own, radically reoriented version of world literature. While the first case highlights the radical potential of literary activism from a provincial location, the second shows that magazine activism need not be read as the desire for assimilation into global movements or a global literary space.[26] Shifting between individual (local) stories and the macro scale of international politics, the Hindi magazine *Sarika* bypassed questions of minority and produced powerful versions of world literature.

6 Magazine Activism, Location, and Scale

"Northern Morocco has tended to be cast as a provincial hub in scholarship about Morocco and colonial Maghreb because it fell under the tutelage of a minor colonial power such as Spain – unlike the rest of the country, which by and large became a French Protectorate, or an international zone, such as the nearby city of Tangiers," writes Itzea Goikolea-Amiano (2022). But the bilingual literary journals *Al-Motamid. Verso y Prosa* (1947–56, ed. Trina Mercader) and *Ketama* (1953–59, ed. Jacinto López Gorjé) founded in the very small town of Ketama and in the regional capital Tetouan played a pivotal role in making contemporary Arabic poetry available in Spanish and translating contemporary Spanish and other European poetry into Arabic.[27] They also published pioneering essays on modern Moroccan

25 For the use of Bruno Latour's action network theory in world literary studies, see Roig-Sanz and Meylaerts (2018).

26 For literary activism as an activism on behalf of literature that scrutinises its function and status, see Chaudhuri (2016).

27 "One of the main aims of the journals became to make contemporary Arabic poetry known among their Hispanophone readers". Thanks to the writings and translations by Jamil Shuwaqi (who contributed from Chile), Muhammad al-Sabbagh and Leonor Martínez Martín, "contemporary Arabic poetry entered the realm of Spanish Arabism," which had until then almost exclusively focused on al-Andalus (Goikolea-Amiano 2021).

literature and short stories by local Arabic and Spanish authors.[28] As Goikolea-Amiano (2022) argues, thanks to their particular location outside the French zone, the magazines used Franco's ideological invocation of Hispano-Moroccan brotherhood and the shared history of al-Andalus to plug into, and in some case initiate, networks that "made visible and enabled the circulation of contemporary Arabic poetry between the Arabic-speaking Middle East, the Maghreb and the Mahjar (Arab American diaspora); and of contemporary poetry between Arabic, Spanish, and other European languages". *Ketama* in particular grew into a bilingual literary platform where Arabic and Spanish texts and authors shared equal space and importance, and where the vector of translation went both ways. The magazine published Nobel-prize winner Salvatore Quasimodo's poems in Italian with translations in Arabic and Spanish, but also the poems of Mahjar author Mikhail Naimy (Goikolea-Amiano 2022). Moreover, the fact that these colonial journals translated more from Arabic into Spanish rather than the other way round, Goikolea-Amiano argues, "challenges customary understanding of colonial culture as systematically excluding the colonised and their production, and of literary translation moving from the literary "centre" to the "periphery" [. . .] and from "more endowed" to "less endowed" languages and literatures (Sapiro 2011)". In fact, in this case a peripheral location acted as a privileged site of encounters, and a node in overlapping networks between different significant geographies – the Arabic Mashreq and Maghreb, Morocco and Spain, and the Maghreb and Latin America.

Finally, like other Hindi magazines of the 1950s–1960s, *Sarika* (Starling, 1969), a commercial literary magazine published in Bombay by the Times of India group, published short stories for general readers (Orsini 2022). It was definitely *not* a little magazine. Until the Hindi writer Kamleshwar (1932–2007) became editor, world literature in *Sarika* had meant stories by contemporary western and eastern European writers, but Kamleshwar exploited the financial resources of its publishers and the format of the magazine special issue to practise what I have called a spectacular internationalism which made Asian, Arabic, Latin American and African literatures visible together to an unprecedented degree. Special issues

28 Including writer, critic and anthologist Muhammad al-Sabbagh and Abd Allah Guennoun, the author of the pathbreaking *Al-Nubūgh al-Maghribī fi al-Adab al-'Arabī* (Moroccan Genius in Arabic Literature, 1938) and commonly regarded as the father of modern literary criticism in Morocco, who moved from Fez to Tetouan. See also Amina al-Luh, "We Want a Moroccan Literature" (Nurīd adaban maghribīyyan); the story "The Wretched" (Tu'asā') by Al-Tuhami al-Wazzani, best known for *al-Zāwīya* (*The Lodge*, 1942), considered by many the first Moroccan Arabic novel; and "La Frontera" and "Neffah" by Dora Bacalcoa Arnáiz; texts and translations available at http://mulosige.soas.ac.uk/resources/translations/translations-essays/bilingual-literary-journals-from-colonial-morocco/short-stories/, all accessed 9 December 2021.

were devoted to the world story (Jan 1969, Jan 1970), or to themes of general interest (The Courtesan in World Literature, Nov 1973), but quite a few were framed in political terms, like Third World literature (Jan 1973), India's neighbouring countries (Aug 1973), African literature (Jan 1975) or Palestinian resistance literature (Mar 1977). The January 1969 International Story issue, for example, features Heinrich Böll and Alain Robbe-Grillet, but among thirty Asian, African, and Latin American writers, including Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Mahmud Taimur, João Guimaraes Rosa, Mario Benedetti, Mohammad Hijazi, Mochtar Lubis, and so on. And if spatially *Sarika* re-oriented world literature towards the literatures of global South (*dakshin golarddh*), as Kamleshwar himself called it, its present- and future-oriented temporality lifted older stories like Jorge Luis Borges's "Emma Zunz" (1949) into the present.[29] Nor were most stories political in theme, despite the political framing. Rather, stories tended to be about the everyday lives of ordinary people (office romances, hoping for a payrise) and written by writers across the political spectrum. This interesting combination, or rather juxtaposition, between the tricontinental political framing and the everydayness of the stories reflected Kamleshwar's own original definition of Third World literature. Kamleshwar explicitly framed the Third World in political and economic terms, foregrounding the shared experiences of colonialism and underdevelopment and the need to make new voices heard; he then rejected this definition as "superficial and two-dimensional," though: third rather meant *beyond*, beyond the two blocs but also beyond the material plane, as in João Guimaraes Rosa's haunting philosophical story "The Third Bank of the River" ("A Terceira Margem do Rio," 1962).[30]

Kamleshwar's spectacular special issues were made possible by the profusion of printed materials and translations produced by Cold War initiatives, which he sourced without acknowledgement or attribution as was the norm in Hindi magazines.[31] But this should not lead us to underplay Kamleshwar's remarkable magazine activism and the way in which he assembled and reframed stories in order to produce an original and located articulation of world literature, drawing connections and pressing for particular readings. The medium of the story magazine, the agency of the editor as literary activist, and the form of the special issue held together very different scales and played off the macro scale of non-Aligned and Third Worldist international politics with the micro scale of local stories.

29 *Sarika*, Jan 1969.

30 Kamleshwar, "Donon taton se ubkar" (Tired of both Shores), International special issue (*Deshantar ank*), *Sarika*, January 1969, 7.

31 Some of the stories seem to come from *Short Story International*, others from *Lotus*, and several of the African stories came from Faber's *Modern African Stories*.

7 Conclusion

Thinking through significant geographies and drawing attention to the location and orientation of actors and texts, this essay has argued, help us to think about world literature not as a single global or transnational scale or a movement towards global integration, but as many criss-crossing trajectories and articulations. This is not an argument about the utopian, ethical recognition of all literatures as equally deserving attention (though there is nothing wrong with that), but rather about the recognition that location matters: it produces particular constructions of the world (and of world literature), for example in terms of aesthetics, ideology, or familiarity; and it enables conditions of visibility that would not be available elsewhere. For this reason, rather than working with scale in terms of different literary ecologies, as Beecroft does, I have chosen to work with individual texts, authors, and magazines as different scales of analysis, and in each case I have stressed location and orientation in their articulation of the world, and the way they creatively manage, shift and combine scales. Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* underscores the process of perception and how places become familiar or strange to us; the compass experiment invites us to step back from an unthinking relationship with the map as a *source* of objective scale. Maryse Condé's *Segu* reveals the work of critical fabulation not just through its sprawling cast of characters, but also through the shift of scale between the local spaces characters intimately inhabit and swift historical explanations and connections. The Moroccan bilingual journals *Ketama* and *al-Motamid* reveal the potential of small, peripheral locations, their keenness to connect and to make the best use of their contacts. Arguably, the equality between Spanish and Arabic, the preference for contemporary Arabic and European poetry, and the connections between Spanish, Latin American, Maghrebi, and Levantine intellectuals were possible precisely because of the particular geo-political location, marginality, and agency of the magazine's collaborators. Finally, the spectacular special issues of *Sarika* show how, thanks to the nimble re-use of translated stories, a magazine can combine small-scale, non-political human stories with the macro-scale of international politics (whether global or regional) to produce unprecedented visibility for literatures from the Global South. Through these examples, of which only some have circulated beyond their original context, the essay has argued that transnational circulation is not the only scale of world literature, but also that each articulation of the world consists of significant geographies.

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