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Border Reading: Epistemic Reading and the Worlding of Postcolonialism

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Abstract

What Robert Young has called postcolonialism's "secular terms" has resulted in the marginalization of postcolonial literary enactments of indigenous knowledge. Today, with the globalization of literary studies, the threat to literary formulations of indigenous knowledge is paramount. As the demand in the academic marketplace shifts from postcolonial to world literature courses, literary expressions of indigenous subaltern knowledge and indigenous discursive strategies are more at risk of being co-opted by a globalized literary practice that is rooted in what Simon Gikandi calls "Levasite Englishness" than ever before. This paper argues for a postcolonial, decolonized critical practice that is attentive to reading indigeneity as subaltern knowledge. The proposed reading strategy, border reading, has its theoretical foundations in Walter Dignolo's border gnosis and addresses the relevance of the marginalization of indigenous knowledge, especially in light of the global rise of world literature courses.

Keywords

worlding postcolonialism, indigenous, magical realism, border reading, epistemicide.

Introduction

My academic career began in the late 1990s when I began researching so-called magical realist texts and literary representations of indigenous counter-modernity religious discourse. Despite emerging from two entirely different geocultural contexts, the two writers I was considering objected to the magic realist label. They insisted that what they described was real. I decided to believe them. That led to explorations in literary indigeneity and what Robert Young has called postcolonialism's "secular terms" (338). Although I had very little experience, I was asked to contribute to the self-assessment for accreditation program when I starting working at my university in 2009. Three years later, I was asked, to my surprise, to write an article on world literature. I was surprised because of the throwback aspect of this problematic romantic notion. In the same year, the new academic plan introduced a course on world literature, which I taught. As of yet, my university has not offered a course on postcolonialism. I have often heard my Joseph Conrad students positively reflecting on colonization, with one student stating that colonization "can bring good things."

These do not comprise a string of random events. They are the effects of profound structural transformations in the global production of knowledge. They are cautionary indicators of a rapidly encroaching hegemonic world literary critical practice. World literature, is today, a global design that is part and parcel of corporatization of academic marketplace, and it is telling testament to the sheer force of the logic of this market place that, previously and happily, self described postcolonial critics, have

succumbed to this atavistic literary episteme. Granted, they do so with resistance, the most substantial effort coming from the left; most recently the Warwick Research Collective (WReC). However, the engagement remains within the Eurocentric episteme. That is not say that such efforts should be dismissed. On the contrary, they constitute an essential aspect of resistance to world literature's global design. However, and this is a key point, such efforts remain colonially inflected. In the following I will use indigeneity as a litmus test for world literature's global designs, and as locus from which to propose as worlded postcolonialism that is informed by the world system's critique of the modernity-coloniality-decoloniality school of thought,¹ which I refer to as "MCD" throughout this paper. My proposed worlded postcolonial reading practice, border reading, is rooted in the desubalternization of indigenous epistemology.²

Postcolonialism's worlding imperative

Although its geotemporal coordinates and its *raison d'être* are hotly debated, the rise of world literature has everything to do with the globalization of literary studies, which is firmly connected to the globalized corporatization of academia. The discussion on the globalization of literary studies has been taking place since the early 2000s,³ with the focus recently shifting somewhat to the attendant but seemingly atavistic return to world literature. Some key (as well as some former) postcolonial scholars, such as Benita Parry,⁴ Neil Lazarus,⁵ Ella Shohat, Robert Stam, and Elleke Boehmer,⁶ have addressed the following questions: Why world literature? Why now?

Today, with growing research on globalism,⁷ which is more accurately imagined as a political rather than a temporal marker, and its influence on the literary universe, not to mention the selective and grouping potential opened up by digital search engines, the concept of world literature has acquired new vigor. The fact that noted postcolonial scholars, whose business it was to critique global colonial designs, feel obliged to "[genueflect] ... to world literature" (Boehmer 302), speaks to the profound embeddedness of logic and efficacy of the global designs in the academic market place. Universities, particularly the humanities, particularly literary studies, are grasping for newer and sexier courses to attract local and global students, in order to sustain their marketplace ranking. Still, it is, arguably, postcolonial theorists, who, given the significant gains of postcolonial theory in critiquing colonial hegemony, are best situated to address this worlding imperative. On condition of course that postcolonialism's discursive gains be examined for its own co-optative mechanisms engendered by Eurocentric epistemological privilege. Otherwise, the "hard questions about Eurocentric epistemological privilege" that "world literary scholars [have] skated past" (Helgesson 485) will not be addressed.

As literary historiography shifts from temporal to spatial concerns,⁸ the renewed interest in world literature follows suit, culminating in Franco Moretti's claim that geography creates literature. Almost all world literature analytical models use what Fernando Cabo Aseguinolaza calls a "critical

koiné, which reflects the obvious spatial drift of underlying epistemological models in efforts to reconceptualize the notion of world literature” (“Dead, or a Picture” 424). It is the objective of the present paper to investigate the coloniality⁹ of this critical koiné and, more importantly, to check the advance of what has recently been branded as “global literary theory” (see Lane). Global literary theory is the world literary criticism system that has emerged from the current phase of globalized literary studies.¹⁰

As postcolonial scholars scramble for placement in the world literature courses of the academic marketplace, they are simply transferring the problematics of postcolonialism onto a broader canvas. One such problem is that of indigeneity, which, Stam and Shohat note, “still troubles postcolonial theory” (384). Postcolonialism’s critical genealogy, its location within a Eurocentric episteme, contribute to the field’s colonial liability, indigeneity tests. I would like to problematize the apparently facile transition from postcolonial studies to world literature by exploring the problem of indigeneity, literary expressions of indigenous ways of knowing in particular.

Indigeneity and the coloniality of postcolonialism

Indigenous scholars and postcolonialists are mutually responsible for the lack of rapport between them. The work of indigenous studies scholars such as Vine Deloria Jr., Taiaiake Alfred, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith remains tellingly outside postcolonialism’s interdisciplinary reach. This fact has been only recently acknowledged in mainstream postcolonial textbook publications such as *The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies*, a 2013 textbook in which Diana Brydon notes that “the field has been slow to see the relevance of indigenous concerns” (440).¹¹ At the same time, indigenous scholars have tended to be either lukewarm or unrealistically enthusiastic in their engagement with postcolonialism. For example, in *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, Marie Battiste, who is attentive to the Eurocentrism of postcolonialism’s theoretical formulations, prefers to uphold the disciplinary boundaries between “postcolonial Indigenous thought” and “postcolonial theory in literature” because the former “emerges from the inability of Eurocentric theory [postcolonialism] to deal with the complexities of colonialism and its assumptions” and “rejects the use of any Eurocentric theory or its categories” (xix). In the same volume, Edward Chamberlin, by contrast, expresses a more optimistic faith in postcolonialism’s potential to counter the hegemonic censoring or instrumentalization of indigenous imagination. Nevertheless, he does not explain how this potential is to be realized. What interests me here is not the validity of his argument but rather the expectation that the politics of postcolonialism should serve indigenous aspirations. This expectation is reflected in the 1996 document “Policy Recommendations for Indigenous Cultural Restoration.” This document was developed at Saskatoon’s Summer Institute, where postcolonialism was proposed as a “graduate program in the nation-states with more than 50% indigenous population and within the UN University” (Battiste 290). What this expectation indicates is that postcolonialism is strategically positioned within occidental

institutions of knowledge production in such a way that it can instigate a transformation of the geopolitics of knowledge. Ironically, however, its disciplinary locale compromises this self-same potential.

Historically, indigeneity—under the banner of nativism—has been confronted in postcolonialist theorizing based on the foundational work of Frantz Fanon. Nativism manifested in certain forms of anticolonial resistance has been either dismissed as an archaic resuscitation of traditional cultural forms or accepted on the condition that these forms of resistance fit into Eurocentric epistemic molds. Indigenous epistemologies are, thus, conditionally accepted by some historical materialists as functional in the anticolonial, anticapitalist struggles for national liberation, as in Benita Parry’s landmark 1994 article “Resistance Theory/Theorising Resistance, or Two Cheers for Nativism.” However, the inherent value of indigenous epistemologies has essentially remained in the margins of postcolonial theorization. In 2012, Parry, in a footnote, applauds and accepts the “measured discussion on indigenous knowledge systems” (emphasis added) (358) in Paulin Hountondji’s “Knowledge Appropriation in a Post-Colonial Context,” thus reiterating the same conditional consideration.

One critique that has examined postcolonialism’s shortcomings vis-à-vis indigenous knowledge is Malreddy Pavan Kumar’s “(An)other Way of Being Human: ‘Indigenous’ Alternative(s) to Postcolonial Humanism.” Here he explores the practical facets of this postcolonialist bias, arguing that postcolonialism is compromised by its literariness and its academism, which is responsible for dismissing indigenous theory as already always contaminated.¹² He illustrates his point by scrutinizing postcolonialism’s failure at matching the gains made by activists such as the Indigenous Peoples Movement (IPM). Whereas the IPM’s recourse to indigenous theory led to the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007,¹³ postcolonialism has dismissed indigenous theory as retrogressive. Kumar finds that “despite the fact that the two movements are inspired by a common concern to repudiate euro-humanism, IPM is a more strategic, more viable, and evidently more instrumental humanist alternative than postcolonial theory” (“(An)other Way” 1567).¹⁴

Whereas Kumar attributes postcolonialism’s failure to its academism and literariness (“(An)other Way” 1565), I argue that it is the coloniality of knowledge construction that generates postcolonialism’s epistemological crisis. The field’s lack of engagement with indigenous concerns discloses an epistemic and disciplinary coloniality and cannot be attributed to its supposed literariness. This point is reflected in the fact that even literary indigeneity is misread by postcolonialism. I am interested in how the colonial matrix of power operates in the control of knowledge production.¹⁵

The fact that these epistemologies find refuge in literary narratives is no accident. This is a consequence of, as Walter Mignolo states, “both imperial difference (e.g., science vs. literature) and the colonial difference (e.g., literature vs. folklore),” which maintains that “literature is fine, but doesn’t constitute serious knowledge” (*Local Histories/Global Designs* 375). The colonial geopolitics of knowledge

thus ensures that indigenous ways of knowing are excluded from consideration as sources of theory, philosophy, and practice. Narratives that house indigenous epistemologies are read as allegorical or revisionist—not as valid sources of anti-colonial knowledge. For example, in Neil Lazarus's *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, the anti-colonial reworking of indigenous epistemologies, earmarked as magical realist, is not discussed but rather is merely footnoted (228). Lazarus cites Christopher Warnes's 2009 book *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence*. Warnes proposes that these texts are anti-colonial and seek "to reclaim what has been lost: knowledge, values, traditions, ways of seeing, beliefs" (12). However, Lazarus argues that this "body of literature" should only "be thought of under the rubric of 'magical realism,'" if magic realism "is itself [. . .] understood in terms of the idea of combined and uneven development" (*Postcolonial Unconscious* 228). Indigeneity in literary texts has been viewed as magical real, exotic, allegorical, mythological, and so on, but never as sites of indigenous anti-colonial knowledge.

Only recently has the problem of incorporating indigenous ways of knowing been tacitly recognized by some postcolonial critics. I will give one example to illustrate my point that a reconciliation between indigenous and occidental ways of knowing is not possible without an attentiveness to coloniality. Stam and Shohat offer the commons as a meeting point for occidental and indigenous concerns. The commons, they say, "as conceived by the indigenous cultures of the Red Atlantic" is a metaphoric and metonymic link "to the theory and praxis of the commons within the West itself" (388). Stam and Shohat argue that this is because the "same class that enclosed land in Europe also enclosed indigenous land outside of Europe" (388). However, as intriguing as this idea is, it does not highlight the coloniality in the normative superiority of occidental knowledge. Therefore, one can argue that it is no consolation to indigenous ways of knowing that, as Stam and Shohat say, "the unending (and uneven) interchange between European and indigenous thought has lent support to [. . .] varied progressive causes" (389). That some indigenous ways of knowing should converge with and lend support to occidental concerns does not mean that these ways of knowing constitute the controlling episteme that allows such concerns to be identified and addressed. Supplementing the dominant episteme is not the same as generating the determining episteme. Indigenous ways of knowing have yet to inform postcolonialists's reading of literary indigeneity, let alone inform its theoretical formulations.

The globalization of literary studies and literary indigeneity

Inequities in the geopolitics of knowledge become greatly significant in an era of globalized literary studies. Postcolonialism's troubled relationship with literary indigeneity needs to be redressed, if one agrees with those critics (e.g., Simon Gikandi, Susie O'Brien and Imre Szeman, Stefan Helgesson, and Ania Loomba) who have identified the crucial role that postcolonialism has in addressing the inequities of this globalization.¹⁶

In his 2001 article “Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality,” Simon Gikandi argues that globalized literary practice is rooted in the Leavisite notion of Englishness. Postcolonial scholars—located in North American and British English departments, where much of the discussion of globalization has occurred—have been taught, Gikandi says, to “read culture and morality in literary texts the same way that these tropes were read at University College London, the ‘mother’ institution” (651). National elites who migrated to metropolitan centers thus transformed local European reading methodologies and critical tools into global frameworks for viewing, knowing, and evaluating cultural products. Gikandi suggests that “we need to rethink modes of reading and analysis that are focused so much on the familiar tropes of [the] postcolonial” and take more notice of the “unfamiliar, but equally powerful, local scenes of being and belonging” (639). In other words, postcolonialism’s critical *koiné*

Taking into consideration that indigenous epistemologies are enacted in literary form and that postcolonial critical practices are determined by local European histories, how should scholars approach literary indigeneity? The idea that there is an epistemic import to literary indigeneity presents scholars with the problem of disciplinary boundaries. As such, it strains the already taut divide between “most post-colonial theorists,” who “come from fields of the humanities such as literature, rhetoric, and cultural studies,” and a small number who “come from the social sciences, in particular from anthropology” (n. pag.). As Grosfoguel goes on to explain, the distribution of knowledge into “three autonomous arenas: science, social science and humanities” is put into effect by liberalism, which is the “geoculture of the modern world system” (n. pag.). To recognize this point is to realize that the solution to the problem of the marginalization of indigenous forms of knowledge by postcolonialism is not to poke holes in disciplinary boundaries, but rather to reconstitute what counts as knowledge. To imagine that an interdisciplinary or interdiscursive perspective would provide access to these local scenes is to overlook how disciplinarity entrenches the colonial geopolitics of knowledge and its construction of difference. For example, anthropology is one discipline that has been used to explore the incorporation of indigenous epistemologies into postcolonialism—most notably in Mudimbe’s 1988 book, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*; Quayson’s 2000 book, *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice or Process?*; and Huggan’s 2008 book, *Interdisciplinary Measures: Literature and the Future of Postcolonial Studies*. I would like to illustrate the problematics of this process by examining Huggan’s exotic.

In his chapter “On Anthropology and the Exotic,” Huggan focuses on the structure of difference that creates the exotic effect. Huggan offers the following explanation: “The anthropological exotic [. . .] describes a mode of both perception and consumption; it invokes the familiar aura of other, incommensurably “foreign” cultures while appearing to provide a modicum of information that gives the uninitiated reader access to the text and, by extension, the “foreign culture” itself” (108). This explanation, I argue, identifies only the *modus operandi* of the anthropological exotic. It does not explain the coloniality inherent in the construction of difference, nor does it examine the hierarchical

placement of epistemologies. Therefore, it occludes the process by which coloniality determines the perception and consumption of difference. As a result, this coloniality seeps into Huggan's ultimately dismissive view. Huggan notes that "homegrown epistemologies" posit a pristine, untrammelled native culture but criticizes their dependency "on a binary 'us/them' rhetoric which negates the transculturative potential inherent in a lengthy history of European encounters—however invasive—[. . .]—however uneven—that have made an irrevocable impact on the configuration and transformation of African national cultures" (122). I take issue with the unexplored use of "invasive" and "uneven" of this description of transculturation because it implies a smoothness that belies its thoroughgoing violence, particularly the long shadow of epistemic violence. Thinking of anthropology epistemically means recognizing that the categories of the primitive, the magical, and the savage are constructed by a privileged occidental episteme to view another subaltern episteme. My point here is that the exotic is only the "exotic" when it is read from a different, supposedly "superior" epistemic locale. In other words, to be "socially located in the oppressed side of power relations does not automatically mean that he/she is epistemically thinking from a subaltern epistemic location" (Grosfoguel n. pag.). To read indigeneity through interdisciplinarity or interdiscursivity means that indigenous knowledge "must be disciplined in order to be inter-disciplined" ("Postcolonialism: Interdisciplinary" 669). Thus, if one cannot read indigeneity through interdisciplinarity or interdiscursivity, how can one read it?

This question assumes heightened significance when considering the migration of postcolonial critical practices to the world/global literary theory. The problem of the coloniality of postcolonialism's engagement, or lack thereof, with indigenous knowledge, if unaddressed by the significant insights of the MCD school of thought, makes certain the eventual epistemicide of other ways of knowing. This problem presents itself more acutely in the case of literary indigeneity simply because the literary, as a category of knowledge, need not necessarily subject itself to the dictates of the coloniality rationality cultural complex. Of course the other side of this coin is the problem that the literary cannot serve as the locus for a theory of knowledge. To leave the problem of indigeneity unattended to would be to foreclose the possibility of indigenous knowledge becoming a viable source of theory itself, for example, but more importantly it would mean the entrenchment of colonially inflected reading strategies in world literary critical practices.

Worlding the postcolonial: a decolonized postcolonial reading practice

The rise of world literature in academia is profoundly connected to Suman Gupta's world literature nexus.¹⁷ There is a determining geoculture to the definition, compilation, circulation, and reception of world literature, which is informed by coloniality. Coloniality in the project of world literature means that the hierarchies of reading practices, canon formation, and genre differentiations are propagated through a newly conceptualized world literary system in both the textualist and the

ideological branches of this system. For many, the remedy for the sweeping homogenization of world literature in the construction of a universal world literary system lies with the internationalism of the left (see Hassan 46; Graham, Niblett, and Deckard 466). However, if the postcolonial left's handling of indigeneity is any indication, then the international left alone is not enough. My position is that this coloniality requires the critical vigilance and anti-colonial conscience of a decolonized postcolonialism, and for that to happen, the insights of the MCD school of thought need to be taken seriously.

I propose that this process can take place only from within a worlded postcolonialism, which uses a reading strategy that does not marginalize indigenous ways of knowing. Although various scholars, including Bhambra,¹⁸ Boehmer, Helgesson, and the editors of the 2012 special issue "Postcolonial Studies and World Literature" of *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*,¹⁹ have all noted postcolonialism's epistemological crisis, none have used the critique of the MCD school of thought to develop a non-co-optative reading strategy.

For example, in their introduction to the 2012 special issue "Postcolonial Studies and World Literature" of *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, Graham, Niblett, and Deckard conceptualize world literature as the literary face of neoliberal capitalism and address the worlding of literary criticism, that is, the comparatist and postcolonialist response to "the historical changes in the world-system characteristic of late capitalism" (465). Graham, Niblett, and Deckard offer a recalibration of "the emergent field of world literature from a materialist perspective," with the development of "new forms of reading praxis attentive to the specific articulations of and engagements with unevenness in literary works" constituting the first part of the recalibration (466). The second part of this recalibration is "to grapple with the materiality of world literary production" (466). These propositions are, in effect, a materialist rearticulation of the two basic elements of Dariosch's definition of world literature as a mode of reading literary texts that circulate beyond their point of origin. The world literary criticism proposed by Graham, Niblett, and Deckard explores "both the aesthetic mediations of the experiences of unevenness within particular literary texts and the dynamics of consecration and domination to which they are subject" (467). Still, problems arise with the suggested reading model, which is adapted from Casanova's methodology. Graham, Niblett, and Deckard claim the following:

Casanova offers a valuable paradigm for reading combined and uneven development in her concluding exploration of how Faulkner's revolution of the novel form became a model for literary expression throughout the Global South because of its potential for registering the peculiar mixtures of modern and residual social formations produced in the periphery. (467)

Casanova's methodology presents a few problems. First, esthetics is a particularly Eurocentric way of knowing creative output. Second, the need to keep to the Anglo-American hubris of point zero as the model, or yardstick, by which all literary output is measured needs to be redressed. Lastly, "modern and residual social formations" is an unqualified revisitation of the essentially uninformative modernity and

tradition binarism. Again, these boundaries and binaries are based on a specific geopolitics on knowledge.

What I am proposing, instead, is a reading methodology that follows along the same lines as Revathi Krishnaswamy's world literary knowledges,²⁰ with one important difference: It is more engaged with the MCD school of thought. It is a reading methodology designed to undermine the co-optative mechanism in Eurocentric reading practices.

World literature, in its current globalist phase, is almost uniformly imagined in terms of reading strategies. Damrosch's "mode of reading and circulation," Moretti's distant reading, Casanova's "World Republic of Letters"—reading tools developed from "the vast, invisible territory," which she calls "the 'World Republic of Letters'" (73)—and Apter's "untranslatability" all deal with the politics and modalities of reading world literature, but not with the epistemic coloniality embedded in these reading practices. Thus, instead of Moretti's "distance," which, for him, is "the condition of knowledge" based on an imagined computational objectivity, I would like to base the decolonized reading strategy on a situational awareness of the geopolitics of knowledge. After all, the units, "devices, themes, tropes—or genres and systems" (Moretti 57), which his distant reading brings to the surface, are themselves products of Eurocentric literariness. Moretti accepts the Eurocentre as a *fait accompli* and not as a culprit in the systematic marginalization of other ways of knowing.

Border reading is the reading method I propose. It is based on Mignolo's border thinking or border gnosis, which he defines as follows: "'Border gnosis' is the subaltern reason striving to bring to the foreground the force and creativity of knowledges subalternized during a long process of colonization of the planet, which was at the same time the process in which modernity and the modern Reason were constructed" (*Local Histories/Global Designs* 13). Mignolo also points out the following: "This is not a new form of syncretism or hybridity, but an intense battlefield in the long history of colonial subalternization of knowledge and legitimation of the colonial difference" (*Local Histories/Global Designs* 12). Border thinking creates new loci of enunciation that produce new forms of previously subalternized knowledges.

Because reading strategies have been identified as the key constituents in world literature formulations, the border reading intervention is all the more pertinent. Border reading as such can be envisioned as an offshoot of Vilashini Cooppan's global reading that finds in the globalization of literary studies an opportunity for "reinventing it, which is also to say returning it to its disciplinary roots and learning (again) that moving, unsettling, relational thinking in which we see nation and discipline through the local, yet as part of the global" (20). Instead of positing the uncanny²¹ as the qualifier of difference, I suggest exploring coloniality as definitive in the construction of difference, especially where indigeneity is concerned.²²

A border reading practice is attentive to different epistemologies and their role in transforming/informing both narrative techniques and content. Border reading makes reading literary

narratives a subversion of Eurocentric differential values, as well as of cultural grammar and its attendant grid of research techniques and ethics. It is a practice that is profoundly invested in the critique of coloniality and is specifically attentive to indigenous knowledge. This is how it resists the co-optative projection of global designs. To avoid reinscribing colonizing forms of knowledge in postcolonial critical practice means to abandon the superior episteme, to accept the confluence of epistemes in the critical practices of reading, to adopt a self-conscious understanding of disciplinary epistemological conditioning, and to apply methods of analysis that do not co-opt the indigenous episteme.²³

Border reading, therefore, does not entail reading indigenous epistemologies as allegories, nor does it involve gleaning indigenous knowledge from the text and reincorporating “that information into an available body of Western cultural myths” (Huggan 110). It is about reading literature from and for indigenous knowledge. It is to go on from this new epistemic locus, to read dominant modes of knowledge construction, and to examine how the coloniality of power is at play in the hierarchization of what is and is not considered valid literary critical practice. To border read is to read literature as epistemologically informative—to read literature for what it knows.

The hegemony of Western ways of knowing has reached unprecedented efficacy with the globalization of the book industry, the corporatization of universities, and the widespread implementation of an academic accreditation system. These three facets of academic globalism are responsible for universalizing the values, differentials, and qualification of Euro-American ideas of what counts as knowledge. Not only are these norms imbibed by foreign academics who learn and undergo mentoring and training in Western academia, but they also now infiltrate the sociopolitical and economic strata of societies via the various satellite campuses of Euro-American universities in countries such as Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, China, and Singapore. The disciplinary location most affected by these sets of norms and practices is arguably the field of the humanities, and in particular, literary studies. Curricula are being imported along with course specifications, learning outcomes, and methods of assessment based on templates engineered in mostly Anglo-American centers of learning. These specifications are the outcome of a long history of occidental epistemological development, the idiosyncrasies of which are perhaps nowhere more marked than in teaching Naguib Mahfouz’s *Zaabalawi* in English to Saudi students enrolled in a world literature course, using literary criticism developed and institutionalized elsewhere.

Elleke Boehmer’s cautious, conciliatory meditation on the importance of the “world” as a signifier comes from her own experience as a postcolonialist professor of world literature in English at the University of Oxford, where she has witnessed the embeddedness of world “on the administrative and pedagogic side, as a seemingly more neutral, more inclusive term” (301). Nonetheless, Boehmer’s meditation strongly advocates for postcolonialism’s continued relevance as a check to “the politics of world literary study and its Enlightenment legacies” (305) and to the forceful violent and imposed

nature of global interaction as seen from “the condition of the less empowered” (305). Granted, as Boehmer says, “for postcolonial criticism there is no transparent medium to a literary work, and no a-political content”; however, I must disagree with her claim that “as a field, postcolonialism has consistently taken histories of dissent on the world’s margins, and knowledge and theories from below, as formative” (306).

What happens with the spill over from comparative literary studies, postcolonial literary studies, and commonwealth studies into world literary criticism—all of which exist within the ambit of Eurocentric literary epistemologies—is that indigenous narratives will continue to be read using inadequate conceptual tools and, more important, indigenous theorizations on literature will be ignored. If a pluriversal and decolonized world literary system is to be imagined, then a delinking with Eurocentric literary practice should be the foundational step. The following step would entail devising a reading strategy that is attentive to coloniality and aims to avoid replicating it. I believe that such a strategy must be built on Mignolo’s border gnosis.

The overall position of the current undertaking speaks to the possibility of formulating an MCD perspective on the category of the literary. This possibility has been explored from the vantage point of a critique of postcolonialism’s inattentiveness to indigeneity and what this entails in terms of world literature as global literary design. Granted the idea that knowledge functions as site of resistance to global designs, may be subject to debate, especially with regards to critics of MCD. That said, however, I believe that there are substantial structural gains to be had from the thoroughgoing epistemic critique presented by various thinkers associated with the MCD school. Knowledge/power has been a long standing bulwark of postcolonial theorization, but I believe that the rethinking of this paradigm that has taken place from the position of the *damné*, as Maldonado-Torres, has it, is a more convincing critique if one is to continue to respect the will and the contribution of indigenous knowledge as an viable interlocutor.

If, as Moretti claims, “the study of world literature is—inevitably—a study of the struggle for symbolic hegemony across the world” (64), why should scholars forfeit this struggle by accepting subalternity as a permanent condition?

Notes

¹ This school of thought was put forward by a group of scholars involved in the modernity/coloniality/decoloniality project, as articulated in Walter D. Mignolo and Arturo Escobar's 2010 book, *Globalization and the Decolonial Option*. This group was an offshoot of the 1998 split in the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group.

² The term *subaltern* here stands for the various disenfranchised social actors, including the multitude, the indigenous, and the damnés (for the respective associations of these terms, see Mignolo "Delinking" 501).

³ See the 2001 *PMLA* special issue "Globalizing Literary Studies."

⁴ Parry, like Lazarus, is involved with the Warwick Research Collective's work on world literature, which is understood as the literature of global capitalism.

⁵ Lazarus works from Moretti's "one but unequal" world literary system to postulate a nonproblematic coexistence of various local cosmopolitanisms (see "Cosmopolitanism"). Whereas Lazarus would delink modernity "from the idea of the West" and tie it "instead to the idea of the capitalist world-system" ("Cosmopolitanism" 122), Mignolo strongly links modernity with the capitalist world system and with occidental knowledge construction.

⁶ See Boehmer.

⁷ Although it can be rightly argued, as Giles Gunn does in the 2001 *PMLA* special issue "Globalizing Literary Studies," that globalization is nothing new and has been around for ages, it has, since the 1990s, stood in for US neocolonial imperialism and has had a very complex and amorphous interaction with literature and literary studies. For a useful summation of these, see Gupta 65.

⁸ "The critique of outmoded temporal frameworks is reflected in many recent projects to use new spatial forms of organization as opposed to the traditional narrative sequentiality that informed literary history in its classical period" (Cabo Aseguinolaza, "The Spatial Turn" 2).

⁹ Ramon Grosfoguel, a founding contributor to the MCD school of thought, defines coloniality as a "structuring process" whereby "the cultural, political, sexual and economic oppression/exploitation of subordinate racialized/ethnic groups by dominant racial/ethnic groups" continues "with or without the existence of colonial administrations" in such a way that informs "current global colonial/racial hierarchies" (n. pag.).

¹⁰ Wail Hassan presents a useful distinction between "globalization of literary studies" and the older concept of "world literature" (Goethe's notion), where world literature is linked "to the internationalization of culture that resulted from the emergence of capitalism as the dominant mode of production in modern Europe" and the globalization of literary studies "is affiliated with the globalization of capital, or late capitalism in the post-Cold War era" (39).

¹¹ A notable exception is, as Brydon points out, Jace Weaver's essay, "Indigenism and Indigeneity," which is included in Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray's 2000 book *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies*.

¹² Kumar states the following: "The gradual refashioning of postcolonial humanism into 'anti-essentialist', 'anti-foundationalist' categories in the guise of contrapuntality, hybridity and 'unnameable alterity' has only served the detractors of indigenous rights and its theory" ("(An)other Way" 1569).

¹³ The draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples features reasonable demands such as the prevention of forced assimilation, the preservation of indigenous cultures, the restitution of cultural property (including human remains) and languages, and the right to self-determination. Thus, Article 3 of the draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples defined self-determination as indigenous peoples' right "to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development" (Kumar "(An)other Way" 1566).

¹⁴ The aforementioned postcolonialist conditional restitution of nativism resonates strongly with Kumar's observation that the nation-state-based understanding of the universal human is taken "to be an adequate proxy for individual equality for all ('turning everyone to be a lawful citizen')," which "has led to a forcible assimilation of indigenous people into modern state systems in recent times" ("(An)other Way" 1562). Kumar's critique reveals that the nation-state is implied as the ideal against which indigeneity is viewed and utilized and to which it is subordinated.

¹⁵ Mignolo states the following: "The control of subjectivity (the Christian faith, secular idea of subject and citizen) and knowledge (the principles of Theology structuring all forms of knowledge encompasses in the Trivium and the Quadrivium; secular philosophy and concept of Reason structuring the human and natural sciences and the practical knowledge of professional schools; e.g., Law and Medicine, in Kant's contest of the faculties)" ("Delinking" 332).

¹⁶ Gikandi states that the "postcolonial perspective on globalization has been the most salient attempt to question older forms of globalization" (636). O'Brien and Szeman also note that "no other critical practice has foregrounded the links between cultural forms and geopolitics to the degree that postcolonial studies has over the past four decades" (606). In addition, Loomba states that "postcolonial scholars are well positioned to trace contemporary global inequities in the often-confusing landscape of contemporary economics, politics and culture" (227).

¹⁷ This industry is the world literature nexus, whereby the advanced corporate capitalist elites govern what becomes published from around the world through "a manipulation of literary products from, so to speak, outside literature"; the literary canon is determined "by processes of controlling the production, marketing and circulation of books at a well-orchestrated global level"; and, finally, "[t]hese factors in turn structure literary studies, which are dependent on markets too and which therefore have to attend to what is made visible and available for literary pedagogy and research" (Gupta 161).

For a perspective on the relationship between “world literature” US hegemony and the global education market, see Spivak’s 2005 work titled “Commonwealth Literature and Comparative Literature.”

¹⁸ Bhabra states the following: “Postcolonialism and decoloniality are only made necessary as a consequence of the depredations of colonialism, but in their intellectual resistance to associated forms of epistemological dominance they offer more than simple opposition. They offer, in the words of María Lugones, the possibility of a new geopolitics of knowledge” (120).

¹⁹ They insist “that the ‘postcolonial’ remains vital to the critique of the capitalist world-system” (Graham, Niblett, and Deckard 468).

²⁰ Krishnaswamy notes that “scholars in different parts of the world are today engaged in the difficult task of recuperating and reactivating diverse indigenous knowledges appropriated by coloniality/modernity (Mignolo 110)” (143). Krishnaswamy then states the following: “I would like to propose as a new component to global literary studies the category ‘world literary knowledges,’ the purpose of which is to open up the canon of literary theory and criticism to alternative ways of conceptualizing and analyzing literary production. This means that regional, subaltern, and popular traditions, whether latent or emergent may be studied, analyzed, and evaluated as epistemologies of literature/literariness alongside the traditions of poetics that currently constitute both the canon (Euro-American) and the counter-canon (Arabic, Sanskrit, Chinese, Japanese) of literary theory. This also means that conceptualizations of literature/literariness may be approached as historically and culturally situated knowledges (or ideologies)—but without foreclosing the possibility that an open-ended, cross-cultural study of literary knowledges from around the world might at some point disclose certain literary or aesthetic features that characterize our shared humanity” (143–144).

²¹ This new way of reading globally is conceptualized as an experience of the “uncanny”: “The literary zone of ‘what is like-but-unlike’ marks out a strikingly similar space to the uncanny’s disjunctive merging of the familiar and the strange, the present and the past, the repressed and the returned” (Cooppan 21).

²² Spivak is perhaps the most imaginative and synthesizing in this respect, offering a modified method of close reading that is de-Eurocentric and is a “literary verbatim” that “can make the psychic apparatus change directions; may, even, perhaps upgrade it” (18). According to Spivak, this method—infused with “the already-existing resources of what is called Area Studies in the US, institutes with a worldwide network, if tempered with the built-in anti-imperial auto-critical irony of the best of Commonwealth literature”—is the only deterrent if “Commonwealth Literature *and* Comparative Literature” are not to “give way to a version of World Literature coming from the US” (18–19). Here, she advocates a retraining of the imagination for a politics of friendship that is based on Derrida’s teleopoiesis.

²³ For an example of border reading in practice see Alfaisal, Haifa Saud. 2014. “World reading strategies: border reading Bandarshah.” *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* (34):199-226.

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