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Rethinking Regions: Locality and Circulation in South Asia

Anne Murphy and Philipp Zehmisch
GUEST EDITORS

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Benjamin Dorman and Frank J. Korom

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Benjamin Dorman
Nanzan University

Frank J. Korom
Boston University

Editors' Note

This issue sees a number of changes to the journal. Frank Korom has retired from Boston University and has moved to Santa Fe, New Mexico. As an emeritus professor of religion and anthropology, Frank will maintain his connection to BU and also continue to work with Benjamin Dorman as co-editor of this journal. With Frank's retirement, we also say goodbye to our editorial assistant Fathimath Anan Ahmed, who has taken a tenure-track position in medical anthropology at the University of Rochester. She has been with the journal since 2022 (beginning with *Asian Ethnology* 81 1&2). In thanking her for her excellent work on the journal including this issue, we wish her all the best for her future.

On behalf of Nanzan University and *Asian Ethnology*, we are sincerely grateful to Boston University for providing the funding to support the employment of editorial assistants since 2011. This substantial contribution has benefited the journal immeasurably.

A project is currently underway at the Nanzan University Anthropological Institute to examine various parts of the journal's long history, and particularly its association with Nanzan University, which officially began in 1974. The university is connected to the Society of the Divine Word Roman Catholic order. The first editor, Mathias Eder, was a member of this order, as is our predecessor and second editor, Peter Knecht. This research project in part examines the history of the journal through the contributions of these editors. We are pleased that Peter is still involved with the journal, publishing a book review in this issue.

Thank you again for your support of *Asian Ethnology*. We look forward to continuing to publish academic work in the form of special issues and articles, along with book and film reviews.

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Anne Murphy
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Philipp Zehmisch
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Guest Editors' Introduction

Rethinking Regions

Locality and Circulation in South Asia

The intellectual formation of "area studies" has been subject to significant critique in the early twenty-first century; at the same time, intellectual work continues to be grounded in particular regions and understandings of regions (Fleschenberg and Baumann 2020; Harootunian 2012; Spivak 2008). The "region," therefore, remains salient. The special issue "Rethinking Regions" seeks to engage with our understanding of the "region" and its continuing relevance, with simultaneous recognition that the cultural formations in specific regions are intimately linked to a broad range of cultural practices across a wide geographic range, and wider cultural forms have particular local articulations. The issue therefore presents case studies that deconstruct and destabilize bounded or fixed notions of the region and replace them with a more dynamic approach focused on context, temporality, and interconnected spatiality. This introductory article lays out the conceptual parameters of the special issue and discusses each article in the context of the larger theme.

Keywords: region—area studies—locality—circulation—South Asia

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The intellectual formation of "area studies" has been subject to significant critique, yet most of us continue to think and work in regional terms (Fleschenberg and Baumann 2020; Harootunian 2012; Spivak 2008).[1] This is a necessary feature of historically tuned, highly contextualized work. Such a commitment is not, therefore, to be dismissed easily. At the same time, we know that the cultural formations in specific regions are intimately linked to a broad range of cultural practices across a wide geographic range, and wider cultural forms have particular local articulations. Locally situated knowledge is thus emplaced in a world of globally entangled orders of knowledge (Baumann et al. 2020, 102).

While the vernacular—which may be understood both in linguistic terms but also more broadly as a locally rooted dimension of everyday life—has been examined in recent scholarly literature in relation to the cosmopolitan, there is still room for exploration of the contours of its relationship with the cross- or transregional (Pollock 2006). In what ways could a transregional reading enhance our understanding of specific regions in themselves and in their multiplicities, adding complexity to how we understand the local and particular? How can we usefully investigate the impact of cross-regional circulation on the making of the vernacular/local/regional, in order to enhance our understanding of how boundaries of language, tradition, place, and belonging are both maintained and crossed through the construction of different layers of regional imaginaries? These questions undergird this special issue, which brings together anthropological and historical engagements with the constitution and reformulation of various regionalizing—or, to put it another way, region-making—dynamics.

Thinking about "regions" and "areas"

Seeking to critically investigate academic representations of the "region," one needs to consider the intellectual and theoretical intersections between regionally situated work and the broader idea of "area studies," an interdisciplinary venture that explores the particularities that make one cultural or physical place in our world different from another. In the final decades of the twentieth century, this domain of inquiry came under powerful critique for its tendency to replicate colonial and Cold War spatial frames; its promotion of archaic, essentializing concepts that particularize human experience instead of representing holistic aspects and

ontologies; and its adherence, in its institutional as well as intellectual formations, to US-defined geopolitical and economic interests. In Harry Harootunian's words, area studies act as a "desire," one that "has been a silent accomplice, duplicitous in its capacious desire to serve a state that sought to refashion the world through unbound capitalism"; he argues it was replaced by an "identity studies" that replicated, while inverting, many of its forms (Harootunian 2012, 10). Scholars across disciplines thus face an ethical and intellectual question, as Natalie Koch put it:

> How do we, scholars-as-situated-actors, represent people and places in a manner that does not further entrench colonial power structures, which have long pervaded academic disciplines and area studies programs? (Koch 2016, 809)

More recently, significant numbers of anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and other empirically working researchers have shown a decisive reluctance to label themselves as working on different regions or even to represent themselves as regional specialists. This reflects the prioritization of theory-driven over regionally situated work that is an undercurrent of contemporary anthropological and ethnographic practice, and to a lesser but still significant degree, parallel emphasis on the global and transregional in historically oriented disciplines. There is a longer disciplinary history to this: within anthropology, there has been an ongoing tension between theoretical schools with a more universalist orientation, such as Structuralism and Historical Materialism, and particularist approaches, for example the Historical Particularism founded by the "father of American anthropology" Franz Boas (1897), which repudiated comparative methods and emphasized descriptive studies of particular local cultures (Lewellen 2003, 1,5).

This tension emerged in more recent times in globalization debates around the turn of the millennium over how to conceptualize the role of the regional in relation to the transregional, national global, and transnational (Friedman 2002; Inda and Rosaldo 2002; Mignolo 2000; Juergensmeyer 2014, XV). A refurbished notion of the region did emerge in work on transnationalism, where the importance of location was seen in dynamic relation to broader processes of globalization, such as in Arjun Appadurai's (1996) much debated concept of "scapes," which implies the circulation of media, ideologies, finances, and people in enmeshing forms of border-crossing motion and mobility.[2] Definitions, understandings, and constructions of regionalism were configured in this context in relation to new modes of global interrelatedness, accompanied by intensified patterns of exchange and circulation through cross-border connectivity and movement (Hannerz 1996), leading to a perceived "time-space compression" (Harvey 1989).[3] Transregional dynamics ultimately took precedence in such work. In her important work *Friction*, Anna Tsing maintained that while scholars had earlier conceptualized "cultures" as isolated and particular, "it has become increasingly clear that all human cultures are shaped and transformed in long histories of regional-to-global networks of power, trade, and meaning" (Tsing 2004, 3). Much recent work is, in keeping with this formulation, configured in thematic, conceptual, or discourse-oriented terms on holistic topics such as energy, bureaucracy, pandemics, natures-cultures, the Anthropocene, climate change, more-than-human ontologies, phenomenological questions, and futurities, or the ontologies

of species (Graeber 2015; Heywood 2017; Tsing 2015). These topics are often self-consciously presented as more original and progressive in their conceptualization, and claimed as an intellectual departure from an established corpus of ethnographic work by conservative scholars, who, as an American colleague reported to one of us in personal conversation, still work on regions and define their disciplinary identities through them. In other words, regionally informed work on or even about people or ethnic groups is out, at least in some anthropological circles. It is also a dynamic in other fields: Deepika Bahri has noted the relative decline of South Asian literary study, which she argues compares "poorly at best with other area-based disciplinary entities, such as African and Caribbean Studies" (Bahri 2017, 53).

There is validity in the concern that regionally grounded work that induces theoretical knowledge from regionally coherent patterns can espouse a kind of cultural relativism, overlooking ontologies and phenomenologies with broader transregional or transnational salience; instead, they can reify, essentialize, other, and Orientalize "other cultures" that are predominantly located in the Global South. Yet, at the same time, most anthropologists and other scholars who work with empirical data ground their work in particular localities; the anthropologist's emic experiences contribute to their data, and their "ethnographic authority" (Clifford 1983) proceeds from this first-hand (regional) "field" experience. This is parallel to the role of the archive in the historian's domain: archives are grounded in place and time, with their own histories of emergence and use, in a significant way. There is a discrepancy, therefore, between a theoretical commitment to the universal and the "trans-" and the regional grounding that sustains scholarly inquiry, across disciplines.

Naming this concern about broad thematic analytical frames must not suggest that we disregard the value of the exciting and important topics and approaches mentioned. Instead, we propose that such approaches can have a productive impact on our understanding of regional locatedness as a contested form of everyday negotiation in the lives of almost everyone living on planet Earth. Despite recent trends in scholarship, perhaps, people from around the world do (one might say stubbornly, in the eyes of those who see this as passé) express their belonging in regional or local affiliations, often linked to notions of ethnicity, language, geography, and positionality vis-à-vis dominant groups or states. There are grounds, therefore, for embracing a critique of regional particularism without disavowing the importance of regional/local/particular dynamics, histories, and movements. The universalizing forces of climate change and anthropogenic destruction of the Earth must therefore, due to global participation in an interconnected sphere, be brought into productive conversation with multiple located and grounded ontologies that construct regions as assemblages of diverse human and more-than-human entities that deserve to be conserved and protected against impending destruction through capitalist modernity.

Trends, of course, vary across disciplines. Beyond anthropology, in fields such as geography, there has been a call to return to the region as an analytic since the early twenty-first century, after the heyday of criticism; this has been called area studies' "third wave" by James Sidaway (2017), in an edited volume by Katja Mielke and Anna-

Katharina Hornidge. As Natalie Koch (2016) has suggested, it may be time now for a "critical area studies" to emerge out of earlier more programmatic rejections of the regional. In this, she draws on earlier discussion of the need for an antidote for the "thin knowledge" that operates in politics and government; as described by Gerard Toal in 2003, this is "to re-think the commitment to the systematic and global and re-assert the importance of regional geographical knowledge, especially in the light of contemporary geopolitics" (Toal 2003, 654). While Toal's call to action for regional thinking too easily adheres to the US-driven geopolitical analytic that undermined the intellectual purchase of area studies in the first place, that is not the only way to imagine the need to think through space with attention to place. In this same period, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak spoke of a "rekindled hope of a new regionalism," one that was not reduced to the geopolitical interests of the United States but instead pursued an "exercise for imagining pluralized Asias" that would not construe the notion of the region in competitive terms (that is, *this* region versus *that* region; Spivak 2008, 2). Spivak instead proposed that "expanding versions of postcolonial theory would have to 'pluralize' Asia, rather than singularize it so that it was nothing but one's own region" (Spivak 2008, 8); this is mirrored in Harootunian's call for a "critical regionalism" that does not replicate the flawed logic of area studies in nativist terms (Harootunian 2012, 18).

What we need, perhaps, then, is what Neilesh Bose (2017, 43) calls "a decolonized variant of area studies," where the region operates at multiple levels: the supranational, the continental, the national, the subnational, the natural, the cultural, the very local; all of these are produced and replicated simultaneously through interactions and movement, and in relation to the construction of space as metropole/colony, center/periphery. While paying due respect to the analytical legitimacy, valor, and rigor of recent approaches to large themes and theories, therefore, we fundamentally disagree with the devaluation of regionally situated knowledge production. We believe that most questions of planetary significance may be only addressed by thoroughly understanding the regional dimensions of knowledge and action. Putting them into a comparative theoretical framework would be the next, albeit important, level of abstraction. Neglecting the local situatedness of knowledge, in all its complexity, would, in our view, debase the ontological and phenomenological dimensions of knowledge. At the same time, these regions themselves need to be interrogated, to see how they are constituted in multiple and sometimes contradictory terms.

For us, the debate on the regional is not one of cultural relativism against universalizing tendencies but one of rethinking and thinking through the region by addressing questions of contemporary theoretical relevance that must always be situated and attentive to the ways in which such situatedness is produced. Here, the regional and the local must be seen as overlapping modes of self-description in a world that is turning ever more self-reflexive with regards to notions of identification and belonging. There are different types of regions, which we seek to analyze: semantic, metaphorical, linguistic, geographic, environmental, and military, et al. By examining these different kinds of regional formations, we can allow the region

to function as a multivalent and changing form, which produces knowledge in the process of its very own production, and at different temporal and spatial scales.

Crucial for an understanding of emerging forms of regional modernity, as the negotiated space between the local and the global, is a renewed emphasis on the nation-state (Sivaramakrishnan and Agarwal 2013). While globalization was once seen to destabilize the nation-state idea (Appadurai 1996), implying shifting notions of sovereignty, territoriality, citizenship, and belonging, the emotionally and politically loaded nation-state concept continues to be relevant for peoples across the world—a recent *Asian Ethnology* special issue, edited by Frank Korom and Jan Magnusson (2021), highlights the plurality and multiplicity of the nation-state concept by discussing several regional examples of South Asian nationalisms. The changing dynamics of imagining the nation-state imply the renegotiation of its administrative, territorial, and ideational units, be they subordinated, dependent, or autonomous. This has profound effects on how the idea of the region itself may be understood in relation to the internal boundaries of districts, regional states, or provinces; in relation to external borders; and, lastly, in relation to the global public sphere, which is perceived as increasingly unbounded, multi-scalar, and composed of different ontological dimensions. Changing perceptions of the "global" have therefore caused a shift in what the "local" means, which, in turn, complicates traditional notions of the "regional"—both at the analytical and at the demotic level.

From the Free State of Jefferson in Northern California and Southern Oregon (USA), to currently dormant but always possible Québécois movements for greater autonomy within Canada, to Catalonian nationalism in Spain and Flemish assertions of regional autonomy within Belgium, from the autonomous Kurdish zone in Rojava (Syria) to the contested status of Tamils in Sri Lanka and their relationship with Tamil Nadu in India, the notion of the region incorporates smaller localized units and both rejects as well as intersects with larger paradigms of nation, state, language, and ethnicity. The notion of the region is usually crafted by including both global connections and specific localities; landscapes, dialects, cultural or religious monuments and signifiers, myths and legends, as well as personalized narratives and collective (hi)stories lend each region a unique character. Where, we are asking, can one determine the intersecting forms of the "imagined community" (Anderson 1980) at the interstices of states and localities, within and across them, as multilayered and intertwined domains? The articles in this special issue engage with such questions.

Provincialized South Asia as a "region" or "area"

This special issue had its origins as a panel convened at a South Asian studies conference, the European Conference on South Asian Studies (ECSAS), and thus has a specific regional focus on South Asia; at the same time, it investigates constructions of the idea of the region itself. This demonstrates the ways in which regional imaginaries have prevailed, even as they have lost their salience in some disciplinary contexts. While, as Anne Murphy (2017) has argued elsewhere, the term "South Asia" can have real value in reaching beyond nationalizing discourses, this is not always the case: the problematic and conflict-prone potential of the notion of the region

itself can be grasped when looking at notions of South Asia employed by scholars of the region.

In conferences on South Asia, for example, scholars often say "South Asia" when they actually mean India. This may be due to the dominance of Indian scholars in the field and a kind of "methodological nationalism" (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2002; Beck 2011) at play, which often lends studies on India a hegemonic, representative status for the whole region. What was British India is, of course, now multiple states, but all too often India is allowed to stand in for all. The picture changes, of course, depending on where scholars are from and in which national cultures they were socialized. Hence, scholars put forward different notions and definitions of the term "South Asia," especially when encountering it at a conference on South Asia like the ECSAS. This demonstrates that a regional term is made meaningful in accordance with the positionality of the person or institution employing it, and the embeddedness of this person or institution in particular relations, fields, or coordinates of power and knowledge, often produced by or in relation to nation-state interests.

The conceptualization of South Asia as a region as being fraught with conflict is tinted with the dominant discourse of the late colonial period, and has complex contemporary articulations, both in popular discourse and in some academic works that might be understood as exhibiting "methodological nationalism" by lending authority to nationalist politics (cf. Patel 2017). At the same time, attention to the region can undermine the dominance of the nation-form. South Asian nation-states can be construed, for example, as a set of (sub)regions with clearly defined cultural features and histories that precede the existence of the nation-state as, for example, the Indian region of Saurashtra (Tambs-Lyche 1994). The relation between the region and the nation-state in India has thus been expressed as one of "the whole and its parts" that is divided, among others, into regional states formed (mostly) on the basis of linguistic majorities (Berger and Heidemann 2013). Here, regions tend to act as signifiers of cultural and linguistic boundaries, which can function both to limit and to reinforce attention to dominant or hegemonic languages and communities.

But what if the regional becomes a dynamic category that resists attempts by powerful actors to fix it? Ashis Nandy's description of South Asia—which he calls an "acultural, emotionally empty, territorial concept" (Nandy 2005, 542)—follows this path, valorizing those who defy an agonistic state system that is marked by a kind of fragility caused by both the commonalities that persist across borders in the region, and the effort to deny them. He thus highlights the failure of regional designations that adhere to nation-state divisions, since "these states are poorly grounded in the everyday lives, cultural and political preferences, and moral frames of ordinary citizens" (Nandy 2005, 541). We can see the flexibility of regional categories in Philipp Zehmisch's ethnography of the migrant and settler society of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal, where the notion of the (island) region functions as a "composed whole" of other regional identities; the term "Mini-India" thus represents a region that accommodates a multitude of diverse ethnic and linguistic groups, classes, and castes, as well as sects and religious communities of the Indian subcontinent (Zehmisch 2017). Here, a flexible and dynamic notion of the region emerges out of transcultural, diasporic encounters informed by travel, motion, and

mobility that merge, abandon, and fuse elements from regions of origin with new homelands. This culturally creolized assemblage has also been termed by one of Zehmisch's interlocutors as "Southeast India," hinting at its regional proximity to Southeast Asia and a separate regional identity (ibid., 83–85).

South Asia itself is one aspect of many different regions: Asia, the Indian Ocean World (Mann 2011), the "Belt and Road Initiative" imaginary and geopolitical project, and many others. As Spivak notes, "[t]here are no ingredients for unification for the regions that are opened up for a generalized cultural production of a revised continent-think" (Spivak 2008, 212). "What inclusive cultural matrix," Spivak asks, "exists in the history of the present for producing a region-think here?" in the case of that broader region known as "Asia." That continent, she argues, is "one continent in its plurality," not reduced to "our own regional identity" (Spivak 2008, 214); she thus advocates for "an anti-ethnicist regionalism" (Spivak 2008, 238) that allows for the articulation of an idea of "Asia" that prioritizes connectivity and diversity. The same can be said of "South Asia," allowing for a kind of global history of the region that recognizes the broader locations and wider valences that inform the region as a contested form.

This special issue

This collection of articles explores the way regions are and can be formed, found, and undermined. The idea of the region is most productive to think with when it is broken, when it is stretched and adapted, a category of difference within a larger arrangement of identifications. Particular localities cannot be understood without considering, first, their material and ideological composition, alongside their narrative, linguistic, and metaphorical dimensions. The contributions in this special issue highlight cultural and historical formations in specific regions of South Asia that are intimately linked to a broad range of practices across a wide geographic range, creolizing many of the pan-regional designations that frame scholarly work. At the same time, particular regional formations occur and take shape within them. Regions can thus be constituted by multiple features: by the physical landscape and more-than-human life forms; by language, religion, politics, caste, and gender; and by racial or ethnic identification. National or political formations constitute only one regionalizing force alongside these others. In what ways can a reconfigured regional as well as transregional reading of space, place, and time enhance our understanding of specific regions, adding complexity to how we understand the local and particular, and greater nuance and local specificity to that which is configured as the cosmopolitan? How can we usefully investigate the impact of cross-regional circulation on the making of the vernacular, in order to enhance our understanding of how boundaries of language, tradition, place, and belonging are both maintained and crossed?

Here, we seek to engage the dynamism and fluidity of the notion of the region itself. We explore its productive capabilities as it generates kinds of knowledge, for instance in notions of gender, caste, language, place and space, mobility, cultural production, bodily practices, and philosophy. At the same time, these notions of regionality are

embedded in far broader, transregional and transcultural, imaginative universes. What joins the articles in this issue, then, is a rethought notion of the region that is a product of, and shapes, the local and the global forces that form it.

The articles that comprise this special issue approach the set of conceptual issues outlined here from diverse locations and times, moving across textual, historical, and ethnographic domains. We open with articles that address the idea of the region through transgression of conventional regional designations, crossing borders and boundaries, while at the same time constructing new kinds of regional configurations and mappings. The first of these, Eléonore Rimbault's article, concentrates on Indian circuses as nomadic institutions that carry an ensemble of people, animals, and infrastructures over long distances. Eluding conventional regional conceptions of space and generic notions of scale, circus actors take decisions on where they move based on histories of collective movement, demonstrating particular ways to think about time and space that reflect a kind of spatial business acumen that is valorized by circus elites. Sarah Merkle-Schneider's contribution explores the complex dynamics between a local tradition dedicated to the deity Ellama, expressed through the adoption of feminine markers by biologically male devotees known as *jōgappa*, and broader transregional articulations of trans*femininity that are configured in more transformative bodily terms. This article suggests the ways the region is written into the body itself, and the sometimes-radical disjuncture between regionally defined and transregional cultural formations that cannot easily be reconciled.

We then bring these ethnographically oriented articles into conversation with articles that explore the historical rootedness of intersecting notions of the regional and the cross-regional. P. K. Basant's article returns to an earlier period with the idea of "Madhyadeśa" or "the middle country" in early India. Basant examines Sanskrit sources to understand how this regional designation was configured in Brahmanical and Buddhist texts before investigating the legacy of these ideas today and the problematic ways in which prior formulations are reconfigured and reproduced in the present. Basant's work thus seeks to uncover the problematic and shifting relationship between earlier conceptualizations of the region and contemporary claims of historical evidence in order to justify sociocultural phenomena such as caste-based inequality. Anne Murphy's contribution explores the ways Waris Shah's mid-eighteenth-century text *Hīr* articulates a Punjabi regional identity, even as transregional and cosmopolitan stories and histories are invoked, complicating our configuration of "Punjabiness" in the text. Here, a notion of the region is articulated in relation to other places. The article by Harald Tambs-Lyche investigates how two economically successful communities of high social status that are viewed as "foreign" by Tulu-speaking people in South Kanara, Karnataka, have been included within, and even enabled, an avowedly local and regional identity formation. Linking ethnographic data on the different castes and communities of South Kanara to a broad historical account, Tambs-Lyche analyzes the contradictory, yet common, process of crafting a regional designation by referring to a kind of "Other" or an "outside," while at the same time encompassing and incorporating that "outside" into the dominant regional formation. Adrián Muñoz's contribution focuses on the intricacies of transregional and transnational negotiations of religious mobility by

highlighting the influence that Indian philosophy and yoga had on Francisco Madero, one of the leading actors in Mexican politics at the beginning of the twentieth century. We see in this article the ways in which the travel of cultural elements both denies and reinforces nationalist formulations. The final article, by Esha Niyogi De, traces film practices that cross national boundaries and create a kind of transregional "filmic region" of both production and consumption. De's exploration of Urdu action heroine films from the 1970s to 1980s highlights the central role of women in the articulation of an extra-national, aesthetically constituted reframing of space and its demarcation.

Each of the articles in this special issue allows us to consider the region through both what constitutes it and what surpasses it, enabling us to reflect on the "work" the region as an idea does, and where it ceases to offer heuristic utility. Even in cases that challenge conventional notions of the region, the articles tell us that attention to how space is imagined, and how boundaries are formed—in multiple terms—remains one of our central tasks as we seek to understand cultural and historical formations.

Authors

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Notes

1. The order of the editors' names is alphabetical and does not indicate a first or second editor or author. Both editors contributed equally to the editing of the special issue and the Guest Editors' Introduction. Articles in this special issue emerged out of a panel at the European Conference for South Asian Studies (ECSAS) at the Centre d'Études de l'Inde et de l'Asie du Sud (Paris, France) in July 2018, which the authors convened with Michel Boivin (CNRS/CEIAS). We would like to thank the authors as well as other members of that panel and Michel Boivin for their contributions to

the conversations that resulted in this publication; Raghavendra Rao K.V. and Mukesh Kumar, for work with the images and one of these articles, respectively; the anonymous reviewers; and the editorial team at *Asian Ethnology*.

2. Appadurai, however, was criticized for not paying enough attention to local particularity in his grand narrative of globalization, while his rather metaphorical use of the "scape" has been viewed as rendering the concept "diffuse, not to say fuzzy" (Antweiler 2020, 82).

3. While the dynamics of globalization led to an increase in transnational connectivity, they have also caused deep-seated psychological and ontological insecurity among the masses due to medially augmented perceptions of risk (Beck 2011).

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Circus Routes

Representing India from the Perspective of an Itinerant Profession

Indian big top circuses carry an ensemble of people, animals, and infrastructures over long distances. Interviews with circus managers and owners about their itineraries suggest their representations of India elude some regional conceptions of space that are widespread and prevalent in South Asian studies. While regions bind together nearby places with a history of exchanges and common practices, circus routes are one modality by which distant places and regions can be defined and connected through the history of the people traveling through them. This article surveys some of the spatial features that managers and owners consider when determining circus routes. Circus routes highlight dynamic and business-oriented ways of thinking about India's territory, factoring in monsoons and droughts, ground availability and prices, and competition with other itinerant businesses. Building on ethnographic material, I show that business acumen in the circus community is primarily defined by a reading of space that successfully factors in this information. Ultimately, the development of circus geographies that do not readily map onto national, international, or subnational scales demonstrates how time and space can be configured in a specific way by one's belonging to a professional community.

Keywords: Indian circus—itinerant communities—migration—cosmopolitanism—Kerala

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I once asked Jimmy, a former circus manager, the son of a circus owner from North Kerala (India), how his company decided where the circus would settle its next camp. Explaining that the person in charge of this decision had varied over the years, he remembered: "Actually, my father was very good at that. He used a map of India: he would just pinpoint, with his hand like this *[he points to a place on an invisible map with his finger]*, and he'd say: 'this is the place.'"[1]

While Jimmy's gesture may be the product of rhetorical flourish or a kind of bravado, it does evoke a logic common to the stories of circus professionals. In their recollection of the way circus companies circulated, which not infrequently invokes romantic visions of the profession in its golden age, when it came to choosing their next destination "the sky was the limit," as long as there was an opportunity for "good collection" (the term used by owners to designate the earnings generated by ticket sales). A finger dropped on an imagined map could, and can still, determine the migration of several hundred people, a parade of elephants and other large animals, and equipment that would require and fill several dozen lorries or train cars.

In this article, the "circus" and "circuses" refer to nomadic entertainment institutions that carry an ensemble of people, animals, and infrastructures—most emblematically among these, a "big top" tent in which the circus show is performed—over large distances. Circus companies cater entertainment to the place where they set up their camp in the form of two to three circus shows daily, open for ticket sales. In India, there are circuses of different sizes: while overall all circus companies have steadily dwindled in size since the 1970s, even a small circus today will require the rental of ten or twelve lorries for transportation, and coordination of the journey for sixty to eighty employees. The larger circuses can be two to three times that large. Many circus companies allow employees to take leave on a rotational basis so the show can perform throughout the year and the circus infrastructure tour continuously.

Indian circus companies plan their movements in India[2] in order to move from one camp to the next as efficiently as possible. Travel dates are fixed in advance, three to six months before, sometimes longer: dates in large cities and for competitive grounds can be agreed upon years in advance. Camps are chosen for their profitability as performing sites, and the choice is constrained by the availability and competition for existing grounds (called *maithanam* in Malayalam and *maidan* in Hindi). Overall, distance between two camps plays a secondary role in deciding a future location. Few

Figure 1: Opening nights at new campgrounds for three circus companies originating from Kerala. On such occasions, the circus companies' infrastructures are typically inaugurated by a local official at the beginning of the first evening show, and are fully illuminated. Photographs by Eléonore Rimbault, 2019, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

of the managers and owners I have interviewed ventured to offer technical details or accounts about the traveling days, unless prompted: they have much more to say about the periods of promotion and camp construction that take place in the new site before the circus performance premieres.[3] It is part of the circus's image to mushroom suddenly in a place, to create a sense of urban transformation through the mysterious appearance of its remarkable infrastructure: the big top (figure 1).[4] Thus, although the circus is an itinerant institution, which by its own definition cannot settle, life on the road does not define it either. The circus is instead a site that continuously visits, and entertains, new places. This particular attitude toward traveling distinguishes Indian circus professionals I have spoken to from what is reported on other forms of itinerant entertainment and labor, in India and elsewhere. Itinerant sellers, or street performers, who move from place to place and are able to adjust to suddenly arising opportunities for business often seek to maximize the value of the distance traveled, either by minimizing their mileage or by flexibly seizing the opportunities a long journey generates.[5]

Circus routes (figure 2), the itineraries for travel from one place to the next elaborated by circus managers, inscribe the circus companies into the space they traverse and shape the temporality of circus life. They involve planned movement over long distances (by road or using the Indian railway network),[6] minimizing stops and time until arrival at the next settlement. In my interlocutors' narratives, a circus route is configured through a selective mode of recollecting that emphasizes time *in a place* over time *between places*. Whether my interlocutors occupy high-ranking positions in the circus and enjoy the expertise and mobility one can draw from constant traveling, or lower positions (as staff members or performers) caught up in mobile but repetitive routines of performance, circus routes are always a central structure in circus professionals' relationship to space and time. Because they reflect a pattern of interaction between a business that moves to meet its audience and Indian society, circus routes can serve as an index of changes in India's spatial dynamics. The migrations of people who enroll in the circus and the itineraries fixed in each circus company reflect transformations in India's economy. And as this article shows, the circus routes are also shaped by several environmental, logistical, and economic factors. Thus, changes in these routes also signal the transformations underway in India's geography and economy.

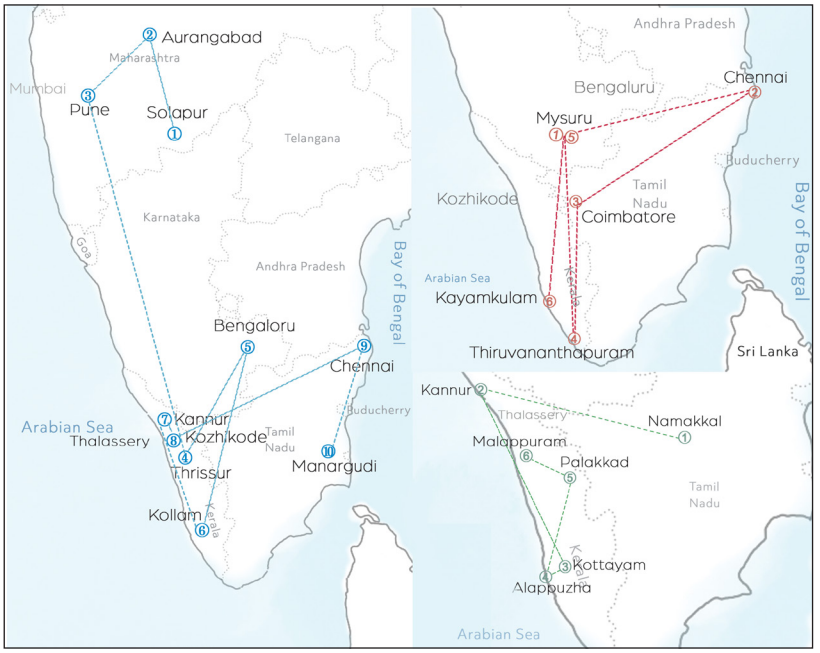

Figure 2. Maps representing the trajectories of three circus companies (2018–2020). These maps feature the sites of performance of three Malayali-owned circus companies (two circuses of roughly the same size on the left and top right, a smaller circus at bottom right). The lines represent schematically the order in which they visited various cities over the 2018–2020 period. Data collected and mapped by Eléonore Rimbault.

Circus routes express the professional acumen of circus managers and owners, who possess expertise in planning such itineraries; they embody the history of a professional group in continuous movement. I attempt to offer a description of these routes and the way professionals discuss them in part as a corrective for what I have experienced, in my ongoing education in the social sciences of South Asia, as a heavy reliance on a regional conceptualization of South Asia, even within India. While the division of South Asia's "sub-areas" in India along lines informed by historical and present administrative divisions (e.g., the Northeast, Kashmir), cultural similarities (South vs. North India), and physical geographical features (e.g., the Deccan) is relevant to and often instructive for research work, the tendency to seamlessly reinforce areas of demonstrated cultural consistency can obscure how local and insider perceptions of space might be connected to histories that build up through travels and regular visits. Frank Heidemann and Philipp Zehmisch offer a reflexive evaluation of academic appraisals of historical time after realizing that "[the informants from the Andamans and the researchers] applied different strategies to reduce the complexity of historical narratives," with Andaman informants placing more emphasis comparatively on the "spatial aspects" of history: "as memories of the past are to a certain extent spatially oriented, there is, consequently, a need to recognize that history is space-bound, too" (2016, 2). Here my argument concerning space offers some related insights, emphasizing ways in which my interlocutors' perception of space departs from widely shared conceptions of space ordered by

subnational, national, and international scales and foregrounds instead dynamic connections arising while navigating a territory over time. I venture that such appraisals of space invite academics to consider other ways of perceiving, thinking, and talking about space.

In the first section of this article, I explain why the way circus routes are talked about in circus companies calls for an approach to time and space that departs from the regionalism that dominates South Asian studies and area studies more broadly. I argue that focusing on how a set of cultural practices relates to a broader regional canon can obscure the singular ways in which a community comes to think about space, movement, and time.

The circus profession is defined by its ambulatory engagement with space, characterized both by the migratory patterns that lead people to enroll as circus professionals and by the continuous and recursive movement materialized by the circus routes. Consistently with this experience, circus professionals express a distinctive relationship to space, premised on the dual experience of migration to join a workplace and of the continuous movement of their workplace. The next section offers an ethnographic analysis of the planning of the circus routes, which is the responsibility of managers and owners. Highlighting the geographical information circus owners and managers take into account to determine the circus routes, this section shows how navigating the Indian territory becomes intuitive for circus owners and managers. In the final section, I show how the particular appraisal of space and time in the profession, while locally valued, remains idiosyncratic and left out of subnational, national, and international histories my interlocutors sometimes aspire to be a part of. I conclude by evoking the changes in contemporary circus routes, and by summarizing the implications of this study for rethinking regions in South Asian studies.

Thinking space beyond regional scales

Numerous anthropological and historical studies of the Indian subcontinent identify themselves as contributions to the study of South Asia as a region, or as studies of a region within South Asia. This regional angle of South Asian studies can be credited for allowing the analysis of phenomena downplayed by nation-centered analyses (Murphy 2017) and has also led to the development of intraregional literatures that provide a heuristic fragmentation of the subcontinent meant to represent India's cultural and historical specificity. While both of these tendencies in regional studies are useful to elucidate a broad range of behaviors, traditions, and migratory movements, they do not provide much footage to understand the professional culture of my interlocutors. While various scholars have scrutinized and critiqued area studies for the epistemological divisions they operate informed by Western academic interests (Dirks 2015, 265–90; Rafael 1994; Hirschman, Keyes, and Hutterer 1992), here I make a case for thinking outside regional categories not so much because of this academic history, but because thinking with regional scales can fail to account for how groups that travel on a regular basis, particularly a multicultural group such as circus professionals, come to think about space.

Circus professionals constitute a diverse and strongly stratified professional group. In a circus camp, people with very different biographical trajectories, professions, and backgrounds cohabitate continuously. The local status of these professionals does not map seamlessly onto prevalent status systems existing in South Asia (Nisha 2017, 2020). While the circus is not necessarily the space without caste, class, or religion that it claims to be (Champad 2012), the importance of caste and religion as identity markers is locally overshadowed by the divisions and ranking of the circus's three sectors of professional activity: management, performance, and camp maintenance.[7]

No traditional or formal restrictions limit enrollment into these groups on the ground of one's place of origin or religious or caste background. In that sense, the circus community differs from other entertainer communities of India for which affiliation is based on language, kinship, or cultural transmission. The circus industry is molded and characterized instead by what Vinay Gidwani and Kalyanakrishnan Sivaramakrishnan have defined as labor circulation, "the movement of people whose livelihood strategies involve relocation, both periodic and permanent, but whose self-making strategies retain a significant involvement with places of origin, especially rural homelands" (2003, 341). Indeed, even if the status of circus workers is determined inside the company and through the exercise of their profession, they remain attached to their place of origin, culturally and linguistically. Distinct patterns of circulation can thus be identified in the ways people from different parts of the subcontinent engage with the circus industry, since the early days of the circus in India.

The history of Malayali[8] engagement with the circus professions, which I have focused on ethnographically during the fieldwork conducted for my dissertation, is marked by a period of upward mobility between the 1920s and 1990. Throughout the history of the circus as a form of entertainment in India, and particularly in the second half of the twentieth century, many circus-owning families had their family homes (*tharavadu*)[9] in the north of Kerala (Champad 2013). Between the 1920s and the 1990s, a large number of artists, performing trainees, and staffers were also recruited in the surroundings of Thalassery, in Kannur district. The circus was perceived as a comparatively profitable profession for men and women, and an opportunity to live a more comfortable life for boys and girls in an otherwise difficult economic context, where job pays were insufficient to feed large families (Mathew and Nair 1978; Menon 1994; Prakash 1978). The circus ceased to be a competitive profession to join for the generations born in Kerala after the 1970s. As Filippo Osella and Caroline Osella have discussed in their ethnographic work (2000a, 2000b), the economic boom within the Gulf countries in the late 1970s created significant job opportunities for Malayali men, and temporary, job-related migration to Gulf countries led to an increase in family and state-wide revenues. The structure of this form of distant employment also helped to "maintain one's prestige by concealing one's occupation and by splitting the moment and site of wealth accumulation from its moment of consumption, enabling and encouraging a focus upon the result, cash earned" (2000a, 121). The 1990s liberalization of the Indian economy also offered (comparatively more educated) jobseekers better-paid jobs that were not as notoriously high risk nor as costly in terms of reputation livelihood as a circus performer.[10] Over these

decades, the economic situation of Kerala improved in comparison to other states, and the circus profession became less appealing locally. Professionals from other states began to outnumber Malayalis in the lower echelons of the profession. This corresponds to broader historical patterns of labor circulation that have brought workers to Kerala, a state now in demand of low-paid and informal labor. Today, the majority of South Asian artists who join the circus industry as performers have homes in Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Manipur, West Bengal, and Nepal. In addition, a small number of "star" performers are recruited abroad, in countries where circus training is conducted in specialized training institutions, facilitating the hiring of performers on the basis of annual or seasonal contracts. These artists receive visas for the duration of their contract, as well as higher (documented) wages. Since the 1990s, these performers have mostly come from Central Asian, post-Soviet countries (places with which there appears to be a longer history of collaboration) and African countries, in particular Ethiopia (Kendall 2017). Overall, the dearth of Malayalis and the demographic significance of performers from other states in Kerala-based companies are consistent with broader trends in migrations to Kerala motivated by its job prospects (De Haan 2002; Venkiteswaran 2017; Raj and Axelby 2019; Breman 2010).

While Malayali performers and staff members have become rarer, circus ownership has continued to be passed on in Kerala, from father to son, and these owners continue to hire Malayalis, mostly from Northern Kerala, to manage their circuses. Overall, this has resulted in the prominence and visibility of Malayalis in the circus industry's management positions. Among the three largest circus companies now active in India, two have management positions entirely staffed by Malayalis, with most of these managers established in the northern district of Kannur. Among the six circus companies I have regularly visited, five of them also had managers who were from Kerala. Shifts in the labor migration observable in the Malayali-owned circus companies suggest that hiring trends in the circus profession are consistent with broader migratory trends across India. As such, circuses are places that index contemporary economic and spatial dynamics, as well as interregional migration patterns. The concentration of a diverse group of circus professionals, with distinct and yet not unusual histories of migration, contributes to the peculiar sense of space and time that the circus generates, both as a site hosting such collectives and as a site of entertainment for spectators.

Indeed, the coordinated movement of these professionals coming from different places as a circus company impacts insiders' conceptualizations of time and space. Circus companies travel continuously throughout the year, most of them shifting their location every month or other month. They interact in limited ways with the places where they set their camps. Within the circus compound, the diverse origins of the performers and workers create a work environment that deviates from regionally situated, sedentary businesses. Circus professionals from Kerala-founded companies negotiate on a daily basis with a polyglot, multicultural group of coworkers: Malayalam, Hindi, and English are routinely used, in addition to the other languages circus workers happen to have in common (for instance, in the circuses I have visited, Assamese, Amharic—because of the large number of foreign performers

from Ethiopia that were hired from 2018 to 2020—and Tamil were also frequently used). Unlike industries relying on the services of intermediary staff managers (Raj and Axelby 2019; Sargent 2017), the scale of circus companies does not include mediator positions below that of the overseer of the camp and other managerial positions, frequently occupied by Malayalis. At most, a performer who was hired as part of an artist troupe may be assigned the role of negotiating with the camp manager, but this does not prevent others in the troupe from having to interact with and live alongside the other employees of the company. This necessary cohabitation renders all employees more versed than average in living alongside and interacting on a daily basis with people speaking different languages and belonging to different cultures and places of origin. Because of this, their outlook is characterized by the sort of cosmopolitanism Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan (2003) identify in their study of circular migration: circus professionals "straddle a world of difference . . . and come to recognize the political relations that secure and naturalize that difference." They "[transmit] through movements in geographic space not just sensibilities and ideas, but also the materials and techniques that enable the production and transformation of the social space of multiple worlds (not merely the social space of the rural, but also of the urban, the regional, the national, and what gets inscribed as the global)" (2003, 361–62). For circus professionals, this definition of cosmopolitanism seems to take on an additional dimension: while cohabitation in the circus company leads to the production of a social world in which multiple origin narratives and visions of India's regional constitution are expressed internally, the circus company is also a place that moves, where business is based on engaging with new places and new people. The reproduction of the circus as a performance exhibited to an ever-changing audience—namely the show, and its episodic installation and presence in sedentary spaces—engages and "transforms" the multiple worlds already contained by the circus as well as those of the places and people for which it comes to perform.

Because these spaces are often visited more than once, and because the circus routes have changed over time, there is a mnemonic and historical quality to the managers' and owners' navigation and descriptions of the Indian territory. This history is longer than the careers of today's professionals. The first circuses that visited India, mostly European ones (British and Italian), played in trading posts and large cities where British officers and families sponsored such shows. They visited the subcontinent as part of longer world tours that were facilitated by European colonial presence across Asia especially. When the first Indian circuses opened in the 1880s, they quickly engaged along the same routes, visiting metropolises, trading posts, and foreign destinations where circus shows were in demand, while also visiting more cities and towns in the subcontinent. Indian-owned companies continued to tour internationally for a hundred years. From the 1940s, Indian companies occasionally toured Malaysia, Singapore, the Middle East, and East Africa, in addition to many sites in India and Sri Lanka. Up until the 1990s, circus routes also included many local festival venues within India annually, which means the companies changed their location more frequently than they do now. Current circuses tour strictly within India, and big tops focus on renting grounds in metropolises where they can camp for months at a time. Nonetheless, the generations of professionals who were active

in the 1990s carry with them the memories and nostalgia for the broader routes they used to travel.

The geographical perceptions of Indian circus professionals invite us to put aside the regional divisions of India's territory to consider other ways of navigating the same space. First, the regional diversity of circus companies generates itinerant sites of cohabitation in which the workers' different cultures, languages, and biographical trajectories are gathered and engage with each other through the close proximity of circus life. Second, the way circus routes connect distant and apparently dissimilar sites calls for an inquiry into the motivations and logic of these itineraries, which I take up in the next section.

Circus routes

Detailed, lively, and nostalgic observations about the geography or social composition of a place that the circus visited are the privilege of a minority in the circus, who can go out and interact with their environment with comparatively more freedom: men rather than women, families and troupes rather than company boys and girls, managers and owners over employees. Thus, it is mostly those among the highest echelons of circus society—circus managers and owners—who are able to engage with the places traveled with enough autonomy to become curious and knowledgeable about these places. From the point of view of those in this position, this compares positively in relation to people of comparable economic status in their places of origin. Aware of this privilege, circus managers and owners are often keen to share their knowledge of a place. The pragmatic aspects of circus management, namely, living alongside people of different social status, origin, and language, and handling their issues on a daily basis, makes them astute observers of the ways of life, desires, and aspirations of others.

Jimmy explains to me in an interview that it was the extended stay in a place and proximity with its residents that made him remember his former profession with fondness:

> Now we go to a place and [when] we are there . . . Bengal for example, then we [get to] know the local culture, the people, what they eat . . . so closely we are involved, you know? For instance, we stayed in some place in Punjab. There are no hotels, so we stayed in somebody else's house. And then we get involved with their family and the culture of the family. Those are the memories that I miss actually . . . [when] we go for holidays, the show is running somewhere. My kids, my wife, my children, my sisters, the family—normally [when] we go for holidays, we stay and take a place for three days. We all hang out. But [in this case] we stay for a month, so one month we are in the same town, we go out and [discover the place]. . . . That's a big holiday, staying a month in one place.

He also noted that one of the perks of being a circus manager was the cultural and geographical knowledge one gains through such experiences: "how well we've seen the country . . . very few people have seen the country [in this way]." For managers and circus-owning families, traveling and staying in different places with different people constitute elements of their identity and inform their accounts of the places

they have lived at. The circus routes they describe are characterized by details on the sociological diversity of India, the cohabitation of speakers of different languages, and by their awareness of India's numerous festivals and pilgrimages—for which the circus can hope to provide a light but remunerative side entertainment. At once an affect-laden mnemonic feature and a form of business expertise, the knowledge gathered by being "close" to the people can be reinvested in making future decisions about where to set up a camp, directly shaping the future circus routes.

Because they are responsible for determining where it is best for the circus to go next, camp managers and owners must develop a sense of where a circus camp might be successful. To do so, they build on their past experiences and on the observation of the routes of other circus companies. They draw meaningful connections between towns and cities through their itineraries, which inform the way they continuously plan ahead to the next camps. Their curiosity and enjoyment of itinerant life and their business intuition blend into a noteworthy character trait remembered by their relatives outside the profession. As Shobha, the daughter of a successful circus manager (and founder of the large company Asian Circus)[11] who passed away in the 1970s, explains to me in an interview in October 2019,[12] her father "was a genius in circus." Explaining that her father was "very, very cunning and very able," managing up to four circuses at the same time at some point in his life, she adds that wherever he traveled, "his breath [was] always with the circus." In her description, as in Jimmy's description of his dad pointing out the next location on an imagined map, the circus owner is the embodiment of his business, with a physical knowledge that enables strategic decisions that must be taken to ensure the success of the company. Jimmy, who learned the circus business directly from watching his father, clarifies that what may look like intuition in the moment of decision-making is in fact structured by extensive practical knowledge about the places that can be toured:

> [Father] knew, he later developed it [that knowledge], [as he did] in Assam: what is the festival in that town, what is [the performance ground like] in that town, if it's raining there. . . . We know the geography of the country so well: the festivals, [the climate, etc.]. When it's raining, we play in Rajasthan, while in Kerala if it's raining you go to Tamil Nadu to compensate—like that.

Such accounts are useful to tease out concrete factors that weigh in the planning of the circus routes. Circus routes must consider the infrastructural needs of the company first and foremost. Circus life is organized around the tented shows that take place two to three times daily. The big top, as well as the rest of the camp, is installed outdoors, on an empty ground rented to the municipality or a private owner (figure 3). It is crucial that that ground stays dry and that it can attract enough crowds to cover what it costs to run the show with ticket sales.

Weather conditions are thus an essential criterion for selecting future destinations. Circuses must avoid areas affected by the monsoons and plan cautiously in areas with changing weather: strong rains can quickly damage the camp, the facilities in which the employees stay, and the tented ring; they can also compromise the performance. Cycling, bike stunts, and acrobatics can be visually less impressive, or pose greater danger to the performers, when they are performed in a ring where the floor is

uneven or wet. Unpredictable weather has made small circus companies particularly vulnerable to climate change in recent years. As another circus manager, Sajith, whose company Sun Circus has since shut down, explained to me during an interview in spring 2018:

> The climate conspired against us. Previously, we used to spend the rainy season in Tamil Nadu, where it didn't use to rain. But now June and July are highly unpredictable months, even there. And December, November, which are usually relatively dry in Kerala, have been very rainy this year.[13]

Another major factor at play in the charting of circus routes is the rental prices of grounds large enough to accommodate the performance tent and the compound. *Maidan* prices and their variations according to local festivals and competition with other aspiring users (other circuses, *mela*s, exhibitions, fairgrounds, and so on) are well known information among managers and circus owners.[14] The price of rental grounds is indexed to the size of the city, the area in which it is located, and its local popularity as a place to stroll by, in addition to the actual size of the *maidan* and its connections to urban infrastructure (bus service, ease of access to water and electricity, etc.). Even in the current context, where many circuses have closed, one can distinguish circuses of various sizes and means, including a handful that can afford *maidan*s that cost more than 30,000 Indian rupees (~$406) daily, while most others seek less expensive deals.

Figure 3. Circus camps installed on *maidans*. The two top photographs show the public-facing, front side of two camps; the two bottom ones the backstage and back-facing side of the camps, where some of the employees live in private tents. Photographs by Eléonore Rimbault, 2017–2020.

Figure 4. A 1986 handbill for the Jumbo Circus company, advertising a show in Ernakulam (Malayalam and English). Document preserved by a former circus artist and photographed in situ by Eléonore Rimbault, Kannur, Kerala, 2017.

The evolution of *maidan* prices is an important element that explains how the trajectories of circuses have changed over time. The diversification of promoters with an interest in renting out a large ground, with the development of events such as music festivals, popular music concerts, book and film fairs, and massive political party events, has led to a steep increase in prices in some cities, and it sometimes put an end to the preferential rents that circuses were given in the past. The handbill displayed in figure 4 is a promotional document for a show put on by Jumbo Circus in the city of Ernakulam, the largest city in Kerala. While no large circus company has visited Ernakulam since the mid-2010s, it was formerly a venue included in the circus routes. Note that while the handbill states the show comes "in your town for the first time," this does not need to be correct; it is a common marketing argument found in almost all circus advertising even today. Thus, *maidan* prices and the climate chart out the sites where it is possible to perform.

Circus companies are further constrained by competition with other circuses, and with other forms of entertainment that perform on the *maidan*, such as *melas*. Competition issues among circus companies have been documented (and also featured in films),[15] but those involved in them rarely venture information about the precise nature of events or the way these competition issues were dealt with. With hindsight, Shobha tells me the following story.

> Once, when [our circus] was running in Pondicherry, Venus *[another large circus, now closed]* also came to Pondicherry. Real enmity, no, at that time real enmity! *[She exclaims and laughs.]* At that time I still remember my *amma* [mother] and everybody used to tell me: don't go there, that these people will kill you kill you kill you. I would say, why [would they kill] me? . . . Then one day [the owner] came to our circus to see the show and we also went there, finally it became friendly, haha! Everybody was thinking that we will have a very good fight. My brother was running it at that time, not my dad *[the circus's first owner]*.

In this account, the owners of each circus alleviate the tension caused by the prospect of competition by visiting the other circus playing the same city. However, note that Shobha mentions it was her brother who was "running the show at that time": by her own account, her brother, who was much more interested in making films than in the circus venture he had inherited, was a bad strategist in planning

circus routes and attendance. In Shobha's account, he eventually sunk his father's business, which shut down a few years after Shobha's father's death. The mishap of having two circuses playing in the same city that was avoided by two men of different generations making a concerted effort to be friendly toward each other could perhaps have been entirely avoided had it involved owners of the same seniority and caliber. As Jimmy, who happens to be the son of the competing owner Shobha mentions in this account, explains, large circus companies have set up patterns of collaboration among each other in the past, which might be perceived as collusion from the standpoint of the circuses who are not their "friends."

> We plan six months in advance, so anybody coming in our way that we face, we try to stop them. . . . If [their] application comes to the office *[the office of the municipality where the* maidan *is negotiated]*, we'll know that another circus is coming. If the other is our friend, we might say, "We'll come after six months." Because whatever we do, we can't come right after *[here the manager means that if they come too soon after another circus has gone, they won't be met by an audience]*, that means that we can't come back. So we avoid it. So like that, we have small-small issues. Then, there's this understanding between the three-four companies of ours *[i.e., the group composed of Venus Circus and its "friends"]*. If somebody wants to play A, he plays town A. "B town *you* play, C town *we* play." Then they say, "You give me B town, I'll give you A town."[16]

Thus, circus companies of comparable status make alliances and use negotiation to fix itineraries that avoid direct competition with companies perceived as "friends." Compared to other circus companies, they do their best to spot the ones that "come in their way" and thwart their attempt to secure the rental of a *maidan*.

The price at which a circus ticket is known to sell at a given place can also weigh in the choice of a performance destination. A retired circus owner discussed with me why large circus companies now tour almost exclusively in Maharashtra, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. He explained that in some other states, like Uttar Pradesh or Gujarat, it is not possible to sell a ticket for more than 15 (~$0.20) to 30 (~$0.40) rupees a seat. "How can you run a show with that kind of money?" he asked. "That's why [big circuses] tour in places like Kerala," where ticket prices in a small circus vary between 100 (~$1.40) and 300 (~$4) rupees depending on seat placement.[17] While circus is by no means a popular entertainment form currently in Kerala, the budgets families can dedicate to entertainment there are still higher than in other states. This is seemingly a recent development that has resulted in more pronounced restrictions of circus routes along a North-South axis, with an understanding of the South limited to Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Many factors weigh in the decision to "play" a city, with some of them being specific to each circus company and the recursive nature of their routes. Aside from competition avoidance, factors like specific histories of engagement with a festival, school vacations, or good or bad relations with the local police force can also play a role in shaping itineraries. Owners and managers come to envision space through these factors and through strategies that can maximize the company's collection.

The circus owner as itinerant diplomat

Over time and across generations involved in circus ownership, observations and memories formed while traveling become recognized as a business sense that is valued inside the profession but also in the broader communities that owners and managers are from. The practical knowledge that circus managers can gather by using their itinerant structure as a place of hospitality for the communities they visit and the local notables and politicians of each place, as well as their strategic assessment of the best publicity tactics to deploy in order to draw different kinds of crowds, can easily be converted into an expertise useful beyond the circus industry.

This explains the smooth professional pivot of Jimmy, the former owner and manager of Venus Circus mentioned earlier. When his father died, he sold the familial circus company to develop a remunerative business in hotels and tourism. Two other circus owners I interviewed were able to invest part of their circus revenue in other companies based across India and secure a steady flow of income (instead of the risky and varying revenue a circus company generates) by diversifying their capital.[18] The Malayali owners I have interviewed are generally recognized businessmen among the society clubs and business meetings of the areas where they have their permanent residence, and their reputation sometimes extends to broader networks.

In some cases, famous owners succeeded in establishing themselves as more than businessmen. M. V. Shankar, popularly known in northern Kerala as Gemini Shankarettan (which combines the name of his most famous circus with his own name, to which the Malayalam kin term for big brother, *chettan*, has been added), owner of the Kannur-based Jumbo Circus and (now closed) Gemini Circus, has been especially successful, for instance in building a reputation as a diplomatic negotiator among circus owners, especially in the 1950s and 1960s.[19] In a 1965 issue of *Big Top*, a magazine published by the Indian Circus Federation (a business association set up by leading circus professionals active between 1965 and 2015), M. V. Shankar describes his experience as "Leader [of the] Indo-Russian Circus Cultural Delegation," which included M. V. Shankar, his wife, one business partner, and four young performers from Gemini Circus. The delegation was sent to the USSR in 1963 "to represent India in the International Circus Fair held in important cities in [the] USSR like Moscow, Sochi, and Yalta" on a 3.5-month itinerary. In his article entitled "Impressions of My Russian Tour," M. V. Shankar notes, "everywhere [they] went [in the USSR] the Indian team was accorded great welcome and affection was showered lavishly upon [them]." He goes on to describe their return to Delhi, and the way he briefed Prime Minister Nehru on their visit to the USSR: "[o]ur late beloved Prime Minister Panditji was much interested in our tour and heard our experiences and listened to most of the suggestions I put forward to him" (1965, n.p.).

Released by the Indian Circus Federation, this account of Shankar's influence must of course be taken with a pinch of salt. Nonetheless, it is useful in assessing how the leaders of the circus profession aspired to be portrayed at the time when this issue was published. It does seem like the image of the circus manager as a cultivated, well-traveled, and business-savvy character that this article conveys had credence beyond the profession, especially in political circles. To this day, the ease of circus owners and managers in navigating space and social milieus cannot be credited to the

circus alone—these men also typically come from families with economic capital and a relatively high caste status compared to other circus workers. But it is their habit of traveling constantly across their country, and the knowledge they have formed firsthand in the places they visited through the circus routes continues to shape their unusual careers, aspirations, and public image.

Yet even at the comparatively thriving time at which the Circus Federation published its magazine *Big Top*, it appears that narratives representing the circus businessman as an itinerant diplomat also serve as a palliative for the broader support the circus industry is lacking. In its editorial, *Big Top* (1965) states: "if the Indian Circus occupies a prominent position in the world arena, it is not because of any assistance or patronage extended to it by Governments, either at the Centre [India's Federal government] or the States [India's state governments], but entirely owing to a handful of persons interested in the existence of this art." Conscious of and dissatisfied with the lack of patronage for their business since its emergence, circus professionals seize opportunities to dwell on their insertion in the "world arena," framing their activities and their routes as part of an international circulation. References to Indian circus figures who have performed in distant places, and discursive emphasis on the international exposure of Indian circus companies, are frequently featured in the narratives of circus owners and of important circus figures I have interviewed, showing their desire to be connected to a global scale and history, rather than to the national and subnational scales that seem to disown them. For instance, on my first visit to Govindan S.,[20] director of the Union of Circus Employees, we spent most of our time together going over his collection of pictures of the acrobat Kannan Bombayo, whose travels to foreign and distant countries and encounters with several world leaders (most famously Hitler and the Queen of England) were presented as evidence of India's contribution to circus history. While these histories have remarkable currency in a place like Thalassery, which has a large community of circus professionals, they have not been taken up to the same extent by circus histories written outside the town, let alone outside India. In international circus festivals and in the specialized literature produced on the circus, references to the Indian circus and appreciation for its particular features are scarce.[21] When it gets mentioned, it most often has to do with the negative coverage received by the Indian circus in the 1990s, rather than these earlier exchanges.[22]

In a striking way, the managers' and owners' expertise and their difficulties in projecting the spatiotemporal framework defined by their profession beyond the realm of the circus make these professionals reminiscent of one of the social types Georg Simmel (1972) drew in his studies from the early twentieth century: the stranger. Like the stranger, they stand out as "an element whose membership within the group," defined by "trade," "involves both being outside it and confronting it" (ibid., 144). The interaction between the circus managers and the sedentary crowds is marked by "an attitude that does not signify mere detachment and nonparticipation, but is a distinct structure composed of remoteness and nearness, indifference and involvement" (ibid., 145). Through its travels, the circus remains a liminal institution, which slips into the scales and aesthetics of all forms of discourse (visual, cinematographic, political metaphors, philosophical figures of speech) but settles in

none. Its route can neither be said to exhaust regions nor to cover representatively India's main cities or the national population hubs. Today this industry is also kept out by its limited financial means from undertaking international touring circuits.

Conclusion: Withering routes

Sajith, a young circus owner, considers the life of his short-lived circus (the circus company he ran closed shortly after our conversation in May 2018) in the following way:

> The first two years were really fine, but it went down from there. It was difficult to pay everyone, and the crowd lost interest in the show. And the climate conspired against us. . . . To top all this, demonetization[23] last year also made people less willing to spend for buying tickets.

As Sajith points out, current circus companies are facing many difficulties, and the routes taken by Kerala-based circuses are shortening due to the combined effects of a lack of demand, decreasing *maidan* availability, and stricter regulations of the circus performance. This has led several circuses to limit their routes to much smaller territories, sometimes confined to one state, or to dispersed cities where they have secured advantageous deals or where they know they will steer clear of changing weather. Circus performers, meanwhile, continue to come from places all across India. These current itinerary transformations will likely be generative of different practices within the circus community: they may, for instance, result in a deeper engagement with local communities if the number of places a circus company typically visits continues to dwindle; that may also change the patterns of competition between circuses and between circuses and other itinerant businesses. The accounts of space expressed by circus professionals will thus continue to be characterized by continuous adjustments and a flexible and dynamic relation to geography.

In this article, I suggested that thinking regionally can downplay the intensity of labor-induced movements within India (as well as movements to and from abroad), or give the impression that the depth of the cultural kinship between the regions delineated by existing literatures portrays a stable cultural homogeneity. By contrast, paying attention to the ways in which itinerant professional communities like Malayali-owned circus companies talk about their navigation of the Indian territory opens up new ways of thinking about space. It prompts us to consider the factors that are significant to these communities. One feature of the circus managers' and owners' geographical descriptions is their dynamic assessment of space, informed by the periodic visit to old and new sites of circus performance. While regions bind together histories through proximity in space, circus routes bind distant spaces through a history of traveling through them. This idiosyncratic weaving of time and space, which eludes well-established scales of geographical analysis (the national, the subnational, the international) serves as an important reminder that there are multiple counterpoints to hegemonic ways of thinking about space. While the biographical trajectories of circus professionals are atypical, they need not be representative of all sectors of the economy to remind us that labor-based

migrations and travels continually inform, expand, and transform people's discursive representations of space.

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Notes

1. Interview with Jimmy K, Trivandrum, November 2019. The interviews with circus owners and their relatives cited in this article were conducted in English. A majority of the names of my interlocutors have been changed, unless their writing or written works about them are relevant and cited in this article.

2. These movements once extended farther than India, but today Indian circus companies do not venture abroad.

3. This perception seems shared among those who work inside the circus; the performers I have spoken to do not single out memories of what happens during the long journeys from one place to the next, and most do not own pictures capturing their life on the road. I have written more on the ways lower-ranking circus professionals remember and forget their experience at the circus in a 2021 article.

4. Carmeli observes that, in the British circuses he studied in the 1970s, "circus travellers consider the fast build-up (and pull-down) of the Big Top and its sudden and surprising appearance as part of the familiar attraction of the circus. The circus usually comes at night (after a performance in another town, pull-down and travelling)" (Carmeli 1987, 224–25). For more accounts of the work it takes to engineer this effect of suddenness, see Janet M. Davis (2002). For a visual reference, Govindan Aravindan's 1978 Malayalam movie *Thampu* ("The Circus Tent") begins with a segment showing the arrival of a circus company in a village in Kerala, and the build-up of the tent.

5. In the literature produced on South Asia, these other traveling groups have been more frequently featured than the circus. This may be because the slower pace of these communities' travels made their presence more likely to feature as a regional feature by colonial literature and classifications (Thurston and Rangachari 1909), and their engagement with police authorities more sustained (Zubrzycki 2018). Some other itinerant performers also have strong ties to their linguistic community (for instance, Tamil Special Drama performers; Seizer 2005), or to the festival traditions of a specific place (Freitag 1989). For a broad survey of the similarities between mobile groups of entertainers and traders in South Asia and worldwide, see Gmelch (1986).

6. "Circus special trains" and "bonafide Professional Circus parties" still benefit from a special status with the Indian Railways, although circulars from 2000 and 2007 limited the advantageous rates on these concessions that previously facilitated the long journeys of circus companies.

7. This article will primarily focus on the managers' and owners' points of view. My dissertation (2022) includes more descriptions and analysis of the way circus performers and people who are part of circus camps' maintenance staff talk about space and traveling.

8. In this article, "Malayali" is used to refer to individuals who are from Kerala. This is the common acceptation of this word.

9. While the *tharavadu* often refers to the ancestral home of upper-caste Malayalis, I use it here as my interlocutors have used it during interviews, to designate their ancestral homes regardless of social background.

10. For sociological and economic surveys of these periods of transformation in Kerala, see Ritty Lukose (2009) and F. Osella and C. Osella (2000a).

11. The name of this circus company has been changed.

12. Interview with Shobha, Kozhikode, October 2019.

13. Interview with Sajith, owner of Sun Circus, Kozhikode, March 2018.

14. Here are some examples of daily ground prices I could gather over diverse interviews for the state of Kerala in 2017 and 2018: Kochi/Ernakulam: between ₹30,000 (~$406) and ₹60,000 (~$813) daily; Thiruvananthapuram (Kerala state's capital): ₹14,000 (~$190) daily; Kannur (largest city in the Malabar region, northern Kerala): ₹8,000 (~$108) daily. A circus manager noted that some states, such as Maharashtra and Gujarat, offered much cheaper facilities (in Gujarat, ₹200 or ~$3 daily) because state governments had policies to facilitate and sponsor circus performances.

15. For an example of competitive strategizing in a European circus company, one can refer to the French example presented in Jean-François Mehu and Jacques Letellier's short 1950 docu-fiction *Un Cirque Passe*, which narrates the everyday life of Achille Zavatta's circus in France.

16. Interview with Jimmy K, Trivandrum, November 2019.

17. Interview with Gopal, New Mahe, October 2019.

18. Interview with M. V. Shankar, Kannur, September 2019; interview with Santhosh K, Kozhikode, December 2019.

19. I was last able to interview M. V. Shankar in September 2019.

20. Interview with Govindan S., Thalassery, January 2019.

21. In his works on the circus for instance, Paul Bouissac acknowledges having done some fieldwork in the Indian circus for his international analysis of circus shows, but he does not

mobilize his experiences in India to support his theses on the symbolic aspects of the circus performance (Bouissac 2012).

22. I elaborate further on this aspect of the recent history of Indian circus in my dissertation (Rimbault 2022).

23. Sajith is referring to the banknote demonetization that occurred in 2016 throughout India. On November 8, 2016, the Government of India announced the withdrawal of two commonly used banknotes, the ₹500 and ₹1,000 banknotes, from circulation, and the issuance of new ₹500 and ₹2,000 banknotes. The government presented this decision as a policy intended to curb the informal economy. This decision led to significant cash shortages and disruptions throughout the economy, especially in domains where transactions in cash are common, such as the circus profession.

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Contested Bodies

Negotiating Trans*femininity and Devotion in Rural South India

This article examines regional notions and practices of trans*femininity and how cross-regional concepts of trans*femininity play within these. The *jōgappa*s, a male-to-female trans*community in rural North Karnataka, worship the deity Ellamma in her local manifestation as initiated devotees. As part of their service to Ellamma, they adopt signs of femininity such as female attire, jewelry, or long hair but also maintain asceticism and an intact and thus physically male body, which guarantees the required ritual purity. This enables them to embody Ellamma by providing her an adequate body, which the goddess can inhabit and influence with her femininity and divinity. *Jōgappa*s have recently become increasingly influenced by powerful discourses on gender and femininity, particularly those defined by the cross-regionally organized *hijra*s. For *hijra*s, norms of trans*femininity are based on surgical emasculation and the physical making of a female body. Material from ethnographic field research documented since 2013 reveals that the core of trans*femininities in the specific context of the *jōgappa*s lies in the close relationship and interaction between the worldly and the divine, and for now continues to be crucial for the distinct identity of the *jōgappa*s. The material also shows examples of negotiations and changes within the *jōgappa* community, which are driven by cross-regional hierarchies and individual tensions, and lead to a growing distance between the *jōgappa*s and Ellamma, potentially resulting in a loss of specificity of the *jōgappa* identity.

Keywords: Karnataka—*jōgappa*—Ellamma—devotional practices—transgender—*hijra*

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> My father used to follow only male gods, he always said, "this Ellamma *dēvaru* is not ours, not ours!" And my father's brother sold everything [that belonged to Ellamma] and wasted the money, right? That's why that Ellamma *dēvi* stopped and stood near me to trouble me.
>
> *Why did she not trouble others of your family*?
>
> No, Ellamma didn't trouble others. She said, "I don't want them," and see!, [regarding me] she then said, "he is the one who has come in my mind, I want only him!" (Usha 2018)

Ellamma, literally the "mother" (*amma*) of "all" (*ella*), sometimes simply referred to as "mother" (*amma* or *tāyi*), "goddess" (*dēvi*), or "deity" (*dēvaru*), is the core of the lives and identities of the *jōgappa*s, who constitute a group of her dedicated devotees and a male-to-female trans*community[1] in the rural North of Karnataka and South of Maharashtra.[2] Generally, Ellamma functions as a tutelary deity among lower castes, protecting a community, lineage, or family, but is equally worshipped among higher castes and Muslim and Christian communities in the region. Her temple on top of her own hill near the small town of Saundatti is regarded as her main residence and counts as one of the largest pilgrimage centers of South India. Here she receives large numbers of her devotees, who come from northern Karnataka and southern Maharashtra by bullock cart, tractor, or sometimes even by foot, or by bus from far cities like Pune or Bangalore, and who during full moon festivals turn the barren hill into a busy temporary settlement.

In Hindu traditions, deities take on various forms; some are worshipped cross-regionally, whereas the knowledge about others is locally confined. Devotees of Ellamma may identify her with the goddess Rēṇuka, whose character is depicted in narratives based on Sanskritic-Brahmanic notions claiming supra-regional validity. Beliefs and devotional practices characteristic of *jōgappa*s, however, are most closely linked with those aspects of the deity that are reflected in oral narratives.[3] In these, Ellamma is incorporated within village pantheons (Bradford 1983, 308) and linked with various local communities. Similarly, central episodes are located in the landscapes surrounding the temple and villages of her followers (Brückner 2011, 95). According to one narration I listened to during my fieldwork, the location of the temple was assigned to her by a local when Ellamma was desperately searching for a safe place to stay. Since then, she established her rule and gained great fame.

Here, devotees like the *jōgappa*s ritually re-enact and embody, and in this way realize themselves and for others, the joys and sorrows Ellamma herself has gone through. Hence, Ellamma is embedded within the cultural histories of the region and connected to the experiences and identities of local communities.

The regional characteristics of Ellamma become manifest in the physical and emotional experiences of her devotees. As the statement by the *jōgappa* Usha cited in the epigraph shows, Ellamma acts and engages directly in the worldly sphere and in the life of people. In doing so, she brings her ambivalent power into effect, causing disease and immense suffering but also wellbeing. She is as ready to afflict people as she is open to negotiate about people's concerns and to listen to their hardships; after all, they are "her children," living under her command and through her motherly affection. Both sorrow and blessings, however, do not occur without reason, and require the participation of the devotees. Disrespect for Ellamma or the neglect of her worship provoke her to turn against a person or a family. Her subsequent "wild" and "troubling play" (*kāḍāṭa*)[4] with people is understood as punishment for their own or their family's wrongdoing, but it is also read as a sign of the deity's demands and as expression of her affinity for the troubled and chosen one.

Once she has chosen a person as her attendant in this manner, the initiation into living as a *jōgappa*[5] is the only way to control Ellamma and redirect her dangerous power into blessings. By "tying the knot" with Ellamma—getting the *muttu*, a chain of red and white beads and silver or gold coins showing symbols of Ellamma, tied around the neck—*jōgappa*s make the vow and the extraordinary sacrifice of giving their entire future life solely into Ellamma's service and worship. They from now onward care for her as ritual specialists at small shrines and temples, spread her blessings by wandering about with mobile shrines, and praise her by dancing and singing songs in her name. Serving her as medium, they convey messages between Ellamma and her regular devotees, and receive offerings on her behalf. This respected role presupposes a high degree of ritual purity that is only guaranteed if the *jōgappa* strictly obeys certain rules, the most important ones being asceticism and physical integrity. A crucial aspect of their devotion to Ellamma is the adoption of signs of femininity, such as female attire, without the physical adjustment of their male bodies. This hints at the *jōgappa*s' female selves. At the same time, Ellamma is considered to be the cause of the *jōgappa*s' femininity and divinely legitimates their active transgression of gender norms. The context in which Ellamma is worshipped in this very regional form thus creates a narrow but empowering niche for trans*feminine individuals.

Devotional practices and notions of Ellamma and trans*femininity are linked to places of her worship. These may be located at her hill in Saundatti but are not confined to this particular site, as Ellamma is simultaneously present in all her temples and shrines in villages and towns of North Karnataka and South Maharashtra. Even temples of female deities considered as Ellamma's sisters or as a form of her, like Huligemma in Munirabad near Hospet, may serve as an appropriate place for Ellamma's rituals. However, for the *jōgappa*s the space in front of domestic shrines is central for the day-to-day worship as well as for rituals on special occasions. Important are also mobile shrines, decorated small pots (*koḍa*), or large round baskets (*jaga*) with Ellamma's representation and paraphernalia. *Jōgappa*s carry them along when they

visit the temple, join ritual gatherings in other *jōgappa*s' homes, or accept invitations from noninitiated devotees of Ellamma who invite *jōgappa*s as ritual specialists.

Distances that *jōgappa*s cover from their homes to temples or ritual gatherings range between a walk in their neighborhood and a one-day journey, depending on their respective social networks and individual preferences. Some *jōgappa*s prefer to worship Ellamma at home in their domestic shrines and visit her temples deliberately during quiet times, returning back home on the same day. During festivals at the main temple, they conduct specific rituals at home in front of their domestic shrines, still participating in the occasion without necessarily traveling to the temple. Others enjoy traveling and visit her temple frequently, especially during busy festival days. They consider traveling long distances and in large groups as an important part of their devotional service. In such cases the journeys may be prolonged for some days by pausing at temples of other deities and visiting befriended *jōgappa*s on the way, or by staying overnight at Ellamma's temple. The mobile shrines enable the *jōgappa*s to temporarily establish places of worship while traveling. This may be directly next to a temple or in other *jōgappa*s' or devotees' houses, reinforcing the divine power by bringing several representations of the deity together in one place. Also, profane places like a railway station may become a place of worship when a large *jaga* of a traveling *jōgappa* waiting for a train on the route to Saundatti invites passengers to offer some coins and to ask for Ellamma's blessing. Thus, specific locations do matter for devotional practices of the *jōgappa*s. They may be public temples, domestic shrines, or the temporary sacred spaces of mobile shrines.

In the following, I am going to examine how the idea of the region matters for notions and practices of trans*femininity. Specifically, I discuss in which distinct ways trans*femininity is constituted and articulated in this regional context, and how cross-regional concepts of trans*femininity intersect with, and are distinct from, regional formations. By "region" I refer to a cultural and social space defined and confined by the validity of specific notions, norms, and practices, primarily linked to the manifestation of Ellamma worshipped in parts of North Karnataka and South Maharashtra. This space determines discourses and possibilities an individual living herein may have access to. The region thus shapes the individual's identity, and the individual's sense of belonging emerges from sharing specific notions of regional belonging. At the same time, interactions with various cross-regional discourses may broaden an individual's possibilities of belonging and continuously redefine and reshape characteristics of the region.

To address these questions, I will first discuss the *jōgappa*s' ways of understanding and worshiping Ellamma by focusing on aspects related to trans*femininity. I argue that in the case of the *jōgappa*s, the regional particularities of trans*femininity, and thus the core of the *jōgappa*s' individual and collective identities, lie in the strong relationship and in the identification between Ellamma and the *jōgappa*s. Besides social interactions and the impact of societal and cultural norms, it is the direct interaction between the devotee and the divine, as well as the norms of the divine, that constitute gender here. Intrinsically related with her and bound to the region of Ellamma's rule, these regional particularities, however, lose their validity and empowering implications outside of Ellamma's physical and cultural sphere.

Set in contrast to broader contexts, regional particularities are further highlighted in the second part of the article. I argue that notions and practices of trans*femininity in regional and cross-regional discourses conflict with each other precisely at their respective cores—the meanings and roles of the body. Among *jōgappa*s, embodying femininity is equated with embodying the divine and requires a high ritual purity ensured through an intact and thus physically male body. Cross-regionally dominant concepts, however, regard the physical making and expression of femininity as central; this is successfully achieved through a surgically created female body, expressing the individual's self. Interactions between the regional and cross-regional reveal sharp differences and may result in creative renegotiations and cultural formations serving the interests of an individual or a group. I argue that interactions that are structured by powerful hierarchies and the hegemony of the cross-regional may also result in the invisibility or loss of the regionality and particularity of the *jōgappa* identity. And still, even though a *jōgappa* may distance herself from the deity and her region, Ellamma seems to remain a ruling power in the realities of the *jōgappa*s.

Context of the interviews

This article is largely based on material from fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted mainly in North Karnataka between 2013 and 2020. An important location of my research was Ellamma's temple near the town Saundatti, which is located 200 km inland of Goa and 470 km northwest of Bangalore, the capital of Karnataka (see figure 1).

Similar to Ellamma's devotees, I traveled there by local bus. Driving through plain landscapes of dry fields with the typical red soil, some harvested, some with millets,

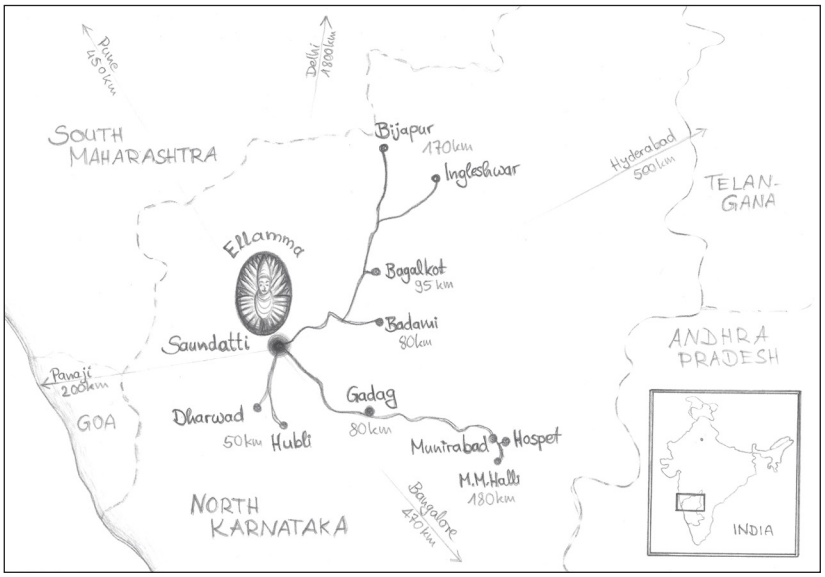

Figure 1. Map of the region: Places of the author's research in North Karnataka and distances from Ellamma's main temple in Saundatti. Map produced by Sarah Merkle-Schneider, 2022.

chilies, or onions, changing busses at dusty bus stands in small towns and villages, it was never sure whether it would take the regular two or rather four hours for the 80 km from Gadag to reach the rocky hill of Ellamma's abode. Gadag is located southeast of Saundatti and is another important center of my research. Here I got to know my assistant Bhagat Y. Bhandage from the registered community-based organization (CBO) Srustisankula Arogya Matthu Samaja Seva Samsthe, Gadag. Bhagat identifies with the term "transgender" and as female. Through her work for the CBO, she is well-connected with the trans*communities and other CBOs in cities of North Karnataka, as well as with trans*individuals in Hyderabad, Bangalore, and some places in Tamil Nadu. She introduced me to many of her *jōgappa* friends and to CBOs in other cities. I interviewed *jōgappa*s in Gadag; in the rural outskirts of the twin cities Hubli and Dharwad, the urban center in North Karnataka; in the city of Bagalkot; in Bijapur and the nearby village Ingleshwar; from villages around the town Badami; and in Mariyammana Halli, a village near the city Hospet.

Quotations in this article are taken from six of a total of forty interviews (see references to conversations with *jōgappa*s), which I mostly conducted in the presence of Bhagat, if possible, at the *jōgappa*s' homes or other private premises, or in the premises of the CBO. At the time of the interview, the *jōgappa* Usha was around twenty years old and lived in a one-room house near the railway lines on the outskirts of Gadag. Our discussion took place in her home, sitting in front of her domestic shrine for Ellamma. Cannamma was between forty and forty-five years old when we met several times in her home in a traditional neighborhood in Gadag. Whenever we met for an interview, we sat in her kitchen on the floor in front of her always beautifully decorated domestic shrine. Rafik was around twenty years old when we met and lived together with her family in a poor Muslim area in Hubli. The conversation took place at her home, where she proudly showed us a stone representing a form of Ellamma standing next to a decorated shrine with Islamic paraphernalia and pictures of Islamic saints in a separate room in the center of their small house. She and other Muslim *jōgappa*s I met visit the temple of Ellamma just like *jōgappa*s from Hindu backgrounds. Renamma was around thirty years old and lived with her family in a village between Gadag and Badami. We sat together in the counseling room of the CBO in Gadag, which provided her a safe space to talk. Basappa was around sixty years old and had lived with a priest and his family at the temple site in Saundatti for the last twenty to twenty-five years. We met her when Bhagat and I strolled around the hill and saw her spreading something out to dry in the sun. When she recognized Bhagat, she agreed to spontaneously sit inside the priest's house and talk about her experiences. Bassu was between sixty and seventy years old when we met him waiting for the evening prayer behind the temple in Saundatti. Although he did not know us before, he agreed to answer our questions on the spot. He hails from a village northeast of Saundatti but now lives at the temple site without a permanent home.

In semi-structured interviews with open questions, I aimed to enable open conversations in which the individual *jōgappa*'s narrative and thematic focus regarding devotion and trans*femininity could be expressed and followed up. The audio recordings have been transcribed and translated into English as close to the Kannada original as possible. Additionally, I draw on recorded discussions with

members from the CBO in Gadag, and on field notes from unrecorded conversations and participatory observations I made, especially when visiting a *jōgappa* or spending time at the temple.

Experiencing and serving Ellamma

In our conversations, *jōgappa*s articulated initial indications of femininity by telling us about various manifestations of Ellamma's *kāḍāṭa*, the unfolding of her ambivalent power and, specifically, her regional character. They suffered a general loss of fortune that could not be rationally explained but was caused by Ellamma herself or by the assault of evil powers. They had disturbing and unsettling experiences like skin diseases, nonspecific body pains, fever, and loss of consciousness and of body control, which by applying conventional treatments only got worse. Nearly all of them faced additional tensions due to an increasing identification with a feminine gender identity, seen to be in conflict with the male sex assigned at their birth. Referring to such experiences, *jōgappa*s commonly use phrases like "Ellamma caught me," "she came upon me," "she fills my body," or "she speaks in my body," which indicate Ellamma's presence and influence on them.

In this way, Ellamma makes her voice heard, indicating whom she desires as her servant in female attire, who is also called her "horse." Identifying and satisfying her wish controls her dangerous power and secures her blessings. As the *jōgappa*s Usha and Bassu express in the following statements, one is compelled to obey her order:

> When I was still young, she came into my body and said to my family, "I want this horse (*kudure*) at any cost! Since its birth I kept an eye [on it]! Whatever you will say now, I won't listen [to you]." (Usha 2018)[6]
>
> If the thought "I want to make him wear a saree!" comes in *amma*'s mind, she will definitely make him wear a saree. And if he says, "I won't wear a saree," she doesn't listen and says, "you must wear it!" (Bassu 2018)
>
> This is the *dēvi*'s play (*āṭa*), we cannot do anything about it. (ibid., 2019)

The role of being Ellamma's "horse" does not refer to serving her as vehicle (*vāhana*). It rather mirrors devotional practices found in regional traditions like that of the male deity Khaṇḍobā worshipped in Karnataka and Maharashtra; here, devotees accompany the deity as "faithful dogs" and horses (Sontheimer 1989, 308). Being Ellamma's desired horse thus illustrates metaphorically the way one is controlled by her and subordinates oneself to her, in order to attend and serve her with loyalty and affection.

> Those whom she favors and to whom that *tāyi* Ellamma comes are called "horse." Those who do her service (*sēve*), the *jōgappa*s, right?, they are called "horse."
>
> *Does being her horse also mean that she is sitting and riding on that horse?*
>
> No!, [it means that] she makes us stand [in front of her] as a horse to get her *sēve* done. The reason why she again and again says "I want my horse!" is her *sēve*.

Usha describes becoming Ellamma's horse as being chosen to do her service (*sēve*). According to the dictionary (Kittel 2006, 1593), *sēve* denotes "service," "attendance," "worship," "devotion," or "employment" and is used in parallel with *pūje* (ibid., 1004), which means "honor," "respect," or "worship." *Jōgappa*s use both terms to refer to crucial devotional activities like the adornment of Ellamma's shrine and images, as well as the *hēḷike* (ibid., 1685), literally "saying" and "ordering." In the context of local forms of worship, *hēḷike* refers to occasions when the deity speaks and commands through a human's body. For this, *jōgappa*s enter a trance-like state, making their bodies available for Ellamma and allowing her to take possession of them. Consequently, "serving her" means to be Ellamma's carrier, to act as her medium and carry her upon or within oneself. Both the initiation itself and the state of being initiated are thus described by the term "*horu*" (ibid., 1696), which means to "load," "bear," "carry," "take upon one's self," or to "assume." As Bassu explains: "'carrying her' means that we are Ellamma."

When Ellamma enters a *jōgappa*'s body, she fills it with her own self. By the unfolding of her character—her divine and female power (*śakti*)—Ellamma takes control over a *jōgappa*'s body and mind, changing the carrier's gender and causing femininity, as the *jōgappa* Cannamma (2017) indicates here:

> Once when I wanted to do her *pūje* [in male attire], *amma* came into my body and said, "I don't favor my horse to do my *sēve* nakedly, she has to wear saree." That time, when *amma* came in my body, I asked for a saree. I took it and wore it all by myself. After she left my body, I saw myself and wondered, "what is all this?" I tore it off and said, "I don't want a saree!" . . . But everybody said, "No!, *amma* had come, *amma* herself told that she wants her horse to wear a saree."

According to her regional character experienced by the *jōgappa*s, Ellamma acts directly in the worldly sphere. She wishes and orders her horses to do her service in female attire, as well as causes and creates their femininity. She does this by entering their bodies, whereupon the femininity of a *jōgappa* is read as evidence of Ellamma's interference and presence in the human body and in the realms of the profane. Falling under her influence, and being driven to perform the initiation to become a *jōgappa* and to put on female attire, is central for the *jōgappa*s' identity, whereas taking up the role of a *jōgappa* in female attire of one's own accord, without Ellamma's possessive influence, is regarded as invalid (Aneka 2014a, 29).

Embodying Ellamma and femininity

But still, why does Ellamma want her service to be done with female appearance? When my assistant Bhagat (2017) remarked that Ellamma is only satisfied once she sees her horse "in *śṛṅgāra* [decoration]," I wondered if attributes like "female attire" mark a *jōgappa*'s body not only to be female but also to be and to be recognized as the appropriate vessel, or *mūrti*, to embody a female deity. *Jōgappa*s do not use the term "*mūrti*" for their bodies or for themselves. Comparing general concepts of the *mūrti* with those of divine embodiment and taking into consideration terms frequently

used by the *jōgappa*s, however, reveals meanings of a *jōgappa*'s body that parallel those of a *mūrti*.

The term "*rūpa*" (Kittel 2006, 1344) for example, refers to "any outward appearance," "shape," "image," or "idol" and resembles meanings of "*mūrti*" (ibid., 1285), given as "any material form," "visible shape," "body," "embodiment," "manifestation," "image," or "statue." A *mūrti* is a physical form that represents or embodies a specific deity and in which a deity manifests her- or himself; the deity is considered to be present in the physical form of the *mūrti*, and in the context of local tradition, the *mūrti* is considered to be the deity her- or himself and treated like a living personality. Thus, a *mūrti* provides immediate access to a deity and enables the devotee to grasp the deity and enter into a relationship with her or him (Sontheimer 2004, 410; Flueckiger 2015, 77–80).

The term "*śṛṅgāra*" (Kittel 2006, 1464) denotes "decoration," "dress," "beauty," or "the erotic sentiment" and is generally used for attributes that adorn a woman and make her desirable. Usha used the term when she described how she made a *mūrti* for the local deity Kareyamma, the "black *amma*," who called on her to be worshipped alongside Ellamma: "I eventually brought it here, the stone of Kareyamma. Initially it was only a stone, so I then kept the whole *śṛṅgāra* on it. I brought clay to make the nose and ears, I put a nose pin in the nose and earrings in the ears." The stone as such is a mere material object. Only when marked with specific attributes does it obtain the form and identity of Kareyamma and becomes recognizable as such. The *śṛṅgāra* may consist of flowers, vermilion and turmeric powders, jewelry, and clothes being put on a *mūrti* as an important act of worship. It does not only dress and beautify a physical form, but it also enables the devotee to see the character it embodies by making its inherent qualities visible; thus, the *śṛṅgāra* is "integral to whatever it adorns" (Flueckiger 2015, 88).

Until today, Cannamma only wears a saree on the days when the deity speaks through her body, which renders wearing a saree an act of devotion. Once, a follower of Cannamma showed me two photos on his mobile phone, pointing to one in which Cannamma was in male attire and then to another one of her in a saree. He revealingly explained: "This is Cannamma, and this is Ellamma." Cannamma herself stressed several times that the sarees and bangles she wears, and even her own hair, were all the deity's belongings and not hers. In the following explanations by the *jōgappa* Renamma (2015), it becomes evident that Ellamma equates the adoption of a female form to the taking of her, the deity's, form: "Ellamma gives instructions like 'these boys and men shall look like me! I will give them the form (*rūpa*) of a woman, . . . I will cause them to shave, make them wear saree, cause them to dance, and give them my *rūpa*.'"

For creating a body recognized as female and thus as divine, however, one does not necessarily need to wear a saree. As Usha remarks, some *jōgappa*s—like Cannamma—most of the time wear *luṅgi*, a piece of cloth tied around the waist of a man, and still embody femininity: "See! Some *jōgappa*s do her *sēve* in *luṅgi*, a *luṅgi* with pleats in the front!, like Canni wears hers, right? She wears the *luṅgi* folding pleats in the front, she is totally in a female form (*rūpa*)!, she wears bangles on her arms, she wears toe rings and a necklace (*tāḷi*) on her neck [indicating that she is a married woman]." Usha

points out single, externally visible attributes of femininity. A saree is not necessarily required, and instead pleats in the front of a male attire (*luṅgi*) imitating the front pleats of a saree are adequate and sufficient to mark and recognize a physically male body as a "female *rūpa*," and thus as the deity's body.

The notion that a material form is able to contain, embody, and even become a deity, and through the corresponding *śṛṅgāra* to express the deity's identity, is crucial to conceptual meanings of a *mūrti*, as well as to the role of a *jōgappa*'s body. Once draped and marked with femininity through the *śṛṅgāra* of the deity, the male body of a *jōgappa*, especially in a ritual context, temporarily loses its meaning of being human and male and becomes the vessel of a female deity. Just as the *śṛṅgāra* transforms a stone into a *mūrti*, embodying and being a deity, single attributes of femininity allow a *jōgappa* to be recognized and worshipped not only as Ellamma's medium, but as Ellamma herself. In the same way that the adornment of a *mūrti* is a mode of worship, the placement of attributes of femininity on a human body is a devotional act crucial to the service Ellamma calls for in order to make her identity and power visible and accessible to the world.

Considering the female self

Discussing trans*femininity as embodiment of the divine inevitably raises questions regarding the relation between the deity and the individual. The statements by *jōgappa*s do not lead to unambiguous answers but rather point out intersections between the profane and the divine that are characteristic of devotional traditions of deities in their regional manifestations.

When I asked Cannamma if people would notice her female self despite her physical body "which is not that of a woman," she replied in a low voice, "they don't see [my] mind, they don't see [my] body, they see *amma*, [and they identify her] when they see this [*points to her muttu and bangles*]." Sometimes, she would comment on the beauty of a flower put in her hair, or of a saree wrapped around her body and express her personal affinity toward such attributes associated with femininity. But when I once remarked that her hair had grown long and that she wore more bangles than the year before, she stressed, "it's all *amma*'s! I feel like *amma*, [that is why] it is all *amma*'s, not Cannu's." The feeling of being like the mother Ellamma emerges from being recognized as her: "Everyone who visits me calls me '*amma*,' right?, that's why I am their mother (*tāyi*) and have the heart and mind of the *tāyi* [Ellamma]. Everyone considers me as *tāyi*, right?, that's why I have her feelings."

In comparison, Rafik (2014), a young *jōgappa* from Muslim background, who was yet to get the *muttu* tied, clearly addressed her strong personal identification with femininity:

> People believe that when a person wears the *muttu*, the *dēvaru* is in the body. But I understand wearing the *muttu* in a different way. I wear it because of my orientation. I live like a woman, dress like a woman, and do whatever women do. All this comes from my heart, it is my strong desire, it is my habit. . . . Initially my family said to me, "no!, [don't wear saree]!," but I said, "she is coming to me, she troubles me in my dreams, whatever I do, I do it in her name and in her service." . . . She

> indeed came into my dream!, and said to me, "wear saree, get started and come to my temple, tie the *muttu* and become a *jōgappa*!" So, what I had as a strong wish in my heart finally appeared in my dream, right?

Later in our conversation, Rafik stressed that the desire for femininity "happens in our heart," and added, "after we fall into her name, she makes our heart and mind shiver and causes us to be female."

Cannamma attributes all signs of femininity and even her own female self to the deity. For her, the region offers a language to grasp her own femininity and to put it into adequate words, embracing the high respect she gained in her social context. The deification, however, does not deny her a female self, which she herself experiences and which exists in identification with the deity and due to the recognition by her followers. Rafik expresses femininity as belonging to her own self. It is a desire arising from deep within her—from her heart—where it is caused by Ellamma after all. The divine legitimation resulting from her strong desire empowers her to express her femininity without losing the acceptance of her family. Still, it is not a mere strategy, as she too experiences Ellamma's power and influence on her heart as reality and her own femininity as the deity's creation. In both cases, as well as in the statements of other *jōgappa*s, identities and the desire for and expression of femininity cannot be clearly assigned to either the individual, or to the deity and her creation.

Remarks on devotion

The *jōgappa*s' concepts of trans*femininity are deeply rooted in notions and practices that are culturally and religiously defined and very specific to North Karnataka and South Maharashtra, although not necessarily accepted by everyone who belongs to this region. Reciprocal interactions and complex intersections between the profane and the divine world, and the physical and emotional experience of Ellamma's regional characteristics, provide a legitimate space for the *jōgappa*s and their trans*identities. The individual as well as the deity are both actively involved, and both spheres—as well as the identities of both spheres—are not unequivocally distinct from each other. Consequently, the femininity of a *jōgappa* is caused and created by Ellamma's power and her interference and is simultaneously embodied and performed by her devotees by putting on attributes of femininity in a devotional act that expresses the deity's as well as the individual's identity.

Interactions between Ellamma and the *jōgappa*s, and the shared knowledge of and belief in this regional manifestation of the deity, determine the *jōgappa*s' identity and belonging; these explain their trans*femininity and divinely legitimate and enable its expression. The empowering aspect of the divinization of trans*femininity, however, risks romanticizing the lives of *jōgappa*s. They suffer from a persistently high degree of stigmatization and marginalization by society in general, within the region they are located (Dutta, Khan, and Lorway 2019) as well as in cross-regional discourses on devotion and trans*gender, where the regional particularity of the geographical and social sphere of Ellamma loses its hold.

*Jōgappa*s who live at Ellamma's main temple remember vividly when, in the early 2000s, representatives of a social reform movement on behalf of the government of Karnataka had been active at the hill, in order "to stop everything here"; "everything" is referring to those devotional practices characteristic of *jōgappa*s that were identified as regionally specific in this article. In pamphlets distributed by these activists, they contrasted mediumship and trans*femininity with "true devotion," declaring the former as "superstition" but not defining the latter. Devotees involved in mediumship and trans*femininity were supposed to either suffer from mental disorder or physical defects, or to pretend and cheat people to get recognition and make some money (Brückner 2011, 99–103, 111–12). The *jōgappa*s' particular identity was in this way disregarded and stigmatized as backward or pathological and pushed to the margins, whereas "true devotion" was propagated by using terminologies typical for cross-regional if not pan-Indian discourses arguing in favor of Sanskritic-Brahmanic concepts.

Asked about the impacts of such activities, Basappa (2020), an elderly *jōgappa* living at the temple for many years, described how they had revolted against the reform. Basappa further stressed that Ellamma in the end had "closed their mouth and taught them a lesson," indicating that she punished those who had worked against her being worshipped in her locally specific form. This exemplifies that Ellamma and her regional characteristics are experienced as a persistently ruling power and unquestionable reality, still shaping the world—or at least her region—with her powerful play.

Trans*femininity beyond regional boundaries

In cross-regional discourses on gender nonconformity, *jōgappa*s are often described as a "transgender community of North Karnataka" and a "minority within sexual and gender minorities." They are assumed to share their gendered identities and experiences with other trans*individuals. At the same time, they are understood as being different from them, because their ties with Ellamma do not fully fit into discourses on gender and sexuality. The transnational umbrella term "transgender," adopted into the Indian context, subsumes diverse local gender-variant identities and expressions, bringing them into broader supra-regional discourses, but also threatening to make their respective regional particularities invisible. Applying this term, which originates from Western contexts and discourses focusing on gender, ultimately does not do justice to an identity characterized precisely by the interconnectedness of gender and devotion. Furthermore, *jōgappa*s themselves do not relate the term "transgender" to their specific identities, nor does the term seem to be of importance in their everyday lives.

Still, *jōgappa*s interact in cross-regional networks of various trans*feminine people and groups who embody trans*femininity in different ways, like *hijra*s or *kothi*s,[7] or people who identify rather with the global term "transgender." In Gadag and Bijapur, I observed that local CBOs working in the fields of sexual health and awareness of gender issues create spaces where trans*individuals can come together and get connected to CBOs and their trans*members in other cities of the region of North

Karnataka, and with organizations in the cosmopolitan city of Bangalore. Since recently, they also seek to strengthen the ties with trans*individuals who, like many *jōgappa*s, are from surrounding villages and so far have had only little exposure to like-minded people.

It may be in such social interactions that *jōgappa*s articulate for the first time questions concerning their female identities, their bodies, sexuality, or sexual health and share experiences of gender-based discrimination and violence. This strengthens a sense of togetherness outside of the realms of devotion and based on gender (Aneka 2014a, 95–97). Here a *jōgappa* may be enabled to express femininity as a matter of her individual self and to get access to various ways of embodying trans*femininity. Some *jōgappa*s are highly attracted to such possibilities, which are rare in their own regional contexts. Others pointedly oppose any interaction with CBOs and their members and stress that cross-regional concepts—of, for example, the surgical making of a female body—conflict fundamentally with their ideal of physical integrity and notions of embodying femininity through the relationship with the deity. Consequently, their regional particularity may also act as a barrier keeping them from participating in cross-regional spaces more frequently.

Explicit differentiations from and simultaneously close interactions with the *hijra*s mark current discourses among *jōgappa*s. *Hijra*s constitute cross-regionally interconnected trans*feminine communities with strong centers and networks all over India. Following the official recognition of a third gender category in 2014 (Semmalar 2014), their generally strong position and high visibility have been further reinforced. Focusing on the *hijra*s as the institutionalized "third gender," the category "*hijra*" became the synonym for the Indian "transgender" community. This occludes the diversity of trans*femininities among the *hijra*s, as well as the existence and distinctness of various further gender-variant groups and individuals. Moreover, *hijra*s have developed a clear impact on regional groups, especially regarding defining norms, practices, and hierarchies of trans*femininity.

One of the central markers of conceptual authenticity of the *hijra* identity and their trans*femininity is the *nirvāṇa* operation, the physical removal of male sexual organs, unless the person is already born with a body neither male nor female. Traditionally, the *nirvāṇa* is performed by an experienced *hijra* in a ritual context as a sacrifice to the deity Bahucharā Mātā. The survival of the *nirvāṇa* is the sign of the deity's blessing, who in return for the sacrifice of the individual's fertility provides the person with universal creative power (Reddy 2005, 97). The *nirvāṇa* establishes the *hijra*'s high status by linking her with sexual renunciation and chastity, and the auspicious power to confer fertility. This position is reinforced by demarcating the *hijra* operated on in the traditional way from those *hijra*s who have chosen the less prestigious way of surgeries performed by non-*hijra*s in a nonritual context and who are openly involved in sex-work. Methods like hormonal treatments and breast implants further add the criteria of creating a body "looking like that of a woman" to the trans*femininity hierarchies.[8] Surgeries to erase masculinity in a nonritual context, as well as the surgical and hormonal creation of femininity, are common practice among *hijra*s and trans*individuals in India today. However, only very few

have access to official options of gender affirming or sex reassignment surgeries, and consequently the majority employ illegal and unregulated services instead.

According to my observations in towns of North Karnataka, the *nirvāṇa* is propagated in a general sense of "being operated" versus "being not operated" (*akva*)[9] and is understood to be the key to successfully embodying femininity, beauty, and eroticism. This hegemony of the surgical making of a female body is characteristic for discourses of trans*femininity in other states of India as well, revealing a general mistrust and nonacceptance of allegedly contradictory performances of gender. In such hierarchies, primarily based on body modifications and corporeal femininity, trans*feminine individuals who live in a male body appear at the lower end, if not outside the spectrum of trans*femininities.

Although *hijra*s and *jōgappa*s share aspects of their gender-specific identities like their female selves as embodied in a male- or previously male-sexed body, many *jōgappa*s portray themselves in clear opposition to *hijra*s. Invoking their own particularity—their physical integrity, asceticism, and divinity—as incompatible with the norms propagated by *hijra*s, *jōgappa*s set themselves in contrast to the stereotypically negative image of *hijra*s, who would mutilate their bodies by performing the *nirvāṇa* and get involved in "dirty work" such as sex-work, disturbing the public by a provocative erotic appearance. *Jōgappa*s reinforce the dichotomy of asceticism versus active sexuality in order to structure the individual's respect in the society (ibid., 45); however, they associate this dichotomy with being *akva* versus *nirvāṇa*, the former referring to the respected non-operated ascetic *jōgappa* living in the name of Ellamma, the latter referring to the operated and sexually active *hijra*. Demarcations along such simplified lines do not necessarily correspond to lived realities and belongings of the *jōgappa*s, but rather strengthen the *jōgappa*s' claim to an independent and respectable identity linked to Ellamma. In fact, the emphasis on such differences is likely to be a response to the increasing interaction between both communities and the clear influence of *hijra*s.

Intersections between *hijra*s and *jōgappa*s are highly complex and contextual, depending on constantly changing factors, like the nature of a *jōgappa*'s relationship with her family, the support by devotees or trans*feminine friends, and individual concerns regarding gender or one's financial situation. Identifying oneself and being identified with *hijra*s promises strong social bonds with like-minded people, comparatively lucrative earnings, and belonging to a cross-regionally known and recognized trans*community. Further, being part of *hijra* networks allows, if not encourages, a less restrictive life, relationships with men, as well as the public expression of explicit femininity and eroticism; it also facilitates an easy and quick access to hormonal and surgical interventions (Aneka 2014a, 66). Young *jōgappa*s in search of a sense of belonging, who follow their current personal needs, often maintain dual or changing affiliations.

A long conversation I had with Usha was one of many examples illustrating how a *jōgappa* may be challenged to negotiate her individual belonging between the regional identity as a *jōgappa* and the cross-regionally organized communities of the *hijra*s. Usha devotedly told me about her close relationship with Ellamma, whose local characteristics manifested in her own female identity, and whom Usha had always

liked, although her family worshipped other deities. She also recalled the time when she lived in Bangalore with a group of *hijra*s to be with her trans*feminine friends and earn some money. Eventually, she did not find the loyalty she was looking for, and to her disappointment was even prohibited from attending Ellamma's festival in Saundatti. She then decided that "it is better to be a *jōgappa* and earn less. Then, people [at least] touch your feet and respect you" (2018). Still, she maintains friendships with *hijra*s, because, as she said, they all have the female identity in common.

Usha was frequently confronted with the question of *nirvāṇa*, on the one hand as a means to acquire femininity and beauty, and on the other hand as a risk to her respected status as *jōgappa*:

> I and [my *hijra* friend] used to quarrel a lot with each other. She used to say, "Hee! I[hn] am *nirvāṇa*, whereas you[sg] are [only] *akva*."[10] But I always replied, "Your[sg] mother didn't give birth to you[sg] like this [as *nirvāṇa*], get lost!" . . . The *hijra*s in Bangalore too used to say, "Hee! You[sg] too become *nirvāṇa*! You would look beautiful and [would easily] make some money." They said many such things. . . . My *jōgappa guru* always says, "Don't get the *nirvāṇa* done, there will be nothing anymore if you become *nirvāṇa*. Nowadays, the lives of *hijra*s are very bad. . . . You should learn to dance and to sing [in the name of Ellamma], this has value! Go and collect offerings in villages, this has value! Come forward and grow!" . . . I like what she says, every word!

I observed several times how *hijra*s as well as *jōgappa*s who themselves had become *nirvāṇa* promoted the *nirvāṇa* and further surgeries to acquire femininity, influencing their trans*feminine friends and teasing them for not being operated but still *akva*. When Usha was offered support to get the *nirvāṇa* done, she initially reacted evasively. But when I came back to Karnataka a year later, she was about to undergo the *nirvāṇa* procedure.

The *hijra* community, through the possibilities it facilitates to realize a less male and more female body, legitimately attracts especially young, marginalized trans*individuals in search of belonging and of methods to acquire femininity. In this way, cross-regional networks function as an important space for those who do not find their selves fully expressed through possibilities that are dominant in regional discourses on devotion, and who seek a surgical adjustment of their bodies. The implications of the *nirvāṇa* and the dynamics of social pressure and powerful hierarchies leading to its utilization, however, are noteworthy. A *jōgappa* who gets the *nirvāṇa* performed bears the identity marker of a *hijra* and therefore the central characteristic of trans*femininity in a cross-regional context. This makes her irrevocably less a *jōgappa* and more or merely a *hijra*, and as we will see below, detaches her from Ellamma and thus from regional belonging.

Ritual purity and the body

To understand what is at stake for a *jōgappa* who considers getting the *nirvāṇa* performed, it is necessary to look back at the particular meaning of a *jōgappa*'s body and the importance of its integrity. By inhabiting the body of a *jōgappa* and by urging the individual toward femininity, Ellamma constitutes the core of trans*femininity

in a particular regional context. As primary condition, however, she requires ritual purity, which is guaranteed by the integrity of the *jōgappa*'s body, and thus by her physically male body.

Ritual purity is already important at the time of the initiation. After an extensive ritual purification, the type of *muttu* being tied around the neck defines the degree of purity that the *jōgappa* embodies and that she has to maintain. Those who get the highly pure *mīsalu muttu* tied are "to be left untouched," "set apart," and "reserved" (*mīsalu*, Kittel 2006, 1256) for serving Ellamma as a member of the *jōg pan*, the inner circle of her close companions. They strictly follow the rules of purity, avoiding any risk of pollution caused in contact with the food, bodies, or bodily liquids of other people, or with death. Wearing the less pure *eñjalu muttu* instead allows the *jōgappa* to travel and meet people without much restriction, as the *muttu* itself is already less pure, like "leftover" food that has come in contact with another person's "saliva" (*eñjalu*, ibid., 265). Consequently, the degree of the *jōgappa*'s purity also defines her geographical mobility and social contacts within the region of North Karnataka and adjacent areas, the places she visits, the borders she crosses, and whom she frequently meets or rather avoids. This eventually determines which discourses she is exposed to.

If norms of purity are not complied with, Ellamma may start causing troubles again, or may reduce her presence as she then "only quickly passes by and doesn't stay [anymore]," as Rafik said. The most severe and irrevocable threat to a *jōgappa*'s ritual purity and to the presence of Ellamma is the violation of the integrity of their bodies, particularly by performing the *nirvāṇa*. When asked about the consequences of the *nirvāṇa*, *jōgappa*s stated that those who had undergone the procedure became impure and were no longer *jōgappa*s but *hijra*s. More detailed statements reveal nuances of purity linked with belonging and exclusion. If a *jōgappa* undergoes the *nirvāṇa*, she must take off her *muttu* and will not be allowed to worship Ellamma for a certain number of days. Only after a ritual bath may she continue worshiping her and get a new, though less pure *muttu* tied. The implied temporary impurity and the subsequent purification mark the transition to the *hijra* identity, as well as the reintegration into the *jōgappa* community. The latter cannot be completely consummated though, as the *nirvāṇa* is irrevocable to such an extent that the purifying rituals do not enable the *jōgappa* to recover her initial purity, ritual status, and respective belongings.

The highly pure *akva jōgappa*s would not allow a *nirvāṇa jōgappa* back into the *jōg pan*, their meetings, and rituals for Ellamma. Although those *jōgappa*s who became *nirvāṇa* could still form their own circles to worship Ellamma, the exclusion from the *jōg pan* is equal to the severe punishment of excommunication; as Usha explains, "they exclude us [from the *jōg pan*] just how people are excluded from their caste (*kula*)." Equally, Ellamma does not accept a *nirvāṇa jōgappa* as her medium, as Cannamma stressed:

> If I want to be able to do her *pūje*, I must live just how the *dēvaru* has sent me here. [If I follow this] I will reach *mōkṣa*. But if I would get the *nirvāṇa* done, I would become impure. I would be impure, just like a widow is impure. If I would cut that off [*pointing downward*], the *dēvaru* would not accept me anymore, I would no longer be able to touch her lights and do the *sēve* for the *dēvi*. My life would become zero.

The *nirvāṇa* does not necessarily lead to the complete loss of the *jōgappa* identity but still entails an irrevocably less pure status risking severe implications. Besides the loss of the *jōgappa*'s belonging to the *jōg pan*, it is the close relationship with Ellamma and thus the core of the regionally specific constitution of trans*femininity that is at stake. The legitimate claim to the *jōgappa*s' identity and femininity requires Ellamma's presence and active involvement; she is "instrumental in the realization of their gender identity" (Aneka 2014a, 23) and, as the *jōgappa* Radhika stresses, "[o]nly if the goddess herself comes and resides in us, we can become *jōgappa*s" (quoted in ibid., 28). Femininity is not perceived as authentic when achieved by the *nirvāṇa* and alterations of the body, but rather when being imposed and caused by Ellamma and linked to her worship and embodiment. The *nirvāṇa*, however, causes impurity and thus renders the particular regional trans*femininity impossible. Only a body that is just as perfectly intact as it was at the time of birth, and thus is of immaculate purity, enables Ellamma to enter and contribute to the *jōgappa*'s femininity.

Ellamma demands the *jōgappa*s to live in a body marked with female attributes in order to make her own gendered identity visible to the world. So, one may ask, could the *jōgappa* norms be renegotiated to realize the individual's desire for a more female body achieved by hormones or breast implants, as long as the body would remain complete? Cannamma explained the following:

> I don't have the wish to become *nirvāṇa*, but I had the wish to grow breasts. . . . When I wear a blouse, my body is like this [*points at her chest*], that doesn't look good. That's why I had this wish.
>
> *How do you relate getting breasts with Ellamma*?
>
> You cannot *cut*[en] off anything from the body, it would be wrong. But the body can be *improved*[en].[11] . . . Getting breasts is fine [with her], because that *dēvi* too is a woman, isn't she?, that's why! . . . It's possible to increase [our body], but not to reduce it.

Although not explicitly mentioned, physical integrity still matters in the words of Cannamma, with the focus on completeness; reducing the body would still have severe consequences, whereas increasing and "improving" the body by getting breasts, a clearly visible marker of femininity, is considered a possibility compatible with Ellamma and her identity as a woman. Although both aspects imply the violation of the body, the second evokes notions of putting on *śṛṅgāra* and feminine attributes, beautifying a material form and making its inner self visible and recognizable to the outer world. In such renegotiations of Ellamma's norms and ways of expressing and embodying femininity, the arguments are again established on the deity's identity and within regional notions of devotion and embodiment.

Conclusion

Regions, understood not only as geographical areas but also as cultural and social space, play an important role in determining discourses and in shaping realities the individual lives in or finds access to. Among *jōgappa*s, trans*femininity proceeds from Ellamma and is perceived as authentic and respectable if not embodied of one's own

accord, but when the individual is chosen by Ellamma to fall under her possessive influence and thus is driven toward femininity and Ellamma's worship. It is achieved not by emasculating the body and adjusting it to the individual's female self but by worshipping Ellamma, by identifying one's self with Ellamma's self, by being identified as Ellamma, and eventually by being identical with her. Consequently, the regional particularity of the *jōgappa*s' constitution of trans*femininity is founded within the interaction and identification between the *jōgappa*s and the regional manifestation of Ellamma in North Karnataka and South Maharashtra.

This potentially empowering particularity does not adhere to cross-regional discourses. Further, *hijra*s consider the *jōgappa*s' embodiment of femininity as not being able to compete with their own surgically emasculated and feminized *nirvāṇa* body, which is successfully propagated as superior in the cross-regional hierarchies of trans*femininity. It is unmistakable that in the regional context, however, the *nirvāṇa* detaches and cuts off the strong ties between the *jōgappa* and Ellamma by causing impurity; Ellamma no longer comes to occupy and inhabit the *jōgappa*'s body, and therefore will no longer unfold her *śakti* causing femininity. Just as a broken or incomplete *mūrti* is considered to be impure, inadequate, and incapable to carry and embody a deity and thus is no longer actively worshipped, also the *nirvāṇa jōgappa* no longer embodies Ellamma and loses the respected role as her medium. The *nirvāṇa* creates an irrevocable distance between a *jōgappa* and Ellamma, rendering the creation and embodiment of femininity in relation with Ellamma—and thus the core of the *jōgappa*s' regional identity and belonging—impossible.

As discussed with *jōgappa*s and CBO members, the interactions between *jōgappa*s and *hijra*s in the early twenty-first century have led to an increasing influence of dominant *hijra* discourses, blurring the boundaries between these communities and causing a growing number of *jōgappa*s to undergo the *nirvāṇa*. This may enable them to explicitly express and embody their female selves and ensures an identity and belonging that are cross-regionally linked and widely known. Implications of the *nirvāṇa*, however, indicate that such interactions lead to a loss of particularities of the regional, while at the same time regional particularities may also become more visible and accentuated once they are at stake. Those *jōgappa*s who have become *nirvāṇa* admittedly still worship Ellamma and stress that they consider themselves as *jōgappa*s, but at the same time they seem to shift their focus away from the service of Ellamma and maintain greater interactions with the *hijra*s in cities. Additionally, the faith in the regional manifestation of Ellamma, according to the *jōgappa*s, is generally declining in the society, diminishing the space wherein *jōgappa*s can embody trans*femininity and still inhabit a respected position.

These tendencies can be interpreted as signs of changing norms and practices among the *jōgappa*s. Statements regarding implications for *jōgappa* identities and their trans*femininity at large, and for what defines the *jōgappa*s as distinct and regional, however, need further research. For now, *jōgappa*s across generations still agree that the *nirvāṇa* renders them impure and no longer acceptable as Ellamma's medium and close attendant within the *jōg pan*. Thus, at least for the moment, Ellamma seems to remain a ruling power in the realities of the *jōgappa*s, still unfolding her play in the worldly sphere and changing the gender of her devotees.

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Notes

1. In the German language the so called "gender star" or asterix is one possible way to mark terms as exceeding the dichotomy of female and male. I use the prefix "trans-" and the asterix to indicate that the *jōgappa*s' gender identity exceeds the terms "transfemininity" or "transgender," being closely interconnected with notions and practices related to Ellamma and her worship.

2. In the existing work on devotional traditions in the context of Renuka-Ellamma (Assayag 1992; Ramberg 2014) and on gender-variant communities like the *hijra*s (Reddy 2005), *jōgappa*s are mentioned as comparative or additional references; papers by Bradford (1983) and Brückner (1996, 2011) provide important approaches regarding the *jōgappa*s. More recent publications by the NGO Aneka (2014a, 2014b) focus exclusively on *jōgappa*s and provide insights into the diversity among the *jōgappa*s and their cultural, socioeconomic, and gender-specific characteristics; the paper by Dutta, Khan, and Lorway (2019) focuses on structural violence; and two papers by Merkle (2015, 2016) concentrate on intersections between gender and devotion in the *jōgappa*s' trans*femininity.

3. The "regional," "local," or "folk" is not understood to be contrary, subordinated to, or independent from supra-regional Sanskritic-Brahmanic traditions, but rather as one of at least five components of Hinduism that, according to Sontheimer (2004), constitute Hindu traditions by their interactions.

4. *Kāḍu* (Kittel 2006, 401–2) means "treating someone harshly or disrespectfully," "to give trouble," "to plague"; as well as "forest," "wild," "black"; *āṭa* (ibid., 149) means "to play," "amusement," "acting or performance."

5. Besides the group of *jōgappa*s, there are various other groups of devotees who are similarly initiated to the devotional service of Ellamma, and who, as the *jōgappa* Cannamma (2013) noted, lead a life outside of the social norm just like *jōgappa*s. These are born with a female body and may be called "*jōgamma*s," "*jōgati*s," or "*dēvadāsi*s"; for details see Bradford (1983), Assayag (1992), and Ramberg (2014). In our conversations, *jōgappa*s regularly used the female terms "*jōgamma*" or "*jōgati*" to refer to themselves, as these do justice to their own gender identity. The term "*dēvadāsi*" was hardly used. Reasons may be that I and my assistant did not explicitly address the *dēvadāsi* complex, and that the *jōgappa*s themselves, just like many dedicated devotees with a female-sexed body too, do not identify with this term, or avoid the term because of stigmatizing connotations. As Soneji (2012, 6–8) points out, in the wake of colonial and postcolonial projects, the term "*dēvadāsi*" has become a transregional category that subsumes a vast number of regional communities, and has become associated with moralizing labels like "sacred prostitute" or "temple dancer" and with discourses on reform.

6. Statements made by another person or a deity are given as direct speech in accordance with the grammatical structure of the Kannada language. Additions necessary for the reader are

marked with square brackets. For non-English terms, I apply the Kannada spelling according to the dictionary by Ferdinand Kittel (2006, first published in 1894).

7. For details regarding the *kothi*s, see Bandyopadhyay (2010).

8. For details regarding implications of the *nirvāṇa* and the performative production of gender among *hijra*s, see Reddy (2005).

9. "*Nirvāṇa*" and "*akva*" as used here are community-specific terms, coined among the *hijra*s and adapted by other gender minorities.

10. In the Kannada original, the second person singular "you" (*nī*, *nīnu*) marked with "[sg]" is used to degrade the person addressed, while the first person plural "we" (*nāvu*) marked with "[hn]" is used as a honorific form for "I."

11. Terms marked with "[en]" in the Kannada original are spoken in English.

Conversations with *Jōgappas*

If not noted otherwise, the conversations took place in the presence of my assistant Bhagat Y. Bhandage, who identifies with the term "transgender" as female.

Basappa (2020), around sixty years old, has lived with a priest and his family at the temple in Saundatti for the last twenty to twenty-five years; the conversation took place in their house; duration 48:26; language Kannada.

Bassu (2018, 2019), between sixty and seventy years old, lives at the temple in Saundatti without a permanent home; the conversations took place in public space at the temple; duration 17:46 and 33:16; language Kannada.

Cannamma (2013, 2017), between forty and forty-five years old, lives with her mother, became well-known as Ellamma's medium; the conversations took place in front of the domestic shrine for Ellamma at her home in Gadag; duration 2:26:41 and 2:39:00; language Kannada.

Rafik (2014), around twenty years old, from Muslim background; the conversation took place in the home of her family in a poor Muslim area in Hubli in the presence of an assistant who identifies as transgender and is affiliated with the *hijra* community; duration 1:33:16; language Hindi/Urdu and Kannada.

Renamma (2015), around thirty years old, lives in a village between Gadag and Badami; the conversation took place in the premises of the CBO office in Gadag; duration 44:14; language Kannada.

Usha (2018), around twenty years old; the conversation took place in front of the domestic shrine for Ellamma at her home in Gadag; duration 4:00:43; language Kannada.

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The Idea of Madhyadeśa in Early India

History of a Region's Identity

In the premodern world, many communities believed that they were located in the center of the world. The Hindu community, too, invented the idea of Madhyadeśa (Middle Country) in the first millennium BCE. This space was as much a physical landscape as a set of cultural markers. The people of Madhyadeśa were believed to speak a "pure" language, follow the norms of a patriarchal caste order, and perform the right set of rituals. These cultural markers were contrasted with those of the people of Mlecchadeśa (Land of Barbarians). In the initial phase, the physical space identified with Madhyadeśa was fluid and malleable. The cultural markers, however, stayed the same or changed ever more slowly. Those cultural markers and ideologies continue to resonate in the lives of people. These ideas define the grammar of most marriages and political formations today. This can be demonstrated by comparing the performance of Madhyadeśa and Mlecchadeśa along a grid of indicators.

Keywords: Madhyadeśa—Mlecchadeśa—*dharmaśāstra*—caste system—marriage—Dalit

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Places are more than dots in a graticule and people much more than statistics illustrated on a graph. Places have their own power, which is reflected in the attachment or emotions of people. Meanings and values are attached to specific landscapes and define their distinctiveness. That is why connotations and symbolic meanings represent a cluster of ideas about a center (Bhardwaj 1973; Nizami and Khan 2013). Certain orthodox believers may proclaim that their god "gave" them pieces of real estate, whose ownership cannot therefore be a matter of earthly debate (Blij 2009, 52). Ideas of a village, town, region, or country are predicated upon definitions of space. Space, however, is not static and universal. It is produced by humans and is dynamic like the arrow of time. Spaces happen. They are constructed and they disintegrate.

Many South Asian scholars of the earlier generation described a region by demarcating a physical space and weaving into it a narrative of human adaptation.[1] This form of conceptualization relied upon the idea of the physical landscape—river valleys, mountains, and more—shaping humans and creating regions. These ideas of regions focused on something concrete, measurable, and visible. Such formulations missed the less tangible flows of ideas that are involved in the expansion, shrinkage, or disintegration of a region.

There has been a gradual shift to conceptualizing regions on the basis of non-physical cultural phenomena. Ideas of region are increasingly based on notions of historical memory, linguistic unity, shared culture, and on structural parallels based on caste and community. Such formulations were enhanced by the rise of nationalism and the making of nation-states. Yet, as much as they relied upon cultural norms, regions were themselves historically contingent and did not just reflect but also created coherent world views based on religious, cultural, social, and literary traditions. The fact that boundaries of a cultural region could be radically different from a linguistic or historical region shows that the idea of region is both objective and subjective (Cohn 1967, 5–37).

In this article, I address two interrelated fields of research into the idea of a region. First, I trace the history of a region called Madhyadeśa (Middle Country) in early India. Second, I show how the idea of region imagined more than two thousand years ago affects the modes of behavior of groups and communities in contemporary South Asia. The inquiry begins with a description of Madhyadeśa found in Brahmanical texts. It is followed by a discussion on how the boundary of Madhyadeśa was modified

in the Buddhist tradition. Some of the early texts prescribe modes of behavior and patterns of habitation for the residents of Madhyadeśa. I discuss the implications of such prescriptions. This is followed by a brief discussion on the information about Madhyadeśa found in the texts and inscriptions of the second millennium. The rest of the article is an argument about the persistence of memory of Madhyadeśa in modern times in areas both inside Madhyadeśa and beyond. Few remember Madhyadeśa as a region today. Yet many of the prescriptions of the Madhyadeśa ideal continue to define the "grammar" of community lives in northern India.

Madhyadeśa

The earliest references to Madhyadeśa are found in later Vedic texts. The period of their composition is believed to be between 1000 and 600 BCE (Macdonell and Keith 1912, 1, 165–69). These texts, consisting of the *Yajurveda* and *Atharvaveda*, the Brāhmaṇas and the Upaniṣads, were composed in the land of the Kuru-Pāñcālas in archaic Sanskrit. The Kurus and Pāñcālas were two powerful lineages of those times. The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* provides one of the earliest references to territorial identities covering large areas. In the chapter on *Indramahābhiṣeka* (coronation of Indra) (VIII.14, in Haug 1863), the term "the middle fixed region" has been used.[2] This "fixed region," inhabited by the Kurus, Pāñcālas, Vaśas, and Uśīnaras, would correspond to modern Kurukshetra, Meerut, and some areas further east. Apart from mentioning the "middle fixed region," the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* also talks about regions of the north, south, east, and west. The use of the words "*asyām*" (on this) for the middle fixed region and "*etasyām*" (in this facing me) for other territories like south or west indicates that the composers of the texts were located in the middle fixed territory.

The idea that the middle region was "fixed" also hints at the possibility that other regions were more fluid and their boundaries could shift. The middle fixed region became the core of Madhyadeśa in the subsequent period. It is also significant that the idea of the middle fixed region emerges in the context of coronation of the chiefs or kings of the Kuru and Pāñcāla ruling lineages, who played a significant role in the *Mahābhārata*. The elaborate coronation rituals of powerful chiefs or kings show that the middle fixed region was not only a ritual assertion but a political one as well.

The prehistory of Madhyadeśa

Texts of the later period expanded the idea of the middle fixed region to include many other areas. They retain a memory of the earlier idea of a "pure region" by inventing terms like "Brahmāvarta" for the area between the rivers Saraswatī and Dṛṣadvatī, and "Brahmarṣideśa" for the areas of Kurukṣetra and the lands of the Matsyas, Pañcalas, and Śūrasenas (*Mānava Dharmaśāstra* II.17–20, in Olivelle 2005; see figure 1).

How could the middle fixed region expand in size in this way? In this section I examine references to this process in the later Vedic texts. In the late portions of the *Ṛgveda*, areas to the south had a negative connotation. It was the land of banishment, of exile (Raychaudhuri 1923, 40; Witzel 1999, 14).[3] The *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* points out

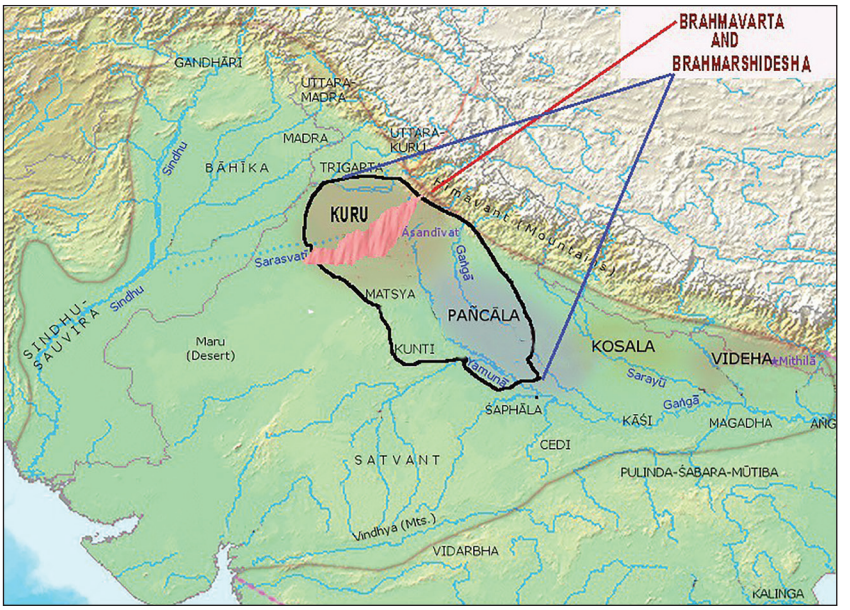

Figure 1. Late Vedic Culture (1100–500 BCE).
Source: Modified version of map of the same title is available through Wikimedia Commons, under a Creative Commons license. Creator: Avantiputra7, modified by P. K. Basant.

that Kurukṣetra was bounded on the south by the Khāṇḍava forest (Law 1976, 101).[4] The famous *Mahābhārata* story of the burning of the Khāṇḍavaprastha gives us some idea about the location of the Khāṇḍava forest that defined the southern limits of Kurukṣetra in the time of the composition of the Brāhmaṇas. It is mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* that the city of Indraprastha was established near the Khāṇḍava forest. Michael Witzel has pointed to the presence of retroflex consonants in the words "Khāṇḍava" and "Kīkaṭa" (Witzel 1999, 14). Such a cluster of consonants was alien to the Indo-Aryan languages in the early stages. The word "Khāṇḍava," its description as a place peopled by aborigines, the story of its burning by Arjuna, and its settlement by the Pāṇḍavas seem to indicate that the area around modern Delhi (Indraprastha) was alien territory for the Kurus.

The Kurus are also called "Bharatas" after an eponymous ancestor. The Brāhmaṇa texts locate the Bharatas in the area of the Saraswatī, Yamuna, and Ganga rivers (Raychaudhuri 1923, 42). In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, Bharata is said to have defeated the Sātvats and taken away the horse that had been prepared for an *aśvamedha* sacrifice. These Sātvats lived near Bharata's realm, namely near the Ganges and the Yamuna (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* XIII.5.4.11 and XIII.5.4.21, in Eggeling 1882–1900). The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (VIII.14) speaks of monarchs of the south called Bhojas, whose subjects were called Sātvats. Many stories narrated in the *Mahābhārata* suggest that the boundaries of the south touched Delhi. For example, at the end of the *Mūsala Parva*, Arjuna is shown as settling the aged men, women, and children of the Vṛṣṇis in Indraprastha. He also established a Yadu prince named Vajra in Indraprastha (*Mahābhārata* 16.8. 67–70, in Sukthankar 1966). Thus, the area around Delhi was believed to have some connection with the Yādavas. The terms "Bhoja," "Sātvat,"

"Vṛṣṇi," "Andhaka," and "Yādava" are used interchangeably in the later Vedic and post Vedic texts. References in the Brāhmaṇa texts seem to indicate that in the early centuries of the first millennium BCE, the "south" might refer to areas around Delhi.

It is well known that Yādava lineages were located in and around Mathura. In the Sabhā Parva of the Mahābhārata, Sahadeva set out to conquer the south, and his victory march began with a conquest of the land of the Śūrasenas (Mahābhārata 2.28.1), a clan of the Yādavas. The Mahābhārata calls the river Kali Sindh (in Malwa) by the name of Dakṣiṇa Sindhu (Indus River of the South; 3.80.72). It is thus obvious that the early composers of the Mahābhārata regarded the territories around this river as part of the south.

The gathered evidence indicates that the areas of Delhi and Mathura were considered alien territories in many early texts. However, at some point in later Vedic times, Delhi and Mathura were integrated into the middle fixed region. I can make this inference because the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*, a text composed between 200 BCE and 200 CE, considers the Śūrasena territory as part of the Brahmarṣideśa (*Mānava Dharmaśāstra* II.18), which was a shade less pure than Brahmāvarta (the area between the rivers Saraswatī and Dṛṣadvatī). The memory of the original middle fixed region is retained in the idea of Brahmāvarta. Madhyadeśa represented the third ring of purity (*Mānava Dharmaśāstra* II.19) in this scheme of sacred spaces. The mention of names of many aboriginal groups who inhabited areas that were incorporated into Madhyadeśa suggests that there is a vertical component to the idea of a region too. Groups like the Nāgas and Rākṣasas who inhabited the forest of Khāṇḍava near Delhi were not considered part of the culture of Madhyadeśa. While Madhyadeśa expanded horizontally, it also subordinated communities vertically. The following discussion will try to examine the vertical as well as horizontal components of the idea of Madhyadeśa.

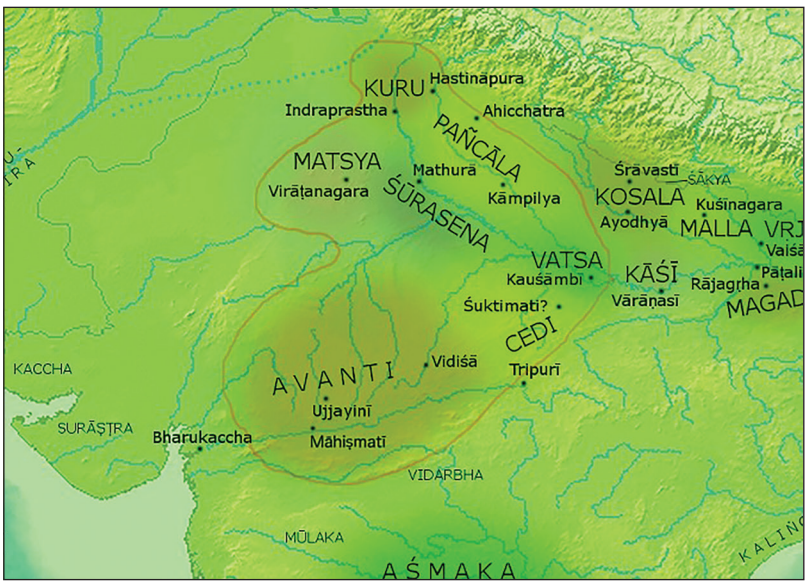

Figure 2. Mahajanapadas *c.* 500 BCE (Madhyadeśa acccording to Brahmanism).
Source: Modified version of map of the same title is available through Wikimedia Commons, under a Creative Commons license. Creator: Avantiputra7, modified by P. K. Basant.

The Madhyadeśa of classical Brahmanism

> The land between the Himalaya and Vindhya ranges, to the east of Vinaśana and west of Prayāga, is known as the "Middle Region." (*Mānava Dharmaśāstra* 2.21)[5]

The *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra* describes Madhyadeśa as lying to the east of the area where the river Saraswatī disappears, to the west of the Kālakavana (a forest near Allahabad), to the north of the Pāripātra (the Satpura ranges in Madhya Pradesh), and south of the Himalayas. This notion of the Madhyadeśa is found in the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*, too (see figure 2). Many of the Purāṇas, believed to have been written around the fifth to sixth century, follow the division of space defined by the *dharmaśāstra*[6] literature. This definition of Madhyadeśa excluded places east of Allahabad from its ambit. This would mean that eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Bengal were not considered part of Madhyadeśa. Thus, cities like Varanasi, Ayodhya, Vaisali, or Pataliputra were believed to be located beyond Madhyadeśa.

What is interesting, however, is that the boundaries of Madhyadeśa as mentioned in the Brahmanical and the Buddhist literature do not match. The Buddha lived and preached in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The four places of pilgrimage in the Buddhist tradition—Kapilavastu, Bodh Gaya, Sāranātha, and Kuśīnārā—were located beyond the Madhyadeśa of the Brahmanical tradition. So, the Buddhist tradition created a different notion of Madhyadeśa. The Majjhimadesa (Middle Country) of the Buddhist texts includes areas that were closely linked to the life of the Buddha. In the *Mahāvagga*, the eastern boundary of Madhyadeśa is said to extend up to the town of Kājangala (near Bhagalpur, Bihar; Law 1976, 12–13). The *mahājanapada*s of Kāsi, Kosala, Anga, Magadha, Vajji, Malla, Cetiya, and Vatsa, areas beyond the boundaries of the Brahmanical Madhyadeśa, were part of the Buddhist conception of Madhyadeśa (see figure 3).

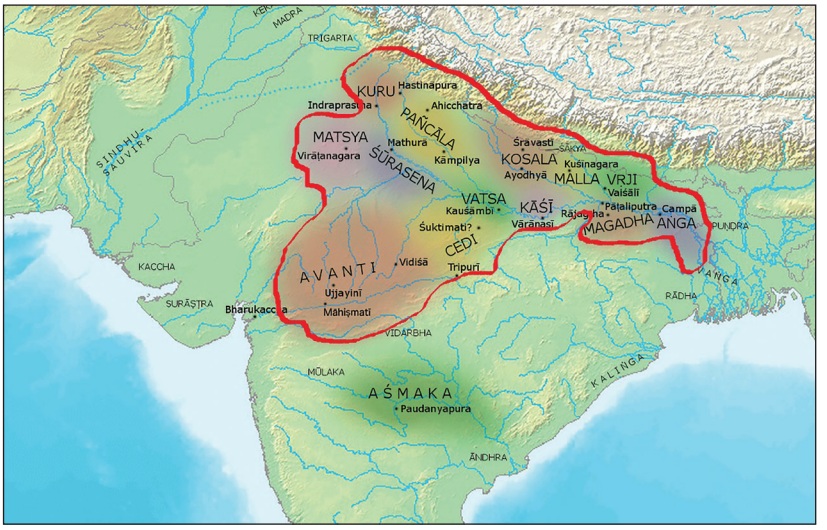

Figure 3. Mahajanapadas *c.* 500 BCE. (Middle Country, Brahmanical and Buddhist). Modified version of map of the same title is available through Wikimedia Commons, under a Creative Commons license. Creator: Avantiputra7, modified by P. K. Basant.

Madhyadeśa itself was located in Āryāvarta; the world beyond Āryāvarta, according to the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*, was peopled by barbarians. Thus, the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* creates a fivefold division of space along a spectrum of the purest to the most polluted. The units of this division are Brahmāvarta, Brahmarṣideśa, Madhyadeśa, Āryāvarta, and Mlecchadeśa. This division is curiously similar to the fivefold division of the *varṇa* system. The *varṇa* system, generally translated as the "caste" system, assumes that Hindu society is divided into Brāhmaṇa, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya, Sūdra, and outcaste groups like the Mlecchas, Caṇḍālas, and Niṣādās.

What is special about Madhyadeśa?

The authors of the Brahmanical and Buddhist texts pictured themselves as cultured and civilized people who were located in the center of the world. Thus, they claimed that Madhyadeśa was the place where the conduct of people was in accordance with *dharma* (the code of conduct that ensures success in this life and the next one). It was the place where people spoke a "pure" language (Macdonell and Keith 1912, 2, 279). Paṇini, the Sanskrit grammarian of the fifth century BCE, called this language *devabhāṣā* (language of the gods). The Brahmanical tradition was very particular about the correct pronunciation of words. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (iii.2.1.23–24) mentions that the enemies of gods could not pronounce words properly. Barbarians are referred to as *mṛdhravācāh* or "those of hostile speech" (Macdonell and Keith 1912, 1, 348).

Brahmanical and Buddhist texts exhort people to follow the cultural practices of the people of the Middle Country. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* regards the language of the inhabitants of the Kuru-Pāñcāla area as the finest (Kane 1963, 107). So, the Middle Country was seen as different from other areas, because people spoke a "better" language. In Brahmāvarta, "the conduct of the four classes and the intermediary classes, handed down for generations, is called the conduct of good people" (*Mānava Dharmaśāstra* 2.17). What is interesting about the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*'s observation is that even the "purest" land was inhabited by people of all four *varṇa*s and also by impure outcastes like Caṇḍālas and Niṣādās. The conduct of all these castes was believed to be the model of "good conduct" in other parts of the world. For the Brahmarṣideśa, an area a shade less "pure" than Brahmāvarta, the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* believed that the conduct of Brāhmaṇas was a model of good conduct for the rest of the world (ibid., 2.21). In the age of the Brāhmaṇa texts, "good conduct" would probably have meant following the rules of caste and observation of various rituals. By the same logic, one can assume that those who did not live in the Middle Country spoke "crude" languages and did not follow the rules of hierarchy, separation, and endogamy mandated by the caste system or perform Brahmanical rituals.

One can get a better understanding of the idea of the Middle Country if one reviews the comments of Brahmanical texts on the people inhabiting the "south." The Yādava clans are associated with the territories to the south in the *Mahābhārata* and the Purāṇas. Some of the practices of the Yādavas were censured in the Brahmanical tradition. They practiced cross-cousin marriage and marriage by bride-capture.

They did not have kings and took decisions in assemblies. So, their kinship system and political structure were different from those of the people of the Middle Country (Basant 2012, 228–36).

Dharmasūtra/śāstra construction of Madhyadeśa as ideal space

The *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* clearly states that Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas, and Vaiśyas should not cross the boundaries of Āryāvarta. This was in line with the notion of ideal space articulated through the ideal of Madhyadeśa, which implied not only flexible demarcations of regional boundaries but also normative ideas about the form of an ideal settlement and household. In this way, religiously ordained and symbolically charged hierarchies were translated into spatial structures and defined patterns of behavior. Having defined Madhyadeśa, the *dharmasūtra/śāstra* texts shifted their focus to the idea of ideal individual settlements; we see this in the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*, where it is said that outcastes like the

> Cāṇḍālas and Śvapacas, however, must live outside the village and they should be made Apapātras. Their property consists of dogs and donkeys, their garments are the clothes of the dead; they eat in broken vessels; their ornaments are of iron; and they constantly roam about. (*Mānava Dharmaśāstra* 10.51)

This quotation from the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* clearly indicates that outcastes were expected to live outside the main settlement. The *dharmasūtra/śāstra* injunction for creating an ideal space was based on the idea of high castes occupying the ritually pure section of the settlement. The fourfold *varṇa* system pushed out the fifth caste beyond the boundaries of the village. It is significant that many of the terms used for groups that were considered outcastes have a spatial connotation. Terms like "*pratyanta*" (frontier), "*antavāsāyin*" (one who lives at the border), "*anirvāsita*" (not banished), "*nirvāsita*" (banished), "*antyaja*" (born at the border), and "*āṭavika*" (wandering people of the forest) are connected with the idea of space. Whether space was invoked in a metaphorical sense or represented real spatial separation would need further research; this injunction, however, articulates a material form of exclusion. Imagined geographies functioned in this way as tools of power, as a means of controlling and subordinating people and places (Basant 2012, 271–72). That the *dharmasūtra/śāstra* injunction of the exclusion of outcastes worked in material terms, too, is proved by modern studies of settlement layout of villages. Scholars who have worked on settlement patterns in north India have pointed out that the households of Dalits are invariably located along the margins of the main settlement, to the south. This is because Yama, the god of death, is believed to live in the southerly direction. If he were to visit a village, it is the Dalit households he would encounter first (Singh and Khan 1999).[7]

The designation of ideal space in the *dharmasūtra/śāstra* texts had its locus in the individual household. The texts give a lot of importance to the act of establishing a "fire for the household." This ritual remains important in the minds of modern Indians, too. The centrality of the household in the scheme of things for the *dharmasūtra/śāstra* is related to the fact that most people in most societies live in households, in

which membership is usually based on kinship. It is simultaneously a dwelling unit, a unit of economic cooperation, and the unit within which reproduction and early childhood socialization takes place (Netting 1984, xxi).

The *dharmasūtra/śāstra* literature indicates the presence of a variety of households. However, the ideal household is that of a *gṛhapati* (householder), who symbolizes control over the productive and reproductive functions of the household. The householder, after all, represents a stage of life in the larger scheme of the cosmopolis. Kumkum Roy (1992, 16) has pointed out that in later Vedic times the *gṛha* (household) came to be defined as the ideal household type, where the *gṛhapati* (householder) was projected as the controlling authority, and the roles of the wife and sons were subordinated.

Vedic literature is, among many other things, a narrative of the creation of patriarchy. A hierarchically ordered kinship structure under the authority of the *gṛhapati* marginalized other kinds of households. Moreover, household rituals marginalized women's role in reproduction (Roy 1994, 268). So, in a statement like, "a householder should marry a wife who comes from the same class as he, who has not been married before, and who is younger than he" (*Gautama Dharmasūtra* 4.1, in Olivelle 1999), the overwhelming concern with marriage practices and strictures against *pratiloma* (hypogamy) or mixed-caste marriages veered around the issue of controlling women. The ideal woman had to be quiet and submissive; we thus see the injunction: "A sharp tongued woman should be divorced immediately" (*Baudhāyana* 2.4.6, in Olivelle 1999). This idea is tattooed eternally afresh in text after text. For the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*, the inferiority of women was natural, and the rules prescribed for controlling them were simply injunctions meant to preserve this natural order. We can see this in the following examples from the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*: "It is the very nature of women to corrupt men" (*Mānava Dharmaśāstra* 2.213); "The bed and the seat, jewelry, lust, anger, crookedness, a malicious nature and bad conduct are what Manu assigned to women" (*Mānava Dharmaśāstra* 9.17).

The *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* describes a variety of marriage practices along a descending grid of legitimacy. Such marriage practices include the tradition of *gandharva vivāha*, in which the girl and boy fall in love and marry without the intervention of kinsmen. But such marriage practices are low down in the hierarchy of approved forms of marriage. The *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* prescribes *Brahma vivāha* as the ideal form of marriage, wherein the head of a household hands over his daughter or granddaughter to another householder. In the *Brahma vivāha* form of marriage women have no agency. They are treated as items of exchange between male heads of households. Honor killings, riots, and murders over issues of marriage in India today are a replication of mindsets created in the early centuries of the Common Era. The Brāhmaṇa thinkers were willing a social order into existence by envisioning "ideal" households. The household was the crucible in which the hierarchies to be replicated in society were worked out (Tyagi 2008, 350). It was an attempt to create a pathology of normalcy.

Having invented an ideal space and designed an ideal household, the *dharmasūtra/śāstra* texts set out to monitor social behavior in the more visible arena of the larger settlement, moving out from the household into the domain of the social. It can be

understood by prescriptions of different figures of speech for students of different castes. Āpastamba, a well-known *dharmasūtra* writer, says, "A Brāhmin should beg placing 'Madam' at the beginning, Kṣatriya placing 'Madam' in the middle and Vaiśya placing 'Madam' at the end" (*Āpastamba* 3, 28–30, in Olivelle 1999). The quotation shows that placement of the word "madam" automatically betrayed the caste status of a *brahmacārin* (pious student). There was an attempt to prescribe modes of behavior that would channel flows of power. This would define patterns of relationships between older and younger, high caste and low caste, and men and women.

The study of the visible spectrum of the social universe gives us an idea about the ways in which subordination was normalized. Political sociologists have shown that American children often confuse the president, policemen, and the father with the benign state (Abrams 1980). The *dharmasūtra*s/*śāstra*s as a body of texts sought to represent the "illusory common interest of society." Style connects to substance. The *dharmasūtra*s/*śāstra*s created a system of ideas that sought to regulate every aspect of life, covering themes like what to wear, how to talk, or what directions to face while urinating or defecating. This obsession with minutiae was an attempt to create a single moral universe. In this, society and power were cleverly compressed. They took for granted the existence of a single and morally centered world that was serviced and unified by Brāhmaṇas. For example, the following quote defines a high-caste person's circle of people, specifying those with whom he could talk:

> Let him not commune with every one; for he who is consecrated draws nigh to the gods, and becomes one of the deities. Now the gods do not commune with everyone, but only with a *brāhmaṇa*, or a *rājanya*, or a *vaiśya*; for these are able to sacrifice. Should there be occasion for him to converse with a *śūdra*, let him say to one of those, "Tell this one so and so! tell this one so and so!" (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* III.I.I.10)

> Now there are four different forms of this call, viz. "come hither (*ehi*)!" in the case of a *brāhmaṇa*; "approach (*āgahi*)!" and "hasten hither (*ādrava*)!" in the case of a *vaiśya* and a member of the military caste (*rājanyabandhu*); and "run hither (*ādhāva*)!" in that of a *śūdra*. (*Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* I.I.IV.12)

The quotation from the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* showing the banishment of Śūdras from the linguistic space is a statement about the creation of a new discourse of power. In the description of different forms of the imperative verb for calling, Vaiśyas are supposed to come quickly while Śūdras are expected to come running. So the pattern of physical movement is also defined by one's caste status. This process of marginalization becomes more visible in texts like the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*, where people of different castes were expected to don different clothes and carry different kinds of staffs (II.41–47).

> The name of a priest should have (a word for) auspiciousness, of a ruler strength, of a commoner, property, and the name of a *śūdra* should breed disgust. (*Mānava Dharmaśāstra* 2.31)

> Chaste students of the Veda should wear (in descending order of class) the skins of black antelope, gazelle and male goat, and hemp, linen and wool. (*Mānava Dharmaśāstra* 2.42)

These quotations show that the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* was inventing distinctions that would easily identify members of the three upper castes. *Śūdras* do not feature in the list because they had already been banished from the linguistic and ritual space of the "pure." As the outcastes were meant to wear clothes discarded by the upper castes (*Mānava Dharmaśāstra* 10.51), there was no need for creating a distinctive clothing for them. Their mark of distinction was their deprivation. This was also visible in forms of greeting, "With joined hands, let a Brahmin greet by stretching his right-hand level with his ears, a Kṣatriya level with his chest, a Vaiśya level with his waist, and a Śūdra very low. When returning the greetings of a person belonging to one of the higher classes, the last syllable of his name should be lengthened to three morae" (*Āpastamba* 1.6.16–21). This meant that the status of an individual was defined by the mere pronouncement of his or her name.

It is remarkable that the prescriptions for the presentation of different castes in social space—the way a male person is to be greeted and the way his name is to be announced—are meant to automatically announce the status of the one who greets and the one who is greeted. "Homo hierarchicus" announces his presence not only by the dress he wears but also by the gestures of his body and by the intonations and emphases involved in articulating the words in a sentence.[8] Bodily gestures as messages of power and subordination are further illustrated in the following passage:

> When he meets the teacher after sunrise, however, he should clasp his feet; at all other times he should exchange greetings, although, according to some, he should embrace the teacher's feet even at other times. In the presence of his teacher, moreover, he should not speak while lying down. (*Āpastamba* 1.6.16–21)
>
> To his mother and father he should show the same obedience as to his teacher. A student who has returned home should clasp the feet of all his elders. (*Āpastamba* 1.14.6)
>
> He should also clasp the feet of his brothers and sisters according to seniority. He should rise up and greet an officiating priest, a father-in-law, or a paternal or maternal uncle who is younger than himself, or he may silently clasp his feet. In every case, however, he should rise up before offering his greetings. (*Āpastamba* 1.14.8–12)

These passages sought to create a grammar of gestures that defined proper conduct in social space. Who was to bow to whom and at what angle was meticulously defined. Who was to walk in front and who was to follow was worked out with the precision of a military drill. Inferiority in age and status was to be demonstrated over and over again in public and private spaces. This grammar defined the patterns of behavior in everyday life, and their repeated displays created the ideal Brahmanical individual. This ideal person had to observe rules of precedence in public spaces, too. People of the lower castes were supposed to give way to people of the higher castes (*Āpastamba* 2.11.5–9). So, the "self" presented in everyday life was constructed to the specification of the *dharmasūtra*/*śāstra* tradition. This is the homo hierarchicus who demands subservience in visible space, in the modes of traffic to be used by people of different castes in Indian villages, and in the right to precedence on roads.

Propagation of Madhyadeśa traditions beyond its borders

Mlecchadeśa (Land of Barbarians) was meant to be avoided by Aryans. How could the noble Aryan cross over to Mlecchadeśa? The empirical world of the subcontinent was radically different from the divisions established by the *dharmasūtra/śāstra* tradition. Literary sources refer to many *janapada*s (lands and people). These *janapada*s represented a range of different lifestyles. The *tinai* idea of *Tamilakam* is one such example. The Sangam literature produced in the early centuries of the Common Era in the Tamil-speaking areas of south India mentions the idea of the *tinai* (genre). It was a poetic convention that connected varying landscapes with different moods. The *tinai* idea shows that the Tamil region was divided into hilly regions, dry areas, pastoral tracts, agricultural lands, and coastal areas (Chattopadhyaya 2014, 8). Each of these subregions had different manners and customs. Thus, the propagation of the Madhyadeśa ideal would require a large range of interventions. The Brāhmaṇa thinkers came up with a variety of ideas about the issue of amalgamating Mlecchadeśa into Madhyadeśa tradition. The most startling suggestion was made by the eighth-century Kashmir scholar Medhātithi. In his commentary on the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*, he says,

> if a certain well-behaved king of the *Kṣatriya* caste should happen to defeat the *mlecchas* and make that land inhabited by people of the four castes, relegating the indigenous *mlecchas* to the category of "*Cāṇḍāla*," as they are in *Āryāvarta*, then that which was a "country of the *mlecchas*" would become a "land fit for sacrifices". (Medhātithi 2.23, in Jha 1920)

It is remarkable that Medhātithi has done away with the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*'s idea of space as a tangible, demarcated physical object. A new trope had emerged that abolished space as a determinant of the construction of the sacred. Once sacred space is freed from physical geography, the possibilities of its expansion are endless. There were a variety of ways in which Mlecchadeśas were turned into sacred lands. One strategy for crossing over to Mlecchadeśa seems to have been the use of fire as a great ritual purifier. Lighting fires as part of household rituals was prescribed as a necessary act for a householder. Household rituals of fire and a variety of fire sacrifices helped Brahmanical communities cross over to territories hitherto regarded as Mlecchadeśas.

Another interesting strategy adopted by the Brahmanical tradition was that of the transfer of toponyms of the Madhyadeśa. Names of holy rivers or holy places saw a wholesale replication in different parts of the subcontinent. For example, one finds Mathura in the Madurai of the Tamil area. This effectively turned Mlecchadeśas into lands of the pure. To be able to accomplish the conquest of new spaces, the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* advocated the adoption of local practices as a part of state law. Local practices were accepted under the cosmopolitan Brahmanical order. No wonder texts like the *Yogini Tantra* were able to assert that the *dharma* in Yogini-Pīṭha (Assam) was of Kirāta (hill people) origin. What seems certain is that the enthronement of the Madhyadeśa tradition was achieved by marginalizing and subordinating numerous local traditions in the Indian subcontinent (Chattopadhyaya 2014, 11).

The reproduction of the *dharmaśāstra* ideology in time was achieved by continuous production of the *dharmaśāstra* texts that were named after great sages. For example, the *dharmaśāstra*s of Yājnavalkya, Viṣṇu, Nārada, and Kātyāyana were written much later than the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*.[9] While *dharmaśāstra*s continued to be composed in the later period, a tradition of commentaries on the *śāstra*s/*sūtra*s became popular after the eighth–ninth centuries. Commentaries were written in every area of the subcontinent. In fact, Pandurang Vaman Kane's monumental work on the history of the *dharmaśāstra*s lists a large number of such commentators who continued to write commentaries well into the nineteenth century (1992, 3–97). What they managed to do was to discover meanings that suited the historical and local context of the commentator.

Scholars have noticed the production of a very large number of copper plates and *praśasti*s (inscriptions in praise of kings) in early medieval India (Sharma 1983, 18). With proclamations like "as long as the sun and moon last" and the creation of *agrahāra*s (grants of land to Brāhmaṇas), the epigraphs were broadcasting an ideology of Brahmanical power. This process of construction of the Brahmanical order continued throughout the early medieval and medieval period. The process was further buttressed by the system of recitation during *pūjā* (prayers and rituals performed to please a deity), which became increasingly popular in the wake of the emergence of *bhakti* (devotion to a personal god or goddess) traditions.

Many *pūjā*s, some of which continue to be popular today, have been occasions for public celebration. Here, the performer is required to recite some incantations that locate them in a particular section of Jambudvīpa (one of the names of India in ancient texts). Those incantations mention the name, caste, *gotra*, village, region, country, and age. All this is placed in the larger cosmological context. Situating the individual in the local as well as cosmological context created powerful notions of individual and collective identity. A thirteenth-century *dharmaśāstra* text has the following prescription "[The sacrificer] should first recite the following: 'Om! Here on this earth, in *Jambudvipa*, in *Bhāratavarṣa*, in *Kumārikakhaṇḍa*, in the field of Prajāpati, in such-and-such a place and such-and-such a spot."[10]

Probably the most powerful instruments of the reproduction of the Madhyadeśa ideology in space and time were the two great epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. Different versions of these stories have been found in almost every part of the subcontinent and beyond. The themes and variations in the *Rāmāyaṇa* stories have led scholars to talk about the tellings of the *Rāmāyaṇa* rather than versions (Ramanujan 2001, 133). It is equally important that many creators of these stories were purveyors of the Brahmanical order. Despite variations, most of the Rama stories try to create an ideal social order, namely the *Rāmarājya*. The *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* show very clearly that their authors had been actively talking to the *dharmaśāstra* tradition. So, the expansion of the epic traditions was an expansion of the *dharmaśāstra* ideology. The dissemination of manuscripts of the *Mahābhārata* in different languages and scripts is testimony to its popularity. Royal endowments for its continual recitation turned the ideal of the text into components of popular consciousness (Pollock 2006, 232). The *Rāmcharitmānas*'s description of Bharata carrying Rāma's sandals on his head represents Tulasīdās's notion of the ideal

younger brother. Similarly, Lakṣmaṇa or Sītā walking behind Rāma rather than ahead of him encodes messages of the ideal Brahmanical order. There are examples of the performance of *Rāmlīlā*s in villages where the *Brāhmaṇa*s and upper-caste individuals played the role of Rāma and other noble characters, while the Dalits played the role of demons (Ram 2010, 46). So, the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* turned into instruments of dissemination of ideologies of power and domination. As audiences heard the recitation of the text, they heard themselves being included in that narrated space of power (Pollock 2006, 237).

The process of the spread of ideologies related to the Madhyadeśa tradition was buttressed by a stream of migration of Brāhmaṇas from Madhyadeśa to Mlecchadeśa, as inscriptional and literary records of such migrations in both the first and second millennia show (Yadav 1973, 23; Datta 1989; Chakrabarti 2001, 118). The history of Bengal provides glimpses of this process. Bengal was clearly located outside Madhyadeśa. The *Kulaji* texts and Bengali *Upapurāṇas* give us an idea about the process of the spread of the Brahmanical tradition in Bengal. Composed between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, the *Kulaji* texts follow a standard trope. The stories begin with king Ādisūra of Bengal requesting the king of Kannauj (or Kolāñca), a city in Madhyadeśa, to send five Brāhmaṇas versed in the Vedas and performance of Vedic sacrifices, for there were no such Brāhmaṇas in Bengal. These Brāhmaṇas from Kannauj are believed to be the ancestors of all the high-caste Brāhmaṇas in Bengal. The five Brāhmaṇas came with five *sat* (good) Śūdras. The *sat* Śūdras were the founding ancestors of the *sat* Śūdra groups, as contrasted with the *asat* (not good) Śūdras, who were local. The thirteenth-century king Lakṣmaṇasena is said to have put a seal of authority on the emergent system by organizing the entire society of Bengal in a caste order. The king prescribed rules of marriage, rituals of worship, and relations among various castes and communities (Inden 1976, 26–30, 54–55). It is interesting that the hierarchy of castes was defined by each caste's proximity to the Brāhmaṇa-centered ritual systems that had been invented in Madhyadeśa. What is equally interesting is that while the Brahmanical co-option of Bengal's traditions of mother goddess worship almost rendered invisible the Madhyadeśa's patriarchal religious traditions, the reworked social world continued to mimic the Madhyadeśa world of elaborate caste hierarchies.

The idea of Madhyadeśa today

Codes of behavior prescribed for the Madhyadeśa have translated into modes of behavior in present-day India. The power of the idea of Madhyadeśa matters, because it still determines the grammar of most marriages and deeply colors the shades of politics in India. Although it varied in time and space, the caste system remains one of the most visible structures of the Indian social world.[11] While it is true that the precepts of the *dharmasūtras*/*śāstras* were not practiced in the literal sense, they impacted the strengthening of hierarchies—with Brāhmaṇas somewhere near the top.[12] When Europeans began studying Indian society, they were struck by the correspondence between the description of the caste system in the *dharmasūtra*/*śāstra* literature and the structures of society in modern villages (Beteille 2011, 87).

Notions of purity and pollution articulated in various forms of hierarchy and elaborate rules of endogamy and exogamy are the most visible elements of the *varṇa* and *jāti* system.[13] Every *jāti* is a self-contained group whose reproduction is ensured by elaborate rules of marriage under the watchful eyes of patriarchs. Marriages across caste are rare. According to the India Human Development Survey, only about 5 percent of Indian marriages are intercaste (Rajagopalan 2020). Patriarchs control the economic resources and the sexuality of the young members of the household. They domesticate the females by controlling their bodies and minds. Males too, controlled by the laws of marriage and authority, are severely repressed. In turn, the younger members of the *jāti* access the cultural and physical resources of their group. Thus, their behavior pattern is shaped and controlled by the senior members.

Households headed by patriarchs are part of a larger network of patriarchal households of the same *jāti*. Each caste group in a village might have a distinct caste head. This hierarchical network extends over a large number of villages with heads of different standing. One of the reasons for the perpetuation of the *jāti* system is the sense of power and ownership it gives to the *jāti* chiefs. Howsoever oppressed they are, patriarchs can feel like lords within their tiny *jāti* clusters by harnessing the law of endogamy and social custom. Such formations exist in a world of parallel *jāti* groups. The cluster of parallel *jāti* groups forming pyramidal power structures act as bases for pyramids formed by higher *varṇa*s. While the Brāhmaṇa *varṇa* sits atop this pyramid, Dalits, shorn of dignity and power, populate the bottom. The Brāhmaṇa *varṇa* itself encompasses numerous *jati*s, while the category of Dalits encompasses the most fragmented set of *jati*s. As per the government list of 1950, there are 1,108 Scheduled Castes or *jāti*s among the Dalits (Government of India 1950). Trapped in small geographies, the local leadership of the Dalits is easy prey to manipulation by the upper-caste *jāti*s as they are spread over much larger geographical spaces.

The *dharmasūtra*/*śāstra* frame of legitimation seems to keep Indians in thrall even today. The *Mānava Dharmaśāstra*'s injunction that the names used for Śūdras should breed disgust can be seen operating to date. There is evidence of upper-caste villagers in north India forbidding people of lower castes from bearing names that were used by members of the upper castes, even in modern times (BBC 2011). This explains the names of Dalit characters like Dukhiyā (Sorrow), Ghisu (The One Who Scrubs), and Gobar (Cow Dung) in the stories of Premchand.[14] Even the popular Bollywood film *Lagaan* names its Dalit character Kacharā (Garbage). That explains atrocities against Dalits in modern times: according to a report on violence against Dalits, the core Madhyadeśa area had the highest incidence of attacks on Dalits (see table 1; Saaliq and Bose n.d.).

Ownership of land and access to water, commons, markets, education, and so on are severely curtailed for Dalits. They are forced to do the most backbreaking and toxic jobs like cleaning of excrement and handling dead bodies. Myths and legends depict them as polluted, lacking intellect, and as the seat of all vices. They are settled in penal ghettos for all to see. Laws of endogamy imprison them in their social ghettoes. Thus, the social, cultural, sexual, and economic aspects of Dalit identity exist in a toxic synergy. The evil architecture of the system ensures that all the castes connive in perpetuating this system.[15]

Caste-defined social networks influence the political behavior of Indians to a considerable degree. Universal franchise, introduced in post-independence India, was based on the idea of a citizen who has rights and responsibilities as an individual. It discounted the membership of caste and community. The caste system based on the idea of hierarchy is antithetical to ideas of equality and individuality. When modern politics entered the world of caste, caste entered politics. Both were transformed. It is said that people do not cast their vote, they vote their caste. The intensity of caste solidarity is proved by descriptions of people voting for candidates of their own caste irrespective of the party they belong to.[16] Almost all political parties calculate caste loyalties in selecting candidates for election. Psephologists routinely use caste categories in their analysis of election results. Such a system disadvantages numerically smaller dominant castes. This leads them to scramble for caste alliances and search for new strategies.

Serial No.	State	2018	2019	2020
1	Uttar Pradesh	11,924	11,829	12,714
2	Bihar	7,061	6,544	7,368
3	Rajasthan	4,607	6,794	7,017
4	Madhya Pradesh	4,753	5,300	6,899
5	Andhra Pradesh	1,836	2,071	1,950

Table 1. Top Five States Ranked by Number of Atrocities against Dalits
Source: National Crime Records Bureau (2021b, 517)

The *varṇa* system has ensured control by dominant castes in a variety of ways. The elections held in 2017 in Uttar Pradesh provide an interesting example of the way pyramidal structures ensure the control of the upper castes. Although the upper castes formed about 20 percent of the population of Uttar Pradesh, they still won elections. The upper castes voted overwhelmingly for the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party.[17] What mattered was that they managed to persuade leaders of various Backward Castes and Scheduled Castes (Dalits) to vote for them. Such attempts at mobilizing voters of different castes required persuading the state- and district-level leaders of subordinate caste groups. It was easier for the upper castes to persuade the Dalit leaders because they were heading isolated local groups. Once the leaders announced their support for candidates of the upper castes, minor leaders followed suit, and the rank and file of the caste group followed them in turn.

Curiously, Brahmāvarta, the purest region of the Middle Country, coinciding with parts of Punjab and Haryana, has the highest concentration of Dalit population in modern India (see figure 4).[18] This is probably connected with the fact that the caste system easily merges and meshes ideas of purity-pollution with the economic, political, and ritual deprivation of a large number of people.[19] Punjab and Haryana are the areas where the caste system was invented. The caste system's hegemony and long history in these areas led to the creation of larger groups of deprived Dalits.

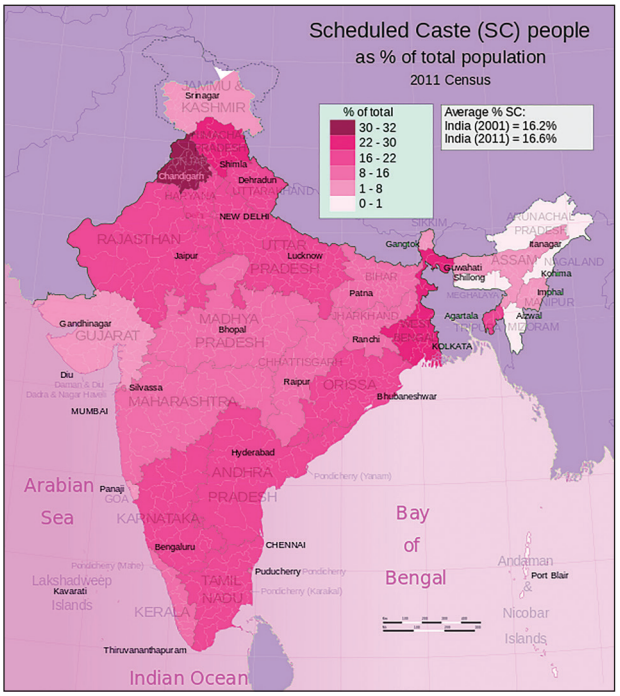

Figure 4. 2011 Census Scheduled Caste distribution map, by state and union territory. Source: Modified version of map of the same title is available through Wikimedia Commons, under a Creative Commons license. Creator: M. Tracy Hunter, modified by P. K. Basant. Data source: Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner (2013).

These are areas where powerful egalitarian movements like Sikhism and Islam were very active. However, even Sikhism ended up creating the Dalit caste of Mazhabi Sikhs (Puri 2003, 2693–2701).

Among Muslims, too, groups that performed jobs considered impure in the Brāhmaṇa tradition have been called *kamīn* (deficient). They have shown caste-like characteristics and have been shunned by the rich and powerful Muslims. Persian sources from the thirteenth to eighteenth centuries condemn the idolatry of the Hindus but never censure the caste system (Habib 1995, 161–77). It appears that while political power shifted into the hands of Turko-Islamic rulers, the social space continued to be dominated by the Brahmanical ideologies of Madhyadeśa. Such a state of affairs speaks of compromises among the stakeholders of political and social power.

The power of the Brahmanical ideology in the classical Madhyadeśa can be understood if we compare it with the social landscape of Mlecchadeśa. Analysis of excess deaths among females aged under five in the census of 2011 show that the Middle Country has a higher rate of female feticide and a higher rate of killings for dowry than those parts associated with Mlecchadeśa (Guilmoto et al. 2018). Table 2 and figure 5 also show that people located in the provinces identified with Madhyadeśa and surrounding areas witnessed the highest number of dowry deaths in the year 2020. It has been the pattern for a long time (National Crime Records Bureau 2021c).

Serial No.	State	Number of women killed for dowry
1	Uttar Pradesh	2,274
2	Bihar	1,046
3	Madhya Pradesh	608
4	West Bengal	522
5	Rajasthan	471

Table 2. States Ranked by Number of Dowry Deaths in 2020
Source: National Crime Records Bureau (2021a, 200)

The *dharmasūtra/śāstra* ideal created a society that worked out a system of distributing conflicts in a large range of situations. It is the Brahmanical tradition's influence that explains the fact that among the rural unorganized workers in India today, about 80 percent belong to the SC (Scheduled Caste), ST (Scheduled Tribe), and OBC (Other Backward Class) categories (National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganized Sector 2007, 117).

Indeed, even in an unlikely place like a prison, caste distinctions carry weight. Some years back, a newspaper carried a piece on prison abuse in India, showing that a Brāhmaṇa was less likely to be tortured in prison than a Dalit.[20] In a place like a prison, some strange laws seem to be at work in the minds of prisoners and policemen alike.

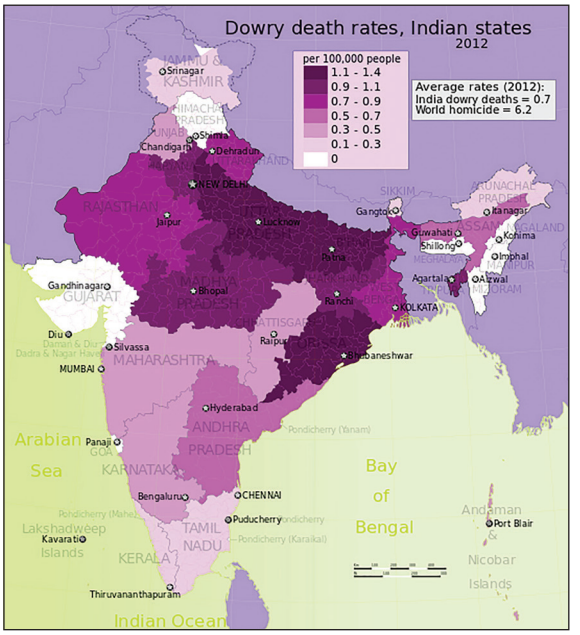

Figure 5. 2012 India dowry death rate per 100,000 people, distribution map by state and union territory. Source: Modified version of map of the same title is available through Wikimedia Commons, under a Creative Commons license. Creator: M. Tracy Hunter, modified by P. K. Basant. Data Source: Crime in India 2012 Statistics, National Crime Records Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt of India (2013), Table 1.8, p. 216.

Those strange laws are the Brahmanical ideology that seems to be more powerful than the modern Indian legal system.

Journalistic investigations point out that prison manuals used in different provinces of India generally follow the prison manual published by the British in 1894. These manuals very clearly specify that the convicts and those under trial in prisons should be assigned various jobs in prisons based on their caste. This translates into a situation where the Dalits are made to clean toilets and drains, whereas Brāhmaṇas look after cooking or accounts. This pattern of caste-based discrimination has been documented in many provinces of India. In some cases, prisoners were allotted rooms based on their caste (Shantha 2020). Prison systems represent the most visible symbols of the monopoly of violence by the modern state system. Prisoners are believed to be cast into anonymity and isolation. They become numbers and categories in prison registers. In India, the Madhyadeśa ideology of caste has inserted itself into the capillaries of the modern prison system. Modern power system and a premodern ideology have gelled to create the habitus of the prison world.

The idea that Madhyadeśa represented the purest segment of space was used by people who argued that Hindi should be the national language of India. One of the arguments given in favor of Hindi (*Khari boli*) was that it was originally called "Kauravi", because it was the language of the Kuru area. As such it was the pure language of the Aryans (Ramprakash and Gupta 1997, 35). The famous Hindi writer Mahavira Prasad Dwivedi called Hindi the daughter of Sanskrit and the elder sister of Indo-Aryan languages (Orsini 2009, 5). The historical self-consciousness of Hindi as the language of the Aryans and the social model it implied became part of the Sanskritization package that spawned conservative ideologies in north India (Orsini 2009, 242).[21]

Ideas connected with Madhyadeśa crossed frontiers and became important elements of the culture of South Asia in a broader sense. These currents took grotesque forms in places like eighteenth to nineteenth century Bengal, where high-status Brāhmaṇas, believed to have migrated from Madhyadeśa, were permitted to, encouraged, and indeed did marry dozens of women of lower-status Brāhmaṇa families, because it would improve the status of the children of such marriages. These Brāhmaṇas continued to marry well into their old age. A high-caste Brāhmaṇa's death could produce hundreds of widows. Opposition to such marriages and widowhood is closely connected with the Bengal reform movement.[22] Echoes of the idea of Madhyadeśa can be heard even today in the Terai region of Nepal, where a group of people calling themselves "Madhesi" are fighting for recognition of their political identity. They claim that they have migrated from Madhyadeśa (International Crisis Group 2007).

Conclusion

My analysis suggests that Madhyadeśa began as an idea of space and developed into an ideology that gradually spread to different parts of the subcontinent. The *dharmasūtra*/*śāstra* literature is obsessed with the idea of what is good and proper, and it reinforces its solutions at the level of family, kinship, caste, and religion. The

household, the street, the state, and the next life became part of a single web, in which plays of power were staged. It is important to visualize the idea of the region as a vertical phenomenon as well. The horizontal expansion of the Madhyadeśa idea was not a conquest of uninhabited spaces. The Bengal case shows that groups and communities that were integrated into the Madhyadeśa ideology had their own autonomous traditions. So, spatial expansion synchronized with vertical othering. The formation of Madhyadeśa produced exalted, knowledgeable Brāhmaṇas and degraded untouchables at the same time. The idea of the region hence needs to be viewed through the eyes of the Niṣādas (people of the forest), Dalits, women, and other marginalized communities. Differences in the definition of Madhyadeśa between the Buddhist and Brahmanical texts prove that Middle Country is a cultural construct with changing physical dimensions. Although there are variations in the accounts of the physical space covered by Madhyadeśa, the cultural definition remains the same.

Normative visualizations of space as a "natural entity" have been challenged in the social sciences. I have tried to map the ephemeral geography of ideas. It showed that the arc of imagined pure spaces expanded in the last two thousand years. Frontiers moved with the whims of history. Few consciously remember Madhyadeśa today. The evanescent geographies of Brahmāvarta are long forgotten. But the basic categories of self-identification created in Madhyadeśa thousands of years ago continue to animate the lives of most "cow-belt" Hindus and many others in South Asia. Descriptions of the attempt to bring Bengal within the fold of the Madhyadeśa ideology show that regions are not solid, finished entities. Regions are more like the flows of streams whose boundaries are liquid. Their flows consist of a constellation of human interactions and ideas that could flood new spaces. Their success would depend on the conjuncture of power and historical contingency.

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Notes

1. The much-celebrated book *India: A Regional Geography*, edited by R. L. Singh (1971), is a classic example of this kind of work. The authors carve out different provinces of India based on physical features or existing political boundaries. This is believed to provide the frame for explaining human activities.

2. tasmād asyāṃ dhruvāyām madhyamāyām pratiṣṭhāyāṃ disi ye keca
kurupañcālānāṃ rājānaḥ savaśośīnarāṇāṃ rājyāyaiva te 'bhiṣicyante

"Therefore, in this immovable middle region kings of the Kuru Pañcālas, with the Vaśas and Uśīnaras, are inaugurated to kingship, and called Kings" (Haug 1863, VIII.14).

The Kuru Pañcālas, Vaśas, and Uśīnaras were powerful lineages in the early first millennium BCE. They were among the earliest communities that made a transition to state society.

3. In the early Vedic literature, the south is expressis verbis excluded as the non-Indo-Aryan land of the Kikāṭa and of Pramaganda. In the later Vedic period, the south referred to the land south of the Yamuna and north of the Vindhyas. It was inhabited by Matsyas, Kuntis, and Sātvants (Witzel 1995, 1–18).

4. The forest of Khāṇḍava is shown as inhabited by Nāgas, Rākṣasas, and a large number of imaginary and real creatures (*Mahābhārata* 1.219.1.).

5. Quotations from *Manusmriti* are based on translations by Wendy Doniger and Brian Smith (1992), and Patrick Olivelle's (1999, 2005) translations of the *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* and *dharmasūtra*s.

6. The *dharmasūtra*s and *dharmaśāstra*s refer to a large number of Sanskrit texts composed between the fourth century BCE and tenth century CE. They prescribed norms and rules for an ideal social order. The *Mānava Dharmaśāstra* is the most well-known text of this tradition.

7. Tulasi Ram (2010, 34–35), a Dalit writer, describes the location of his house in great detail in his autobiography entitled *Murdahiya*.

8. The term "homo hierarchicus" is taken from Dumont (1988). He argued that the idea of hierarchy is the foundational principle of the Hindu social order.

9. See the chronology of texts in Kane (1992, 14–16).

10. This quotation is from the thirteenth-century Maharashtrian *dharmaśāstra* of Hemadri, quoted in Pollock (2006, 190).

11. Historians have traced histories of the caste system to show that the *dharmaśāstra* vision of a fixed system is incorrect. Studies of the origin of Rajputs have traced the process of the creation of a new caste in the early medieval period (Chattopadhyaya 1976).

12. Scholars have debated the working of the caste system. While Dumont (1988) regarded the caste system as a seamless structure based on the purity-pollution principle that was invented in early India, Dirks (2001, 10) questioned its existence in premodern times. Modern studies have questioned the view that a single, all-encompassing hierarchy is the most enduring feature of the caste system. They tend to visualize it as discrete groups contesting and creating hierarchies (Gupta 2004, ix–xix). I believe that modern studies indicate the presence of the caste system, though not as neatly organized as our *dharmaśāstra*s would have us believe. However, everywhere its organizing principle is the creation of a hierarchy with the Brāhmaṇas near the top.

13. Two Sanskrit words, "*varṇa*" and "*jāti*," are translated as "caste." I am using the term "*varṇa*" for the four-caste formulation of the caste system used by the Sanskrit law books. I use the word "*jāti*" for the numerous endogamous groups found in India. Each *varṇa* space is populated by a cluster of *jāti*s who would not intermarry. There are a large number of Brāhmaṇa *jāti*s but one Brāhmaṇa *varṇa*. Similarly, according to the Government of India list of 1950, there are 1,108 Dalit *jāti*s (Government of India 1950).

14. In the Hindi stories of Premchand, a Dalit character Dukhiyā is the protagonist in *Salvation* (Asaduddin 2018), Ghisu figures in *The Shroud* (ibid.), and Gobar is a protagonist in *The Gift of a Cow* (Roadarmel 2002). That such names were not fictional inventions is proved by the fact that

Tulasi Ram (2010), a Dalit writer, mentions the names of his grandparents as Jooṭhan (Half-Eaten Impure Food) and Musariya (Mousy) in his autobiography.

15. There is a large body of literature on the caste system. I have used writings that touch upon issues of power and political mobilization. See Rajani Kothari (1970), Paul Brass (1984), Andre Beteille (1965, 2020), and Gail Omvedt (1982). Many of the ideas here are based upon the unpublished writings of an activist friend, Jogin Sengupta.

16. During one of the elections in Rajasthan a popular slogan was, "Do not give your daughter or your vote to anyone but a Meena" (Beteille 1970, 295, in Kothari 1970). Endogamy and elections have been effectively conjoined.

17. According to data from a Lokniti-CSDS survey, as many as 89 percent of Brāhmaṇas voted for the BJP-led alliance in Uttar Pradesh. For Rajputs the figure was 87 percent, while for Baniyas it was 83 percent. See Daniyal (2022) and Beg, Pandey, and Sardesai (2022).

18. Punjab, with 32 percent, has the highest concentration of Dalit population in India (Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner 2013).

19. Ronki Ram (2007) has argued that the deprivation of Dalit Sikhs in Punjab emanates from their caste status, segregated neighborhoods, landlessness, and absence of political agency. His analyses give us insights into Dalit insurgency and conflict with the dominant Jat caste. His descriptions of the caste system match descriptions in other parts of the subcontinent. Social, economic, and ritual deprivation for the Dalits plays out in a variety of ways.

20. Pisharoty (2015) quotes Smita Chakravarty, "If you are a Brahman, say in a Bengal jail, it is most likely that you will not be tortured."

21. Alok Rai (2002, 103) makes this interesting comment about why the north Indian upper castes chose Hindi over literary languages like the *braja bhasha*: "Bhasha, heavy with tradition, rendered soft and pliable by the usage of time, was unsuitable for becoming a vehicle of identity politics for the emergent Hindu-savarna middle class."

22. Bengali novels like Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Those Days* (1997) capture the crisis of child widows and doddering old Kulin Brāhmaṇas making a living out of multiple marriages. Similarly, Saratchandra's novel *Brahman's Daughter* (2019) narrates the story of a high-status Brāhmaṇa making a living out of multiple fake marriages.

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Locating a Punjabi Classic

Regional and Cross-Regional Affinities in Wāris Shāh's *Hīr* (18th c.)

Wāris Shāh's *Hīr*, widely considered a quintessentially Punjabi literary text, expresses complex linguistic and regional affinities that its designation as a singularly "Punjabi classic" might occlude. This article considers the diverse regional and cross-regional affinities expressed within the text, and the ways in which its linguistic character and textual referencing—with reference to diverse story-telling traditions from South and West Asia, and a multi-religious cultural domain—function to both localize and broaden these affinities, and to shape Punjabi at the intersection with Persian and vernacular traditions. Through recognition of this process, we can see the capaciousness of a designation of what is "Punjabi," at the intersection of diverse traditions and linguistic domains, at a time, in the early modern period, when the idea of Punjab as a cultural region was articulated across diverse texts and diverse terms. This enables us to consider the multiplicity that can be expressed in the formulation of the "region."

Keywords: Punjabi—Waris Shah—Qissā—Persian—Persianate—Punjab

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Wāris Shāh's *Hīr* is widely considered a quintessentially Punjabi literary text.[1] Yet, this text expresses complex linguistic and regional affinities that its designation as a "Punjabi classic" might occlude (Gaur 2009; Matringe 2003; Sabir 1986; Shackle 1992, 2000; Syed 2006). This article considers the diverse regional affinities expressed within Wāris Shāh's text, and the ways in which its content and its linguistic form function to both localize and broaden these affinities, and to shape Punjabi at intersection with the Persianate in a far larger world, and at the intersection of the cosmopolitan and the vernacular in literary, linguistic, and imaginative terms. The vernacularization process associated with what Sheldon Pollock has called the "vernacular millennium"—which involved the emergence of nonclassical cosmopolitan languages in South Asia and other locations—was characterized by what Pollock calls "new conceptions of communities and places," by which the region came to be experienced in new terms (Pollock 2006, 6). I have noted elsewhere in preliminary terms how region emerges in texts produced in the Punjab region (and only some in the Punjabi language) in the early modern period; my effort here is to examine this question with greater depth in relation to this "Punjabi classic" (Murphy 2019).

Indeed, Wāris Shāh's mid-eighteenth-century rendition of the story of the star-crossed lovers Hīr and Rāṅjhā, whose love for each other is thwarted by her family's concern for status and ultimately ends in their deaths, is generally seen as quintessentially Punjabi. Its deep resonance with Punjabis of all religious backgrounds inspired the colonial-era revolutionary nationalist Udham Singh, who renamed himself Muhammad Singh Azād—in recognition of two prominent religions of Punjab, Sikhism and Islam, with the addition of "Azād" or "free"—to seek to take his oath on it, when at trial for the 1940 assassination of Michael O'Dwyer, who held the position of lieutenant governor of the Indian state of Punjab during the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 1919. Jeevan Deol has thus argued that the text is central to the "Punjabi episteme," and in this way has represented a symbolic opportunity to think beyond and across the religious identities that came to be defined in agonistic terms in the years leading up to independence and decolonization, and which defined the shape of the subsequent Partition of Punjab along religious lines (2002, 142). I focus here on Wāris Shāh's text, but it is one among many. In its Punjabi forms, the Hīr-Rāṅjhā story has been available in diverse versions, and in diverse scripts: both the Perso-Arabic script, known in Punjabi-speaking circles today as "Shāhmukhī," which

is utilized in the Pakistani Punjab and its diaspora communities to write Punjabi, and in the Gurmukhī script, which is used in the Indian analogue to write the language (Mir 2010; Murphy 2018a). There are many premodern Punjabi versions of the Hīr-Rāṅjhā story, including the sixteenth-century version by Damodar Gulati, and brief mention in the *Vārs* or historical ballads of Bhai Gurdās (also dated to the sixteenth century) and in the *Dasam Graṅth*, the early eighteenth-century text associated with the tenth and final of the living or embodied Sikh Gurus (Deol 2002). Farina Mir (2010) has explored colonial-period versions of the Hīr-Rāṅjhā narrative to understand the dynamism of Punjabi literary production in that time; the variety and number of Hīr-Rāṅjhā narratives in the colonial period, she argues, are testimony to Punjabi's fluorescence under colonial rule, and the continuing vibrance of the Hīr-Rāṅjhā tradition. This is in keeping, she shows, with the continuing relevance of and creativity visible in the *qissā* or narrative romance genre in South Asia, a genre with origins in Persian literature but which took both allied and distinctive forms in South Asia in the early modern period (Khan 2019; Pritchett 1985).

The full-length narrative by Wāris Shāh, which is known by the name of its heroine, Hīr, is considered a classic form of the larger Hīr-Rāṅjhā *qissa* or narrative story tradition. It was roughly contemporaneous to the time of Bulhe Shāh, a poet of lyrics that are much quoted across India and Pakistan even today (Murphy 2018b; Rinehart 1999; Shackle 2015). One prominent motif in those lyrics is the Hīr-Rāṅjhā narrative. While Bulhe Shah explored in particular Hīr's emotional state and her undying devotion to Rāṅjhā, with a focus on the experience of *viraha* or love in separation, the merging of lover and beloved, love beyond barriers, and the experience of love as a woman (for Bulhe Shah often wrote from that perspective, as was common in the period; Petievich 2007), Wāris Shāh's text is quite distinct in its narrative expression and orientation. Firstly, the text expresses (as will be discussed in brief, drawing on prior discussion) a range of social contestations and debates that are both locally and more broadly configured (Murphy 2018b). This leads me to the central point at issue here: that the text is marked both by distinctive Punjabi narrative elements and geographic ties, and those that reach far beyond the region, complicating the formulation of this text as a "Punjabi classic." This allows consideration of the notion of the "region" itself in more specific and complex terms. A close reading of the text with attention to the formulation of the region invites us to rethink the nature of what is "Punjabi," to locate a capacious, multilingual, and cosmopolitan breadth at the center of, not in opposition to, "Punjabiat" or "Punjabiness."

Social categories in Wāris Shāh's *Hīr* and their local and broader dimensions

The story of Hīr and Rāṅjhā (which, in the case of Wāris Shāh's text, is known by the title *Hīr*) revolves around the pair's surreptitious love affair. Both are from the Jaṭ caste—a prominent caste in Punjab associated with the control of agricultural land and with considerable social power—but with Hīr from a more prominent family, in the region of Syāl. This difference in status makes Rāṅjhā an unacceptable prospect as a groom when their love affair is discovered by Hīr's parents through the connivance of her uncle Kaido. Hīr is then duly married off to a more suitable groom: he is from

the Khera clan, in Wāris Shāh's text. Rāṅjhā calls upon and experiences visions of the five spiritual holy men, or Panj Pīr, who are named as a different set of pirs in different contexts. Rāṅjhā takes on the guise of a Nāth Jogī (the vernacular for "yogi") at Hīr's suggestion—inspiring, in Wāris Shāh's version, a lengthy debate about the nature of yoga and the nature and role of desire—and then Rāṅjhā travels to Hīr's marital village in search of his beloved (Murphy 2020a). After a spirited fight between Rāṅjhā and Sahiti, Hīr's sister-in-law, upon Rāṅjhā's arrival at her marital home, the two are reunited briefly and a plan is hatched for her escape. Hīr goes out for the day with the other young women of the village and feigns a snake bite; Rāṅjhā is called to care for her, as a Jogi-healer. They escape together, only to be caught again. In Wāris Shāh's version, the intervention of a local ruler ends with Rāṅjhā being granted Hīr—after the two threaten to destroy the ruler's city with fire—but under the guise of setting up their wedding ceremony, Hīr's family separates them and poisons Hīr. Rāṅjhā dies at the news of his beloved's death.

I have elsewhere discussed the ways in which Wāris Shāh's *Hīr* expresses emergent and contesting social imaginaries (Murphy 2018b). According to Jeevan Deol, it is the "erotic countercurrent" of the text that "forms a part of the poem's larger discourse of social critique, which has as its main target the hypocrisy of organized religion," but which he sees as "bound by literary convention" at the same time (2002, 146–47). I have also described my disagreement with this position: that the character of Hīr is not so subdued as Deol alleges, and that critique is configured not just against organized religion but in the spirit of farce overall, where all forms of social authority and privilege are questioned (Murphy 2018b). Francesca Orsini has noted the importance of the *naql* genre of folk performance tradition in the genealogy of the *qissā*, particularly for those with the markings of a less elite context; this observation resonates with Wāris Shāh's text, where satire and farce dominate (Orsini 2009, 114–15). Najm Hosain Syed, a prominent Punjabi-language literary critic in Pakistan, has thus called its primary mode "comedy," which is "unrestrained to the extent of boisterousness, still more a means of irony than hilarity" (2006, 45; see also Shackle 1992, 249). Farce and mockery are consistent themes, in diverse forms and with diverse objects of teasing and derision. These feature alongside description of social hierarchies and rules, in tension and in rupture. In their discussion of the satirical literary form in early modern South Asia, Monika Horstmann and Heidi Pauwels argue that it portrays and comments on social relations to "deconstruct in order to reconstruct"; Wāris Shāh's *Hīr* works along such lines, both to unsettle and to amuse (Horstmann and Pauwels 2012, 1; see discussion in Murphy 2018b).

This challenge to existing social categories in Wāris Shāh's *Hīr* centrally addresses gender, which acts as a focal point of tension and farce. The questioning of gender norms emerges here, however, within a broader range of debates around social roles and categories, and not in isolation. An additional central theme concerns caste and social status. Elsewhere, I have called attention to the congruencies between the preoccupation with caste in Wāris Shāh's text and contemporary discourses over caste that are visible in Sikh narrative texts dated to the same period, in the mid-eighteenth century (Murphy 2018c). One such text, the *Gurbilās Patshāhī Das,* articulates new kinds of social order within the Sikh community—outside of caste

hierarchy—designating the Sikh communitarian vision as opposed to caste. While some texts of this period in the same and other genres reassert the importance of caste—in keeping with caste discourses that prevailed in Vaishnava contexts, for example, in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Jaipur, as Monika Horstmann's (2011) work has attested—others continued to challenge these formulations. In Wāris Shāh's *Hīr*, we see both the articulation of operative social categories and their critique.[2] The positions in Wāris Shāh's text were therefore tied to a larger set of contestations underway across early modern north India, which could constitute both a challenge to and recognition and reinforcement of caste as a form of social hierarchy.

I reiterate these earlier observations on caste preoccupations within Wāris Shāh's text here not only to give a sense of the text overall, but also because of what some scholars have suggested they may indicate. Farina Mir has noted that caste was a recurrent feature of colonial-era narrations of the romance of Hīr-Rāṅjhā, whereby "*zāt* (caste or kinship group) . . . figures in these texts as the most salient category of social organization" (2010, 123). She sees this as expressing a set of localizing concerns, shared across religious communities in the colonial period. As Mir puts it, "[s]ocial life, as portrayed in these texts, is highly localized"; Ishwar Gaur concurs with this analysis of Wāris Shāh's text (Mir 2010, 127–28, 138–39; Gaur 2009, 20). It may be an overstatement, however, to see caste concerns as fundamentally localizing or regional. In part, the social contestation seen in Wāris Shāh's text may be indicative of the political turmoil in Punjab in the eighteenth century, as imperial Mughal authority fractured and successor powers sought control at the regional level, but it is also the case that a concern for caste and attendant social contestations was a dominant dynamic broadly across communities not only in Punjab during this period but also across the broader region of what is now North India and Pakistan, as already argued. This seemingly localizing mechanism was therefore part of a larger cross-regional concern and set of debates both challenging and reasserting caste. What we see as "localizing," therefore, needs to be read with sensitivity to its possible broader affinities that can complicate understanding of both the local and what is beyond it. In turn, this complicates understanding of this text's "Punjabiness."

Mapping the conceptual universe of Punjab

Punjab as a region was imagined in powerful ways by its residents—Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, and others—in the time probably before and certainly since Amir Khusrao called attention to it in linguistic and cultural terms.[3] Some have argued for Punjabi regional consciousness as a wholly modern invention: Harjot Oberoi argued in 1987 that "it was only in the 1940s, when the demand for Pakistan was articulated by the Muslim League, and when the cold truth dawned that the Punjab might after all be divided that the Sikhs with a tragic desperation began to visualize the Punjab as their homeland"; as such, he argues, the "affective attachment with the Punjab among the Sikhs is fairly recent, and it does not date back to the early annals of the Sikh community" (1987, 27). Such a claim, however, is difficult to support. It is undeniable that the notion of Punjab in national or territorial terms is new, since the idea of the

nation-state itself is entirely modern, and until the mass migrations of Partition Sikhs were not a majority in significant contiguous parts of the greater Punjab region, so Sikh articulations of possible Partition schemes prior to 1947 involved power-sharing and the numerical balancing of communities, rather than a Sikh majority territory (Murphy forthcoming). However, there is a long history of the affective attachment to the Punjab as a region among Sikhs, as well as other Punjabis. As I have argued elsewhere, the representation of the past was a particular concern for the Sikh community in the eighteenth century: the imagination of the physical landscape of the community formed a part of such representations, although they were never strictly coterminous with Punjab, and the landscape of the Gurus was far larger (Murphy 2012, 2020b). These attachments, again, suggest a notion of belonging to the region that does not neatly map to current national or regional boundaries; it also creates simultaneous kinds of mapping that produce overlapping regions. At the same time, such mappings of the region are not modern inventions.

As I have discussed elsewhere, we do see a conceptualization of Punjab as a region in the early modern period. In part, this emerges as an administrative and bureaucratic idea: the formal designation of the Lahore province in the Mughal administration was instituted under Akbar in 1580 to describe the region of the river Indus and its tributaries; the *s̱ūbah* or province of Multan, in what is now southwestern Punjab in Pakistan, was designated as a separate area (Singh 1985, 31). The Braj seventeenth-century text the *Bachitar Nāṭak*, an autobiographical text attributed to the tenth Guru and contained within the *Dasam Graṅth*, features the term "*madra desa*," which refers roughly to Punjab. At the beginning of the fourth chapter of the text *madra des* is linked to the founding of the Sodhi and Bedi clans, the lineages associated most prominently with the Gurus (Murphy 2018c):

> *paṭhe kāgadaṁ madra rājā sudhāraṁ, āpo āpa mo baira bhāvaṁ bisāraṁ/*
> *nripaṁ mukaliyaṁ dūta so kāsī āyaṁ, sabai bediyaṁ bheda bhākhe sunayaṁ/*
> *sabai beda pāṭhī cale madra desaṁ, praṇāmaṁ kīyo ān kai kai naresaṁ*
>
> The Sodhi king of Madra sent letters, requesting that they forget past enmities
> The messengers sent by the king came to Kashi and revealed this secret to all the Bedis
> All those who recite the Vedas came to Madra Desa and paid their respects to the King. (*Bachitar Natak*, chap. 4)

At the end of the seventh chapter, describing the birth of the poet, the tenth Guru tells us that after his birth at Patna, "*madra desa ham ko le āe* / I was brought to Madra Desh," clearly again meaning Punjab. Here we do seem to see a sense of new kinds of culture boundaries (in Sheldon Pollock's words) associated with a "vernacular millennium"; they do not, however, map to the emergence of a regional polity at that time (Pollock 2006, 382–83). This is where Pollock's formulation of vernacular emergence is less useful for the Punjab region, where localized control came late and with peripheral commitment to Punjabi as a language. This section of the *Dasam Graṅth*, for example, is written in an influential, cross-regional vernacular called Braj (associated with the Mathura region, south of Delhi), not Punjabi, as were the majority of Sikh texts written in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; when

an independent polity was established with its center at Lahore in the Punjab region at the very end of the eighteenth century, under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Persian was instituted as the language of court, not Punjabi. The imagination of Punjab as a region, and the emergence of a Punjab-centered polity, therefore, were not closely linked to Punjabi language use.

Wāris Shāh's text is, however, written in Punjabi, and he opens *Hīr* in praise of the Lord, and the Prophet, and the Sufi saints who were so important to the cultural landscape of Punjab, creating Punjab as an Islamic domain:[4]

> *ma'udūda dā lāḍalā pīra cishatī, shakkara gaṅja māsa'ūda bharapūra hai jī bāīāṅ kutabāṅ de vicca hai pīra kāmala, jaiṅdī ājazī zuhada manazūra hai jī khānadāna vicca cishata de kāmalīata, shahira fakkara dā paṭaṇa ma'mūra hai jī shakkara gaṅja ne āṇi mukām kītā, dukkh darada paṅjāba dā dūra hai jī*
>
> The beloved of Moinuddin (of Ajmer), the Chishti Pir, he is full as a treasury of pure sweetness,
> He is the perfect saint among the 22 poles (*kutabāṅ*) [that guide the world], whose renunciation and humility is accepted by all,
> He is the perfection of the Chisht lineage, whose city has become civilized (*ma'mūr*) as a town of mendicants.
> Shakar-Ganj has come and made this his home (*mukām*), dispelling the sadness and pain of Punjab. (Sabir 1986, v. 5)

The territory or *vilāyat* of Punjab's most prominent Sufi saint Baba Farid is thus described, highlighting a feature of Punjab as a distinctive region and simultaneously making it a part of a broader Islamic imaginary (Murphy 2019, 320). This reflects a larger dynamic in the text: Punjab as a region does matter, but it does so at intersections with, and connected to, a broader cultural-geographical imaginary.

Exploring later versions of the Hīr-Rāṅjhā narrative in the colonial period, Farina Mir has highlighted how regional imaginaries prevailed within the *qissā* or story of Hīr and Rāṅjhā in that time to define a territoriality that "emphasizes the affective attachments people established with the local, and particularly their natal places" (Mir 2010, 123). In this context, Punjab emerges "as an imagined ensemble of natal places within a particular topography (rivers, riverbanks, forests and mountains) and religious geography (Sufi shrines and Hindu monasteries)" (ibid., 134). This is a mapping of Punjab through the places of the Hīr-Rāṅjhā narrative: Jhang, Takhat Hazara, Tilla Jogian, Rangpur; the places are enlivened by the always repeated and performed story of Hīr-Rāṅjhā, fixed in time and place in this region. Yet, Wāris Shāh's version of the text demonstrates that this mapping clearly predates the arrival of the British (Murphy 2019, 320).

Punjab as a place and a cultural sensibility—as a region—therefore mattered. It shaped Waris Shah's text, but also other texts in other traditions: the Punjabi landscape is enlivened also by the histories of the Sikh Gurus and other important figures from Sikh tradition, with sites commemorating these histories established across the region and beyond (Murphy 2012, 2020b). The region as an idea percolated through texts that were diverse in their religious formations and only at times reflective of a Punjabi vernacular linguistic form. As noted, many Sikh articulations

of a regional Punjabi sensibility, for instance, were expressed in Braj, an early modern linguistic form that had achieved a cosmopolitan status.

Yet we must also take into account the complexity of the landscape created in and around Wāris Shāh's *Hīr*. In linguistic terms alone, Wāris Shāh's text is multivalent. Although Punjabis generally regard the Hīr-Rāṅjhā story as quintessentially Punjabi, in linguistic and literary as well as regional terms it is also extant in Persian from the time of its earliest expressions in Punjabi; Hīr-Rāṅjhā had a vibrant life in Persian, as did many other Indic story traditions in the early modern period. The earliest extant Persian version is by the Tajik poet Hayāt Jān Bāqī Kolābī, which was composed between 1575 and 1579 during the time of Mughal emperor Akbar (d. 1605) and demonstrates characteristics of the larger Persian romance (*mathnawī*) tradition with a focus on dialogues between lovers—a tradition that was imitated and popularized by Amir Khusro (d. 1325) in South Asia from the thirteenth century onward (Murphy and Shahbaz 2019). By the time Wāris Shāh composed his narrative, there were already nine existing versions of Hīr-Rāṅjhā in Persian, among which four were contemporary to his work; this reveals the broad circulation and popularity of the tale in eighteenth-century South Asia, and in Persian (ibid., 2019). This Punjabi tale thus is also "very" Persian both in terms of the larger genre it relates to—the *qissā*, though it is a particular regional expression of that genre—and in terms of the language it was inscribed in from an early period.

Genre too tells us something about region, and how this text is both locally configured and also moves far beyond the local. Wāris Shāh's text is tied in terms of genre to a wide array of narrative traditions across South Asia and the Persianate world, many of which were first expressed in Persian in the *mathnawī*/*masnavī* poetic narrative form (Deol 2002; Khan 2019; Pritchett 1985). The tale is distinctive among other similar texts in the *qissā* genre in that its narrative core is unique to the Punjab region and environs: at least as we understand it today, it did not stem from a pre-existing Persian narrative tradition. Hīr-Rāṅjhā is thus fully geographically Punjabi in its origins, which is the basis for its identity as a "quintessentially Punjabi text," but as noted, it has been linguistically Persian from the time it was first inscribed in text in Punjabi (that is, the first Punjabi texts are contemporary to the first Persian texts). Further, the Persianate and the Punjabiat (a term generally used to describe "Punjabiness," but which I extend in meaning here) are linked through the text's form to a range of texts that were first expressed in Persian and/or Arabic, and later in South Asian vernaculars, such as the famous tale of the lovers Laila and Majnun. This is something the text itself expresses: references to the larger *qissā* narrative tradition abound in it, such as to the story of the lovers Sohni and Mahiwal, and Mirza and Sahibaan:

> Love delivers countless scandals, oh friends! Difficulties become one's intimate companions.
> What kind of tricks has love played, that all the young girls have been called?
> These memories have made kings into beggars, we have all become water-carriers.
> Hīr hasn't invented any new kind of love. All of human kind has loved in this way.
> Look—this love has laid down Farhad, and then it destroyed Yusef.
> Love also killed the likes of Sohni, who drowned in the river.

> Love also burned figures like Mirza, bringing flames to the desert.
> Look, this cruelty kills, and more friends go along with it.
> Wāris Shāh says, the ways of the world are strange, and so too are the ways of love. (Sabir 1986, v. 553)

This set of references occurs when the young women of Hīr's marital village, married and not, plot with Hīr and her sister-in-law Sahiti to help Hīr meet Rāṅjhā. They plan to take Hīr to the garden in the morning, as a group, so she can feign the snake bite that will allow them to call Rāṅjhā, the healer. (When they go, they go a bit wild, in a scene that certainly is meant to invoke laughter in the audience. That relates to observations made earlier about comedy and farce.) Through such references, the tale is embedded in other tales, a kind of genealogy of love and textuality alike. Such comparisons are made throughout the text: how Hīr is like the heroine Sassi (from the story of the lovers Sassi and Punnu), and how the suffering of love portrayed is like that experienced by Farhad, another great lover from the *qissā* tradition.

In another example, Hīr describes the terrible fate that comes to all those who sleep (because Rāṅjhā wants to take a rest while they are running away; Hīr is right, of course, and they get caught because of their nap). Her references draw broadly on Islamic tradition, as well as the *qissā* tradition:

> [And Hīr said:] those who have slept have all been robbed. Sleep has killed kings and queens.
> Sleep kills the saints, friends, and the pillars of the world; sleep steals the road from the traveler.
> This sleep has turned kings into beggars, and they weep at the passage of time.
> Sleep sets the lion, the god, and the priest for slaughter; sleep has killed the wise.
> Those who sleep are lost, like Adham, the black horse; sleep prevails and displeases the giant.
> Sleep threw down the great Solomon; sleep causes one to lose one's home.
> Sleep caused Jacob's son to be left in a well, and Joseph was bound in rope.
> Sleep caused Ishmael to be butchered, and Yunis/Jonah was found in the belly of a fish in the water.
> Sleep by accident (*qazā*) stops the Fajr early morning prayer, and stakes the camp of the devil.[5]
> Look what sleep got for Sassi, wandering in the desert searching.
> The Kheras have bound Hīr and Rāṅjhā, both, now they weep for their loss.
> Only the land of three and a half hands is yours as a grave, oh Wāris, why do you seek more? (Sabir 1986, v. 592)

We see, then, that Wāris Shāh's text positions itself within a regionally larger tradition, and it is a narrative one. It is linked both to local Punjabi tales, and those from the Persian canon; references from Qur'anic lore are numerous, with occasional quotation of Qur'anic verses (these are usually excised in Gurmukhi printed editions of the text, so they will not be visible to readers of published versions in that script). We also see references to the *Rāmāyaṇ* and diverse South Asian narrative traditions. These ground the text within Punjab but also link it to a far broader imaginative and textual universe. This is of course contrasted with the reference to the landscape in the last line of the verse above, where the concrete boundaries of our ultimate

inhabitation of space—the small size of a grave—represent the true borders we, as humans, live within.

There are multiple direct references to region and place, and to interactions between them, in the many versions of the Hīr-Rāṅjhā narrative. Discussing colonial-period versions of the story, Mir argues that these references "ground [the text] . . . in the topography and religious landscape of the five doabs and the cis-Sutlej territory of northwest India" (Mir 2010, 135). However, while the language of *des* (locality, land) and *watan* (country or homeland) may prevail in the colonial-period versions of the narrative that Mir examines, we do not see a singular articulation of "homeland" in Wāris Shāh's text (Mir 2010, 136ff.). Punjab as a region does not emerge alone in the regional affiliations and references within the text: thus, we can see the complexity of place and region in it, and of the traditions that are invoked therein. Deol has drawn attention to the martial connotations of the first *saropa*, or head-to-toe description of Hīr, in Wāris Shāh's text, noting that these utilize "the traditional equation between love and war," an interpretation that is suggested by the ending of verse 61 in Sabir (1986), which notes that

> *rūpa jaṭa dā vekha ke jāga ladhī Hira vāra ghatī sargardāna hoī*
> *vāriśa shāha naha thāoṅ dama mārne dī chāra chashma dī jadoṅ ghamsāna hoī*
>
> Seeing the shape of this Jaṭ, she has awoken, and Hīr sacrifices [herself] again, a helpless waif.
> Wāris Shāh says, no one can catch their breath, when two pairs of eyes are locked in battle.

Deol sees this use of "explicit and localized military references" as a foreshadowing of later violence, but that this is offset by the sexualization of the heroine in the same passages (2002, 153). In light of the social transgressions indicated in the text, we can also see the text's portrayal of violence within a larger logic of transgression; such sexual references too operate within that logic of excess. Further, across the text, such martial references work not in isolation, but to both localize and regionalize the text and relate it to a larger geographical imaginary.

We start, for a first example of this dynamic, with what begins as a more standard articulation of Hīr's beauty, but which quickly is put in martial terms (Deol 2002):

> She came, bringing 60 of her girlfriends with her, as if drunken with pride.
> With clusters of pearls hanging from her ears, with the splendor of a fairy.
> Dazzling in the red bodice she wore upon her bosom, leaving no one with their senses on earth or sky.
> That one whose nose ring shone like the pole star, drenched in the deadly storm of youth.
> Come, my friends, she has caused even the tents of the dead to stake in the sand.[6]
> Wāris Shāh, the Jat girl has laid waste to us, fueled by pride and ego.
> (Sabir 1986, v. 55)

Now the poet will praise Hīr: her forehead shines with the beauty of the moon.

> The plaits of her reddish hair are like the color of a streaming meteor in the night, crossing the moon.

> Her eyes are like narcissus flowers, beautiful like those of a bird or a deer, and her cheeks blossom like the rose.
> Her eyebrows arch like the bows of Lahore, there is no end to the accounting of her beauty.
> The beauty of the line of the Kohl upon her eyes is like the advancing line of the army of Punjab on the plains of Hind.
> Swinging freely in the open spinning circles of young women, like a Nawāb's drunken elephant.
> The lines and dots made on her beautiful face are like the calligraphy of the letters in a book.
> Those who have the pleasure of seeing, this is their great honor.
> Let us go on the pilgrimage on the holy day of Lailat-ul-qadar[7], Oh Wāris Shāh!
> This is just such an act of great merit. (Sabir 1986, v. 56)

What I would like to emphasize here are the geographical references that accompany this martial imagery: the plains of north India, Hind, and the bows of Lahore. These represent an important subtheme throughout the work, describing region, regions, and relationships among regions, embedding the text both in a sense of the region and in a set of larger interactions. We see this in analogies to describe Rāṅjhā's defeat, for example, that place the text in its historical context:

> The flag of love was black and white. In the middle of it, she has cast it the red of grief.
> In the same way that the Khaljis [rulers based in Delhi] swiftly attacked the camp and brought it to ruin,
> Having applied the heat of fire to the *ṭalā kuṅd* (gold thread), making it glow red through and through, inside and out
> You came after me like Ahmad Shah, to uproot and build your own foundation.
> Those who made [your new in-laws,] the Kheras, prosperous (full with seed: *bijālā*) have dismissed me as a cowherd (*mahīṅvāl*).
> Victory took up residence for the Kheras, and for Rāṅjhā there was only a place of enmity
> She ran away, abandoning me and the herds of Syāl, and came to the Kheras to entrap them
> When I went in their courtyard, where she had joined forces with Sahiti, I was caught like a thief.
> The same way Hind and Punjab shook from the forces of Nadir Shah, she shook me completely.
> It's all well that the Chaudhury's son became a cow-herder.
> She who was so cruel to me will get her accounting in God's court
> She gave grief at her pleasure—Wāris Shāh says, the Fakir delights in this. (Sabir 1986, v. 465)

Here we have a range of historical references that locate this text both in regional and supra-regional terms: the Afghan ruler Ahmad Shah Abdali (the founder of the Durrani dynasty), who invaded Punjab in the 1750s and 1760s (in 1761, Abdali's forces defeated the Marathas at Panipat, and parts of Punjab were integrated into his empire); Nadir Shah, the Persian ruler who led a devastating attack on northern

India (both the central plains referred to here as "Hind," and Punjab) in 1739; and the Khaljis, who ruled from Delhi. Here in this verse we see both dimensions I have highlighted: the linking of the text to a particular set of political and martial conflicts, grounding it in the particulars of time and place, and both the local region and other regions and localities.

Later, the village girls who gather in support of Hīr are compared to those who might attack Punjab from Qandahar (in Afghanistan today), again referencing historical events from the eighteenth century, just before the composition of this text in the 1760s. We also see repeated references to the generalizing force of the *qissā* tradition through the story of Laila and Majnun, and Sassi Punnu again:

> Praying throughout, the night passed, see, what was meant to be came quickly.
> That which should be, that very thing was happening—all the bad things associated with destiny.
> This fate was as that of the king of Faqirs, who like Punnu, became drunk.
> Absorbed in the name like Majnūṅ, whom the princesses deprived of water.
> The lover is careless, and the beloved passes the night without a response.
> Just as Ali was killed by the slave, and the companions of the prophet (*asahābiyāṅ*) had no word of it.
> The girls of the village gathered and sat and made themselves into a force, like an attack on Punjab from Qandahar.
> Wāris Shāh, all the girls came and gathered at the door (*phale*) of the Kheras. (Sabir 1986, v. 552)

The text thus features references that both localize and link the Punjab region to a larger geography—often expressed through political conflicts and attendant relationships between Punjab and adjacent regions, and often invoked to denote conflict or tension between men and women—just as we have a capacious embrace of cross-regional narrative traditions and references. There are many such broader referencing traditions, such as the reference to the Panj Pir, which is framed as a "local" tradition but which is relocalized across the subcontinent in different ways, reimagined and rearticulated in relation to new "locales" (Snehi 2019).[8] The theme of the hero-as-Jogi, here in this tale in the form of Rāṅjhā taking on the Jogi guise to win back his beloved, is also a larger motif that is found across northern India and, much earlier, in the *prem-ākhyān* tradition from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century in Avadhi, a form of Hindavi (Behl 2012). It would thus be a mistake to regard Wāris Shāh's text as preoccupied only with Punjab, even as a sense of this region emerges within it. It is a diversely moored Punjab that we see expressed.

Having focused thus far on the regional affinities of the text, including how it reaches beyond Punjab and also relates this region to those outside of it, which itself entails a sense of boundaries on the region, it makes sense to return to the question of language and its relationship to regional articulation. Mention has been made of Persian versions of the story of Hīr and Rāṅjhā. Wāris Shāh's text exhibits a complex relationship with Persian, in linguistic terms, too. This is obvious from the linguistic character of the passages we have looked at so far in brief. Most are Punjabi in grammatical character. Persian vocabulary is used, but within a Punjabi linguistic frame. There are moments in Wāris Shāh's text when Persian logics prevail,

but overall the Punjabi frame holds. The linguistic formations of the text therefore match the complex textual referencing found in the text: grounded in Punjab and Punjabi, but at the same time much more than that. Punjabi's emergence in the early modern period therefore needs to be understood in this way, emphasizing its complex relation to Persian and other languages, such as Braj and Khari Boli (the basis for modern Hindi and Urdu; Murphy 2019).

Closing

My line of questioning in this article has addressed how and why the region emerges in Wāris Shāh's *Hīr*, and how this relates to larger affinities. I regard this as an effort to tease out "a different, plural, premodern logic of space," in Pollock's terms (2006, 16). There is importance to this. As I argue elsewhere, Punjabi language in the modern period, since the Partition of 1947, has been the object of various kinds of nationalizing or quasi-nationalizing forces (Murphy 2018a). Even when the national is in all practical terms impossible, such as today when the region is split between India and Pakistan—and this will not be changing soon—efforts along these lines continue in contingent ways, claiming Punjabi, for example, for one community, or defining Punjabi in opposition to other languages, like Persian. Persian in particular has been largely effaced from popular representations of the cultural history of the subcontinent, particularly in India. We can learn from Wāris Shāh's text that the story of Punjabi and its literature is more complex than such nationalizing narratives allow. If, as Pollock suggests, "The goal . . . is learning to understand how people conceptualized macrospaces in the past, and what work in the spheres of culture and power such conceptualization was meant, or not meant, to do," we need to understand Punjab as a region, and the Punjabi language as a language, as entities that were connected to other places and languages, in complex terms that cannot be fully understood in isolation (Pollock 2006, 17).

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Anne Murphy began her work on Wāris Shāh's *Hīr* as a fellow at the Max Weber Kolleg, University of Erfurt, in 2017, as a part of a larger project on the history of the Punjabi language and its expressions in the early modern and modern periods. She is currently working on a full English-language translation of the text, with reference to the earliest available manuscripts.

Notes

1. *Paṅjāb* represents the accurate transliteration of this word in Roman script, but in English I use "Punjab" because the English word "pun" is closer to the original in Punjabi than the English word "pan." This facilitates more correct pronunciation in English contexts. An earlier version of this article was presented as "Indian Narrative in a Larger Eighteenth Century World," at the 20th Annual International Conference on History & Archeology: From Ancient to Modern, May 30–31, 2022, Athens Institute for Education and Research, Athens, Greece. Attendance at

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2. I argue elsewhere that the dynamic social positions sketched out in Wāris Shāh's *Hīr* are indicative of a larger process of religious individualization in the early modern period. See Murphy 2020a.

3. This paragraph and the next draw on and expand discussion in Murphy 2019.

4. This article utilizes the Sabir 1986 printed edition of the text.

5. There is sexual innuendo in this line.

6. Deol suggests that this phrase has idiomatic secondary meaning of getting an erection (2002, 162). Arafat Safdar has suggested that the tents of the dead is a more appropriate translation. Personal communication, Spring 2020.

7. The 27th day of the month of Ramadan, when the Qur'an was first revealed to the Prophet.

8. He calls on the Panj Pir, five Sufi saints that are prominent in folklore across present-day north India and Pakistan, to assist (Sabir 1986, 41, and on the portrayal of the Panj Pir, see also 110–11, 122). The Panj Pir grant Hīr to Rāṅjhā. See Snehi (2019, 101ff) on the Panj Pir and their veneration in Punjab; Snehi provides a sense of some of the variety of constellations of these five figures (ibid., 110).

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The Bourgeoisie Comes from Elsewhere

The Gauḍa Sāraswat Brahmins and Catholics of South Kanara

South Kanara, the region around Mangalore, Karnataka, lacks an indigenous merchant caste. The bourgeoisie here is mainly constituted by two groups—the Gauḍa Sāraswat Brahmins (GSB) and the Catholics. Both came from Goa and speak Konkaṇī, an Indo-European language, while the local speech is Tuḷu, a Dravidian language. Both groups are external to the regionalist "Tuḷu movement" and to the "*bhūta* cults" that define regional religious traditions outside of mainstream Hinduism. Though they have lived for several centuries in South Kanara, both groups tend to be seen as "immigrants." This constellation of an identity-conscious Tuḷu society representing "traditional" culture and a "foreign" bourgeoisie, together with the present assertions, particularly by the GSB, toward Hindu dominance, might seem to threaten plural society in the region. Yet South Kanara, accustomed to cultural pluralism for centuries, seems able to maintain a discourse on the region as an object characterized by its multiple cultures and religions.

Keywords: India—South Kanara—caste—plural society—region

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Defining a region is never a straightforward matter. In India, however, it is tempting and often practical to delimit a territory where a single caste is dominant, in the sense of traditionally having control over most of the land (Schwartzberg 2017).[1] This approach presupposes, however, that land control remains at the core of the social organization of the area. Then, we should realize that a caste that is dominant in one region may form a minority in another: indeed, the constellation of majority and minorities is likely to be particular to any region and to form one of its main characteristics.

When I tried, years ago, to pose the question of whether and why the peninsula of Saurashtra, in Gujarat, formed a region, I stressed a different point: it must be seen as a region because an indigenous discourse focuses on it, as the locus of debate between castes or other groups (Tambs-Lyche 1994). Both these approaches may, of course, be related in their turn to the features of natural geography: with a peninsula such as Saurashtra, such features may seem obvious. But I shall insist, here, on social and ideological factors as fundamental to the issue.

The region called South Kanara—which formerly coincided with the district of that name but is now divided between two districts, South Kanara and Uḍupi—is less obviously delimitated by physical geography. To the east, certainly, the Western Ghats form a natural barrier toward the plains of eastern Karnataka. The river complex Sītā forms the northern boundary, but there is no obvious change in physical geography across the river. Here, however, there is a language boundary, which coincides with a change in the dominant landholding caste: the Bunts to the south of the river speak Tuḷu, while the otherwise rather similar Nāḍavas north of the Sītā are Kannaḍa speakers. The Bunts, as well as other Tuḷu-speaking castes of South Kanara, are matrilineal, while the Nāḍava and most other castes to the north are patrilineal. To the south, the limits of South Kanara are purely political, as its Bunt-dominated, Tuḷu-speaking, and matrilineal society continues into Kāsaragoḍ, the northernmost district of Kerala. Historically and culturally, then, this northernmost *taluk* of Kerala belongs to the region traditionally designated as Tuḷunāḍu, the land of the Tuḷu speakers. Some Tuḷu speakers, then, feel that when state boundaries were redrawn along language lines in 1961, Tuḷunāḍu should have formed a separate state. By Indian standards, however, Tuḷu is a small language: it does not have its own script, as the larger regional languages in India do, and modern Tuḷu literature was still modest in the 1960s but has grown significantly in more recent decades.[2] Tuḷu

has not gained recognition as a regional language, and the project of a Tuḷu state has remained the dream of a few local activists (Rao 2010, 288–90). This is dramatically demonstrated by the Tuḷu-speaking area being divided between Kerala, defined as the Malayalam-speaking state, and Karnataka, the state of Kannaḍa speakers.

Still, most people in South Kanara speak of it as their homeland. It certainly corresponds to the criteria of being an object on which regional discourse is centered (Tambs-Lyche 1994). Across caste, community, and language barriers, there is considerable local patriotism in South Kanara. Language divisions contribute, in fact, to the focus on South Kanara as an object of discourse, for Tuḷu is only one among several languages spoken in the region. The Gauḍa Sāraswat Brahmins, who have been dominant in the region's commerce for at least three hundred years, are Konkani speakers. So are most of the members of the important Catholic community, while the various Muslim groups speak different languages. The Byaris in and around Mangalore have their own dialect, usually seen as a mixture of Tuḷu and Malayalam, and Deccani Muslims regard themselves as Urdu speakers who speak the Deccani dialect of Urdu that developed in Bijapur and other sultanates of the peninsula. The Navayats, centered on Bhatkal farther north but present in Mangalore, speak a variant of Konkani. Mapila Muslims and other people originally from Kerala speak Malayalam. There are also a number of Marathi and Malayalam-speaking immigrants, mainly from the lower castes. Finally, Kannaḍa is not just the official language but also functions, to some extent, as a lingua franca between the linguistic groups, and there are quite a few Kannaḍa speakers from elsewhere in the state, who have retained their language. Perhaps even more important as a lingua franca among the middle classes is English.

Thus, while Tuḷu remains the popular language of the countryside, and of much of the urban population, a major part of the bourgeoisie[3] speaks Konkani. Concerning the land of the Tuḷus, then, Tuḷu is far from being a universal language. In this context, "South Kanara" is a regional term that transcends linguistic and cultural differences, avoiding the precedence that the term "Tuḷunadu" gives to Tuḷu culture and language, and which signals the acceptance of the Tuḷu speakers as a majority in the region.

The Tuḷu speakers

To Tuḷu speakers, however, South Kanara is a Tuḷu-speaking region, forming the core of the Tuḷu-speaking lands, Tuḷunadu. This is how it is generally seen by the Bunts, the dominant landholding caste of the region, as well as by the Billavas, the largest community in the region, which traditionally included small farmers, tenants, and agricultural labor on Bunt lands, as well as coconut growers—often owning their own plots—on the coast. The Mogavīra fishermen, another large Tuḷu-speaking caste, reach into the coast north of the Sita rivers, but they are mainly concentrated in South Kanara. A number of smaller Tuḷu-speaking castes are also present here. These include the Jains, who were never dominant in the usual sense of the term, since they were—and still are—few in number. They were, however, central to regional history, since most of the land in South Kanara belonged to a series of small Jain kingdoms.

These kingdoms were at their apogee from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, maintaining their regional power under Vijayanagar, though they lost much of their influence during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, when the country was ruled by the Ikkeri Nāyaka dynasty from the northeast (Bhat 1975, 60–141). Under these rulers, the Bunt chiefs, originally vassals of the Jains, gained in autonomy and importance, sometimes becoming rivals to the Jains for power and prestige. Under Haidar and Tipu, the successive kings of Mysore, the Jain kingdoms were not allowed much autonomy, and when the British took over South Kanara in 1800, none of the Jain kingdoms were acknowledged as princely states. Still, several Jain families reside within the region, occupying an important position in rituals as well as in the popular imagination. Many people remember to which kingdom their villages belonged, and the frontiers between these domains continue to inform local perceptions of the region. Some of the descendants of these kings are still being formally enthroned, known as "taking *paṭṭa abhiṣekha*."

There were Jain kings in North Kanara, too, but their kingdoms and the memories of them have to a great extent disappeared. In the south toward Kāsaragoḍ district, the most important state Vittala, whose "capital" was in South Kanara, was a Hindu kingdom. The Jain kingdoms are still present in memory and celebrated in rituals such as the *nēma*, discussed in the following paragraphs, and this contributes to the specificity of South Kanara as a region. This centuries-long Jain influence has also produced a marked contrast to the situation in Kerala, where Brahmin settlements had a central role in the constitution of the state (Veluthat 2009, 301). Brahmin influence is far less important in South Kanara, where the religion of the Tuḷu speakers traditionally and to a considerable extent even now revolves around the so-called "*bhūta*" cults (Carrin 1997; Chinnappa Gowda 2005, 17–38). The *bhūta* (literally, "spirit") deities (often characterized as demigods) have very weak links to all-Indian Hinduism, though they are usually said to be the *gaṇa* (flock or troupe) of Shiva; they are linked in general to lineage traditions in honor of clan or family leadership. The ritual of these cults, where possession is a central feature, is quite distinct from other forms of Hinduism in the region. The most prominent deities, the royal *bhūta*s or *rājandaiva*s, were—and are—the protectors of the Jain kingdoms and Bunt chiefdoms (as well as of some manors taken over by members of other castes, notably Gauḍa Sāraswat Brahmins), and the main annual ritual, the *nēma*, still acknowledges these political units, which no longer have any legal existence. The *nēma* entertains the ritual unity of the chief and his (former) dependents, while the numerous caste *bhūta*s, as opposed to the *rājandaiva*s, address the unity and specificity of each community (Carrin and Tambs-Lyche 2003; Brückner 1995).[4]

Most important among these are the twins Koṭi and Chennayya (Carrin 2016; Kalmody 2007), who serve as symbols for the revendications of their ex-untouchable caste, the Billavas. Their cult is linked to a modern rhetoric of resistance to oppression. Apart from a presence to "bless" some of the most important *nēma*s, Brahmins generally do not have important roles in the *bhūta* cults.

Though Brahmin settlements never reached the importance they had in Kerala, they have considerable presence in South Kanara, notably in the coastal zone and especially around Uḍupi. There were Brahmins in the area probably since the seventh

century (Ramesh 1970, 274), and they must have served in the Shiva temples, which flourished under the Alupa rulers (seventh to fourteenth century CE). We know the Pāṇḍyas invited a large number of Brahmins to Tamiḷnāḍu from the north during the eighth century, but the main immigration to South Kanara is much later. It is described in two texts, the *Grāmapaddhati* and the *Sahyādri Kaṇḍa*, probably dating from the between the fourteenth and the fifteenth century, and the actual migration may be dated to the thirteenth century. The geographical origin of these settlers has not been established. These texts describe the Brahmin settlements in some detail (Rao 2005). They describe thirty-two Brahmin settlements in Tuḷunadu (South Kanara and Kāsaragoḍ), while sixty-four are mentioned for Kerala and sixteen for North Kanara; these numbers give an impression of the relative importance of Brahmins in the three regions. These were *brahmadeya* villages donated to Brahmins for service to a temple, with *agrahāra*s or living quarters exclusively for Brahmins and temple lands controlled by the Brahmin community though farmed by members of other castes.

For South Kanara, the texts clearly show the predominance of the settlement traditionally called Shivaḷḷi, which in fact covers Uḍupi and several surrounding villages (Rao 2005, 154–55, 292). The Shivaḷḷi Brahmins, taking their name from the place, and the Sthānikas are predominant among the Tuḷu-speaking Brahmins, though there are several other caste groups.[5] While the Shivaḷḷis serve in most important temples along the coast, the Sthānikas occupy a similar place in the eastern part of the district. Each caste group is connected to an important ritual center: the Sthānikas adhere to the Shringeri *matha* (monastery), said to be founded by the Advaita philosopher Shankarāchārya in the eighth century CE, while most Shivaḷḷis have converted to the Dvaita philosophy of Mādhavāchārya (thirteenth century) and adhere to one of the eight Madhava *maṭha*s in Uḍupi. Most of these conversions from the Advaita to the Dvaita school of philosophy probably took place in the sixteenth century, when the system of the eight *maṭha*s and the Krishna temple at Uḍupi was put on a firm footing by the Madhava pontiff Vadiraja (Vasantha Madhava 1985, 43–44).

Both ritual centers have considerable influence in South Kanara, and many temples—some of which were royal temples of the Jain kings—draw large numbers of devotees. Many of them are also adherents of the *bhūta* cults, and what is striking is the coexistence of these quite different religious forms, where the popular *bhūta* cults retain their separate character with only a very moderate degree of Sanskritization, in spite of the Brahmanical presence. It is above all the Tuḷu speakers who participate in the *bhūta* cults, while many Brahmins, including the majority of Vaishnavites and the Shaivite minority, practice their own Brahmanical form of Hinduism, with several caste particularities (although Tuḷu-speaking Brahmins do associate to some degree with *bhūta* traditions). With these highly different forms of "Hinduism" as well as Jainism, Christianity, and Islam, the region's diversity is striking on the religious and the linguistic levels.

Town and country, trade and agriculture

It is in a sense paradoxical, then, that locals from all the communities refer to South Kanara as a rather neatly bounded region, the cultural specificity of which is not in

question. It does, indeed, form a very specific and rather interesting case of regional Hindu society.

Traditional society in Tuḷunadu is a conception centered on the Bunt-controlled village society of Tuḷu speakers, ritually enacted in the *nēma*. This image is opposed but not superseded by the revendications of the lower Tuḷu castes, especially the Billavas who, generally resenting Brahmin influence, try to establish their ritual, economic, and political autonomy from the dominant, landholding Bunts. They are heavily engaged in modernizing and rationalizing the cult of their own *bhūtas*, the twins Koṭi and Chennayya, seen as symbols of Billava opposition against former Bunt dominance (Carrin 2016). Some of the lowest castes like Koraga and Muṇḍala—ex-untouchables that were termed slave castes in early British times—also promote their own *bhūta*s and cult places to gain ritual autonomy and visibility, rather than joining bhakti movements to gain respectability within mainstream Hinduism.

Quite different is the case of the Mogavīra fishermen, who have a tradition of living in their own villages (*paṭṭaṇa*) and, unlike the Billavas, have traditionally maintained a good deal of autonomy in relation to the higher castes. Yet today, they are busy Sanskritizing their religion, with their main goddesses Mahāsati and Māriamman being deprived of their former right to animal sacrifice, while Mahāsati is now claimed to be Durga Parameshwarī. This is a process, however, that has not gone without protest and backlashes from within the caste, as I have described elsewhere (Tambs-Lyche 2015). We should note that even in her present Sanskritized and vegetarian form, Durga Parameshwarī is still served exclusively by Mogavīra priests.

But if we move to the towns, commerce, banking, and the professions, we remove ourselves from traditional Tuḷu society, and the dominance of the Bunts disappears. This difference between town and country is not a modern phenomenon. The ports along the coast are documented as important trading centers for close to two thousand years, with Mangalore, the most important, mentioned in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* (usually dated to the first or second century CE). The inland towns were on the trade routes linking the ports to the pepper and areca plantations in the Ghaṭ foothills and to the country across the Ghaṭs. These trade routes traversed, however, the rural agricultural homeland of traditional Tuḷu society. Apparently, there is a striking contrast between cosmopolitanism and localism here. But at least from the fifteenth to sixteenth century, the hinterland expanded, as the river valleys of the hilly subregion between the coastal plain and the Ghats were cleared and drained for rice cultivation (Vasantha Madhava 1991). This also meant an integration of the hinterland into international trade, since a large portion of the rice was exported to Oman and the Gulf, and later to Goa, after the Portuguese had established themselves there in 1510.

Historically, Jains and then Muslims dominated the cosmopolitan urban sector, oriented to the Indian Ocean trade world, but it was the Gauḍa Sāraswat Brahmins—whom I shall refer to as GSB, a term commonly used in the area—who came to monopolize the export of rice when the hinterland valleys were cleared, and from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries onward they became the dominant trading community in the area (Tambs-Lyche 2011). They are still the predominant community among the South Kanara bourgeoisie. Secondarily, there are Catholic

elites, strongly present since the sixteenth century, who are originally converts from the GSB caste. Like the GSB, these Catholic Brahmins ("Bammos") speak Konkani, the language of Goa, a place to which both communities link their origins. The Muslim presence among the bourgeoisie declined from the seventeenth century and through the colonial period, though Gulf money is now effectuating something of a revival. Bunts, moving in from the countryside, began to make their presence felt from the second half of the nineteenth century (Rao 2010, 194–98), but it was only by the early twentieth century that their numbers became important, and they still represent a minority in this sector.

The Gauḍa Sāraswat Brahmins

The GSB have been present in Tuḷunadu since the thirteenth century, when they were established at Manjeshwar in Kāsaragoḍ *taluk* of Kerala, and in South Kanara from the fourteenth century, when they had arrived at Mulki, halfway along the coast between Mangalore and Uḍupi. The main immigration from Goa followed from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries (Tambs-Lyche 2011, 40–46). Their conversion from Advaita Shaivism to Dvaita Vaishnavism, under the leadership of the Kāshi and Gokarṇa *maṭha*s, began in the sixteenth century (Vasantha Madhava 1985, 45). In spite of centuries of presence in South Kanara, however, the GSB are seen, and to a large extent see themselves, as immigrants to the region. But the term "immigrant" does not really convey their relation to the region, nor that of the Mangalorean Catholics, for both groups have their main population and their cultural centers in South Kanara, and their patriotism for the region is in no way inferior to that of the Tuḷu speakers, though the groups refer to different aspects of the region's culture.

The GSB are, above all, a merchant community,[6] but they are proud of their status as Brahmins. Moreover, they are Sāraswati Brahmins, claiming to descend from the priestly caste living along the banks of the Sāraswati River during the period of the Indus civilization. Since the river dried out and the population left there somewhere around 1500 BCE, this makes the GSB descend from some of the oldest Brahmin communities of India. They claim that their custom of eating fish stems from the difficult period when the lands along the Sāraswati were drying up: the sage Sāraswat then told them to eat fish, as the males of the caste still do.[7] Rather than accepting nonvegetarianism as a stigma in relation to other Brahmins, then, the GSB tend to see fish-eating as a proof of their ancient traditions. In fact, when questions are asked about their orthodoxy, they retort that younger and upstart Brahmin castes do not have as old and genuine traditions as they themselves have. In South Kanara, they are also proud of being Northern (*gauḍa*) Brahmins, generally seen as more prestigious and ancient than their Southern (*pancadrāvida*) brethren, such as the Shivaḷḷis. In short, they see themselves as the most genuine representatives of a pan-Indian, Brahmanic civilization in South Kanara (Tambs-Lyche 2011, 307–8). In relation to their own heritage, then, the *bhūta* cults of the locals are regarded as popular culture or folklore: Hindu, yes, but not the "real" Hinduism of which they themselves are the stalwarts. In this sense, their image of their own caste is not that of "immigrants" but

rather as "civilizing colonizers" in an otherwise rather "barbarian" or "primitive" part of India.

This view is strongly opposed by the Shivaḷḷi and other local Brahmins, who see the Saraswats as ritually inferior to themselves. This view is also held by the Madhava *maṭha*s, which in many contexts, such as access to dining halls and puja rooms, do not allow the Saraswats to enter spaces reserved for Brahmins (Rao 2002, 74–75). This is particularly striking since the majority of the GSB are Madhava Dvaitas,[8] converted, however, not through the Uḍupi *maṭha*s but from the Madhava Kashi *math* at Varanasi, or from their own Gokarna *math*. In the region, the GSB—both the Mādhavas and the Smārta (Shaivite) minority—have their own caste *maṭha*s, quite independent of the centers at Uḍupi and at Shringeri. Thus the rivalry between the Shivaḷḷi and the Gauḍa Sāraswat Brahmins persists, but it need not be invoked in most colloquial settings and does not lead to much conflict, since few GSB eat at the Uḍupi *maṭha*s (though they do attend some of the important rituals there), and Shivaḷḷis do not have any business with the GSB *maṭh*s at all.

Though they are well known for their vegetarian Uḍupi restaurants (Toft Madsen and Gardella 2009; Bairy 2010), the Shivaḷḷis do not have economic power and influence comparable to the GSB, who control three of India's largest banks.[9] The small banks founded by Shivaḷḷis have all been swallowed by the dominant GSB banks.

The Catholics

The Catholics, of course, have their own ideas of the superiority of their own religion, not only over the local forms of Hinduism but over "idol-worshipping" Hinduism in general. For them, Christianity itself denotes a higher civilization. But their pride as Catholics is also linked to the particular history of the church in South Kanara, where most "Mangaloreans" strongly opposed the *Padroado*,[10] the control of the local church by the Portuguese king and the bishops of Goa, in order to gain independence as a bishopric directly under the Pope and the *propaganda fide*, the missionary organization run directly by the Vatican (Farias 1999, 90–92). From 1800 until well into the twentieth century, the Catholics saw themselves as the dominant population of Mangalore town—the GSB, who only really settled in Mangalore in the eighteenth century, were less strong here than elsewhere in South Kanara then—and they most commonly used the term "Mangalorean" to designate the Catholics of the area.

The Mangalorean Catholics were the pioneers of coffee processing in India, and at one time they owned most of the tile factories, which for a century starting around 1850 was the main industry of Mangalore. Today the tile industry is but a shadow of its former self, and Catholics have lost much of their commercial influence. But the Catholics are still a significant presence among South Kanara's bourgeoisie, notably through their position in the professions. The Catholic Saint Aloysius College in Mangalore remains one of the most prestigious educational institutions in the region.

The Bammo (ex-GSB) Catholics are quite conscious of their cultural closeness to the GSB. They, too, are proud of being Brahmins, and in Mangalore, Brahmin and non-Brahmin Catholics each tended to frequent their own church among the two big churches of Mangalore, the Rosario and the Milagres. In Kaliāṇpur,[11] too, the two

churches have a history of differential caste adherence, though the main division here—and the reason for building the second church—was the *Padroado* conflict. It may be noted that kinship and marriage among the Bammo Catholics is also quite similar to the GSB pattern, with frequent cousin marriage and alliances, where two sisters were married to the same family (Tambs-Lyche 2011, 230–40; Lobo 2000). The Konkani dialects of the two groups differ somewhat, however, mainly in vocabulary.

Modernity and the bourgeoisie

A central element in the self-image of both these groups is their claim to have been the agents of modernity in the region. As merchants, the GSB naturally tended to dominate the regional market economy from early on. This is very visible from the period of Portuguese domination of the coast in the sixteenth century, when much of the economy of the Estado da India was in the hands of the GSB (Subramaniam 1993), and it was also a commonplace observation from the beginning of the British period (Buchanan 1999). The basis for this domination was the export trade in rice, which had become important from the fifteenth century.

Here, we shall have a closer look at the transformations in the region in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, which continued in the seventeenth century. The middle zone of low hills, which was basically a dry plateau cut by numerous river valleys, had been rather sparsely populated till then. It was a transit zone from the inland plantations of pepper and areca nut, located in the foothills of the Ghaṭs, to the ports on the coast. This plantation and export economy had been the economic base of the small Jain kingdoms of the region. But from the fifteenth century we see a major effort to drain the marshy valleys and plant rice (Vasantha Madhava 1991), clearly an answer to the growing demand for rice abroad. It may well have been the GSB merchants who saw this opportunity and initiated—and possibly financed—this agricultural expansion (Tambs-Lyche 2011, 17).[12] Certainly, it was they who soon acquired a near monopoly of this trade. At the same time, it was the Bunts, already present in the middle zone, who became the owners of the drained lands, while the manpower used for draining the valleys and, later, to cultivate the rice came mainly from the Billava caste. It was in this period then, that what was to become the traditional society of South Kanara took shape, with the Bunt as "feudal" landlords and the GSB as the main commercial community.[13] Gradually the Bunts, who had formerly engaged in trade, withdrew from that sector to concentrate on the land (Rao 2010, 40–52). It was also during this period that the *bhūta* cults grew into the form they have, largely, retained till the present time (Tambs-Lyche 2017, 169–73).[14] The rice exports grew considerably after the Portuguese annexation of Goa, since the colony there became dependent on South Kanara's rice.

The GSB were thus, to a considerable extent, responsible for creating the traditional Tuḷu society, which was, more precisely, early modern. In social terms, however, this traditional society was centered on the axis of the Tuḷu-speaking Bunts and Billavas, to the exclusion of the Konkani-speaking GSB, who largely lived separately (though some also acquired land). It is this ideological constellation, with the GSB crucial to, but beyond, the traditional village, that explains why a community present in the

region for some five hundred to six hundred years is still regarded as being composed of "foreign immigrants" (Tambs-Lyche 2011, 83–84).

But it is not to the agrarian transformations of the early modern period that the GSB and the Catholics refer when they want to bolster their claims to be the agents of modernity in the region. In this context, narratives start from the colonial period. British commentators, indeed, tended to see the GSB and the Catholics as the most progressive communities in the region, which may also be read as the communities most ready to accept the goals and policies of the colonial regime. It is the reverse side of the coin, then, that is exposed when the left-wing Marxist historian Saki (1998) qualifies the GSB as a "*comprador bourgeoisie*," a group acting as intermediaries and agents for the colonial power. The pejorative implications of the term may be contested, but Saki is certainly right that the GSB and the Catholics, at least till the beginnings of the freedom movement after World War I, played rather exactly the role that the term was meant to describe—they developed the enterprises that made the colonial economy prosper in the region. From their basis in the rice trade, the GSB branched out into almost every kind of merchandise, "from pins to planes" as one well-known Uḍupi trader of the 1930s used to describe his business. The Catholics, who were the pioneer coffee-curers in India, similarly branched out into a wide range of businesses. They came to dominate the tile industry, very important for more than one hundred years in the region (Lobo 2002, 536–37), though there were also GSB involved in it. One particular branch of enterprise stands out as independent of these two communities. This is the Uḍupi restaurants, pioneers of the modern vegetarian catering in India, which were started by the "indigenous" Tuḷu-speaking Shivaḷḷi Brahmins (Madsen and Gardella 2009; Bairy 2010, 91–92).

The protestant missionaries among the Billavas were the pioneers of modern, Western-style schooling in Karnataka. But the Catholics came up strongly on this front in the latter half of the nineteenth century, with the foundation of Saint Aloysius College in Mangalore, still regarded as the region's most prestigious college. The GSB came into higher education only around the turn of the twentieth century, but since then they have come to dominate the sector of private higher education, notably with Manipal University, which was built up gradually since the 1940s, originally by the Tonse Pai family of Uḍupi (Tambs-Lyche 2011, 123–41, 150–57). The first modern, private bank in the region—now the Corporate Bank—was founded by a Muslim but taken over by GSB directors when the founder ran into difficulty in the 1920s. The Bank of Canara and the Syndicate Bank, both among India's largest banks, were GSB creations, the latter again by the ubiquitous Tonse Pai family. The GSB have a leading position in the private hospital sector, with the Manipal hospitals and several others, followed by the Catholics and, more recently, the Bunts. The latter also have their own important bank, the Vijaya Bank. These various institutions are, of course, important in several ways, but here I stress their role as symbols of modernity, while it is typical of South Kanara that they are identified with particular communities. They and numerous enterprises in many sectors underline the role of the GSB, seconded by the Catholics, as the modernizers of the region.

A communitarian social order

The importance of caste, here, should be clear. In fact, the region is characterized by the success of the private sector, which largely predates the liberalization of the Indian economy since the 1980s. This private sector is largely organized according to caste. One is made clearly aware of this when traveling on the buses—South Kanara has arguably the best and densest bus services in India—for every bus may be easily identified as to the owner's caste or community (at least one of the three largest bus companies, however, has directors from several different communities; Benjamin 2017). Shops are easily identified by the religious images shown behind the cash desk. Thus, while the banking sector, as we have seen, is thoroughly dominated by the GSB, almost all the important communities have their own banks, which are generally much smaller and often cooperative enterprises. This is true, for example, of the Catholics, the Mogavīra fishermen, and the Billavas. Similarly, the GSB and the Catholics may dominate private higher education, but there are some important Bunt and Jain institutions, and the Mogavīras have their own schools up to high-school level, while there are also the government fishermen's schools. The Billavas do not have their own education system, apart from a few Guru Narayan schools,[15] but the Protestant church in the area is predominantly a Billava church, and the system of Protestant schools therefore has a very large proportion of Billava students, both Christian and non-Christian. Protestant priesthood in the area, and the seminary that prepares for it, are largely institutions dominated by Billavas. The particular role of the GSB and of the Brahmin elite among the Catholics must therefore be seen in a context where social organization is predominantly communitarian; in institutions of all sorts, caste plays a crucial role.

Elements from the past

One element of their past that the GSB generally avoid referring to is their former importance as moneylenders. As David Hardiman (1996) states for the relationship between moneylender and peasant in northwestern India, the moneylender could be both necessary and useful to the peasant, in spite of the former's exploitation of the latter. But when members of other castes in South Kanara speak of the GSB usurers, it is the exploitative aspect of the relation that is foregrounded. Some observers also saw it this way. When the German missionary Fischer struggled to open protestant schools in the Karkala area in the 1850s and 1860s, he met considerable opposition from the GSB community (Fischer 1906, 12–15). In his characterization of this merchant group, he compares them with the Jews in his own homeland, Württemberg in south Germany. His remarks are typical examples of the anti-Semitism shared at the time by many in his homeland, but they do also reflect the resentment of many members of the Tuḷu-speaking communities in South Kanara against the GSB (Tambs-Lyche 2011, 76–83). This anti-GSB feeling seems to have been stronger in the nineteenth and the early twentieth century than it is now. Moneylending is, of course, a profession that tends to breed unpopularity, a view clearly implied in Fischer's comparison with the German Jews. The RSB,[16] a slightly inferior offshoot of the GSB caste, were equally unpopular, since they often worked as tax collectors. There does, indeed, exist a

certain animosity toward the GSB among many other castes. Still, this animosity does not amount to anything that can be compared with anti-Semitism. Yet the Jewish bourgeoisie in Germany was clearly seen as a "bourgeoisie from elsewhere," comparable to the GSB.

The Brahmin Catholics are not similarly remembered as usurers. But as Christians, they were perceived as close to the colonial power, and many in fact supported the moderate Justice Party[17] in the period just before India's independence. A main issue for most of the Indian Catholics was the question of separate electorates, seen as necessary to guard their interests as a minority. Yet the Mangaloreans were leaders among the minority who opposed separate electorates for Catholics (Farias 1999, 245–79; Lobo 2002, 770–91), a position that probably reflected their strong position locally. In Mangalore, the Catholics felt they could make themselves heard anyway; this was not the case in most locations where the Catholic minority was found.

Christianity was, and of course is still, regarded by many Indians as a foreign religion. Indeed, the Mangaloreans, as the Catholics like to call themselves, were voting as part of the Anglo-Indian constituencies that the British created for the elections of the late 1930s, and many did vote for a party that favored continued attachment to the empire. And yet, South Kanara, which has one of the highest proportions of Christians in India apart from some tribal areas, is a region where their presence has not created, and still does not seem to produce, any real anti-Christian feeling.

Though the GSB were accused of being "*comprador bourgeoisie*," as a group they were quite central to the anticolonial movement and tended to support Congress in the 1930s. But with the growing skepticism toward Gandhi's nonviolent strategies in the 1940s, many GSB turned to the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, or "National Volunteer Organization").[18] When that organization was banned by the Nehru government in 1950, a good number of GSB were jailed—a time still well remembered by their families. The story repeated itself later, when several RSS supporters among the GSB went to jail during the Emergency (1975–1977). Nevertheless, there were also important congressmen from the caste at the time of the Emergency, such as T. A. Pai, who was a minister in Indira Gandhi's government, which he defended then but later criticized (Tambs-Lyche 2011, 157–62). The presence of progressive and rather universally admired elements among the GSB, notably the Tonse Pai enterprises such as the Syndicate Bank, Manipal University, and the hospital complex at Manipal, may well have contributed to reduce the earlier animosity to the GSB as moneylenders. Both radical and conservative positions among the GSB set them apart from the Bunts, however, who have been the mainstay of the Janata Dal in this region. The Janata Dal is and has been, above all, a party of the dominant farming castes in Karnataka (Carrin and Tambs-Lyche 2009).[19]

Conclusion: The integration of "foreign" elements in South Kanara

Here I arrive at a crucial question. Regions, as noted in the introduction, may be characterized by the particularities of their constellation of majority and minority groups. But these may differ in their attachment to the region, with some minorities seen as outsiders. Why, in a region where a central part of the populace—the Tuḷu

speakers—are deeply aware of and proud of their cultural particularities, do these powerful communities, occupying most of the social space of the bourgeoisie, not engender animosity, exclusion, and hate? The Basel missionary Fischer compared them to Jews in a way that was clearly anti-Semitist. Yet there is no sentiment toward the GSB that can be compared to the anti-Semitism once common in Germany. Why?

My tentative answer is that there is a major difference in the constitution of the society in which these minorities are encompassed. Germany, like other European nation-states, was largely the product of efforts to perceive the nation as a single ethnic community, making "foreign" minorities of all others. Württemberg, the region from which Fischer and other Basel missionaries came, was basically a peasant society with emerging industry, and it was largely a mono-ethnic area. Arguably, the ethnic element in nationalism was stronger in Germany than in some other European countries, such as Britain or France. And then nationalism, perhaps especially in France, was and largely still is anti-communitarian; no community loyalty should stand between the individual and the nation.

This would be extremely difficult in South Kanara, however, since communitarian dynamics in a plural situation have been fundamental to the functioning of society there and remain so to this day. Indeed, few parts of India fit John S. Furnivall's definition of the plural society (1948)[20]—where communities are separate but meet in the marketplace—so well as South Kanara does, though as critics of Furnivall have pointed out, we must add the political field of power and bargaining to the common spheres where communities meet. In such a society, there is no clear majority to turn the others into minorities. Traditionally, Tuḷu speakers dominate the countryside, while the towns have historically been the home of other communities from very early on: Muslim traders, Jain kings, Christians, and the GSB. The tradition of maintaining cultural difference within a framework of generally peaceful coexistence is very old in South Kanara. My argument is that this, in fact, may well be why the region remains a relatively peaceful corner of India.

The present power of the Hindu right has been able to produce effects in many parts of India that recall the ethno-nationalisms common in Europe. There is a break here with earlier, secular interpretations of Indian nationalism built around the concept of "unity in diversity," which de facto accepted that individuals belong *both* to a community—a caste—*and* to the nation. The minority situation typical of the European nation-state can only be created in India, then, by pitting a majority of communities against the others, which is what Hindu nationalists are attempting to do.

It has often been argued that the peaceful coexistence of plural societies is endangered when and as the different communities strengthen their boundaries and their distinction from others (e.g., Benedict 1965). This presupposes that an earlier situation of fluid or split identities is replaced by one in which these identities harden and consolidate. Such developments certainly do take place in South Kanara, as when the Billavas distance themselves from the Bunts to gain ritual and social autonomy from what used to be the landlord caste. But it seems to me that these developments do not threaten plural society in South Kanara: they take place in a context where

avenues for competition and rivalry are already well established, so that the plural social order changes but does not break down.

Indeed, cultural pluralism has become part of the very discourse that defines South Kanara as a region, and for many inhabitants the tolerance and respect that seems to govern the relations between groups from different religions there has become a matter of pride. The alternative designation of the region, Tuḷunadu, which puts the stress on Tuḷu language and culture, has become a part of this discourse, but its potential for a monocultural interpretation remains severely limited by the presence of the non-Tuḷu speakers, so that it mainly works to single out the non-Tuḷu "immigrants" as minorities whose right to be there is not seriously contested.

Rather, it is the attempt to constitute a dominant majority that appears as a threat to the other groups (Morris 1968), with the danger that a tolerant plurality be replaced by efforts to impose majority norms based on mainstream Hinduism. The Tuḷu movement has not succeeded in this. Hindu nationalism, however, is indeed present and strong in South Kanara, and the BJP is currently the strongest party. But the community that has for long been the main basis of the party's support is the "immigrant" GSB, comprised of northern (*gauda*) and not southern (*panchadravida*) Brahmins. This is important for the community's self-image as modernizing colonizers, and as representatives of the all-Indian Brahmanical tradition, in what they see as a rather primitive and barbarian land.

Hindutva politics have indeed advanced in recent years in South Kanara, to the point where some commentators talk of the cultural pluralism breaking down. The advancement of Hindutva is largely effectuated by an alliance between leading GSB and Sanskritizing elements from the lower castes, particularly from the Mogavīra community. But as far as I could observe during my last stay in 2017, the Hindutva pressure had increased conflict through several provocations, without seriously threatening the plural character of South Kanara society. After all, it is a self-conscious minority that stands for the unity of the Hindu nation in South Kanara, and this clearly weakens their position as spokespeople for majority dominance.

Such dominance is, above all, prevented by the Bunts, with their traditional base in the countryside, who are the main supporters of the identification of the region as Tuḷunadu. But again, the discourse on the region and the quest for a dominant position within it cannot be reduced to a rivalry between these two castes. This is where other vocal groups come in such as the Billavas, who are very conscious of their Tuḷu culture but strongly opposed to Bunt dominance, or the Catholics, who see themselves as modernizers rather like the GSB but who are vehemently opposed to Hindutva politics.

Whatever the community or its revendications, however, the region remains the reference. One reason for this, I think, is that apart from historically recent diasporas among several castes, all of them are firmly based in the same territory. There is no significant group whose territory extends beyond the region.[21] This is rather different from the situation on the North Indian plain, for example, where the territories of important caste groups may not coincide at all. Thus, the discourse on the region continues to focus on South Kanara as a well-defined object, without the possibility of defining the region with reference to a single dominant caste or religious group. This

apparently paradoxical situation can be understood when related to a fundamental trait of South Kanara society: the bourgeoisie comes from elsewhere.

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Notes

1. For the concept of dominant caste, see Srinivas (1959) and Mayer (1958).

2. The Basel missionaries, present in Mangalore since 1840, published dictionaries of the language (Männer 1886, 1888) and various religious literature. Modern secular literature in Tuḷu first appeared in the 1920s. But the number of writers and works have increased enormously at least since the 1980s, and at present the literary activity in Tuḷu is flourishing, though many writers publish their books themselves, and there is no real publishing industry apart from the Tuḷu Academy's books. In the circumstances, it is difficult to get a fuller picture of the growth of Tuḷu literature.

3. I prefer the term "bourgeoisie" to alternatives such as "the urban middle class," though the two terms overlap. On a first level, we may oppose the bourgeoisie to such categories as the nobility, the priestly group if it exists, peasants, and the working class. The origin of the term from "bourg" (borough) indicates an urban location, but also formal citizenship in the borough. While this status disappeared with modernity, the typical bourgeoisie still tend to see themselves as the social core of the urban formation. Associated with this is a certain economic (merchants being the archetypal bourgeois) and cultural (Bourdieu 1977) capital; the bourgeoisie generally sees itself as more enlightened, rational, and "civilized" than other classes. Thus, the new rich may have to pass through a stage of acceptation to enter the bourgeoisie. In Europe, this often happened by marriage; in India, the new rich often stage sumptuous religious ritual to gain acceptance. In South Kanara, in 2007, a rich low-caste owner of several hotels from Karkala celebrated the opening of a hotel in his hometown by an expensive ritual in the Venkatarama temple, belonging to the Gauda Saraswat caste. The ritual did not make him a GSB, but it did seem to signal his acceptance into the local bourgeoisie, dominated by this Brahmin caste.

4. Brückner (1995) has done an extremely thorough study of the ritual and of the texts (*paddana*s) of some of the *rajandaiva*s. Our study concerns, rather, the social and political aspects of the *nēma*.

5. Sthanika was originally a title, not a caste: Sthanikas were administrators of temples. The earliest inscriptions relating to this role are from 1215 and 1216 CE. They continued to wield considerable authority in both temples and community matters in South Kanara until the late eighteenth century. Vasantha Madhava relates the decline in their influence from then on to the rivalry between Shaivites and Vaishnavites in the area, with the latter gaining influence in modern times (Vasantha Madhava n.d.). Vasantha Madhava holds that it was from around

the sixteenth century that the term "Sthanika" came to denote a caste rather than a position (Vasantha Madhava, personal communication).

6. In Northern India, the most typical merchant communities are the various castes called Banias, but there are no South Indian castes in this group. Many Brahmin castes are in fact specializing in commerce, such as the Shrimali Brahmins of Gujarat or the Chitpavans of Maharashtra.

7. The Gauda Saraswat Brahmins refer to fish as "water vegetables." Maithili Brahmins of Bengal use a similar euphemism. Both in Bengal and Orissa, several Brahmin castes eat fish. As one Shaivite GSB remarked: "Vegetarianism was not there from the beginning. It was introduced by the Vaishnavites."

8. In opposition to the Advaita (monism) of Shankaracharya (eighth century), who held that the material world is an illusion, and the Vishistadvaita (modified monism) of Ramanuja (eleventh to twelfth century), for whom the material world was relatively real but of an inferior degree of reality to the spiritual, Madhava (thirteenth to fourteenth century) considered the material and the spiritual as equally real, which is why his philosophy is called Dvaita (dualism). The eight Madhava *matha*s of Uḍupi are the centers of this philosophical school (Rao 2002).

9. The Syndicate Bank, the Bank of Canara, and the Karnataka Bank. They also control the smaller, but still quite important, Corporation Bank.

10. When the pope divided the newly "discovered" world between Portugal and Spain in 1494, the monarch of each country was given the duty to Christianize "his" part of the world and authority (*Padroado*) over any new churches and congregations thus created. Thus until 1845 the Catholic church in South Kanara, as in Goa, was controlled by the Portuguese king, who among other things named the bishops of the area. This situation was later contested by the Propagation Fide, the missionary organization controlled directly by the Vatican. The rivalry between these ecclesiastic powers wrought bitter conflicts among the Catholics of South Kanara.

11. Kallianpur is located at the mouth of the Sita rivers, northwest of Uḍupi.

12. Vasantha Madhava (1991) furnishes very rich material on these agrarian changes. The generalizations as to the role of the GSB in this agricultural and economic transformation are mine.

13. There is nothing in our material to show the existence of a "*jajmani* system" at this period, though there were contracts with tenants and, very probably, with various service communities.

14. We may note that the important epic of Koti and Chennaya, the main *bhūta*s of the Billavas, is dated to the seventeenth century (Nandavara 2015).

15. Guru Narayan, the Hindu reformer so important among the Izhavas of Kerala (Osella and Osella 2000) also has numerous followers among the South Kanara Billavas. There is a very large Guru Narayan temple in Mangalore, a smaller one in Uḍupi, and several Guru Narayan schools, the most important of them catering to the Billava diaspora in Mumbai.

16. RSB stands for Rajapur Saraswat Brahmins. The name comes from Rajapur, an old port just north of Goa, which was under the Bijapur sultanate when the two castes left Goa. One possible explanation for their lower status is this move to a Muslim rather than a Hindu state.

17. The Justice Party stood for greater autonomy, rather than independence, in relation to the colonial power, and sought above all more equality for Indians within the colonial order.

18. The RSS is an extreme right-wing movement founded in the 1920s. The present prime minister of India, Narendra Modi, is a prominent member of the RSS.

19. At the time referred to in our 2009 paper (around 2005), a rough generalization was that the majority of the GSB supported the BJP party, the Bunts the Janata Dal, and the Billavas the Congress Party. Such generalizations are, of course, approximative, but they were shared by many people from these three groups.

20. I would hesitate to state that South Kanara *is* a plural society, since the term is normally not applied to a caste-dominated society; the caste order as well as differences in rank between the groups are important in the region. Nevertheless, Bunts, Jains, GSB, and Tuḷu-speaking Brahmins all have their grounds for claiming the highest status, and so have the Bammo Catholics. There certainly is no single, undisputed rank order in South Kanara.

21. This is of course a simplification. The GSB are, for example, present both in Kerala and North Kanara but still see South Kanara as their main territory. Their attachment to Goa is historical. Most temples of their lineage deities are situated in Goa, but there are very few GSB in Goa now. The Nadavas of North Kanara are very close to the Bunts, but they do differ in being patrilineal rather than matrilineal and speaking Kannaḍa rather than Tuḷu. The fishermen of North Kanara are not Mogavīras, and the Billavas are concentrated in South Kanara. So are the Shivaḷḷi Brahmins. In short, if we accept the Tuḷu-speaking Kāsaragoḍ district of Kerala as part of the region, all the main castes identify with the geographical area we are dealing with here.

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Revolution and Spiritualism

An Unlikely Chapter in the History of Yoga in Mexico

This article seeks to broaden the current scholarship on modern yoga by expanding the customary regional areas of enquiry. It offers an introspective overview of an early episode of the history of implementation of yogic ideas in Mexico. By focusing on the case of Francisco I. Madero, a prominent statesman and one of the chief actors in the Mexican Revolution, I will explore the influence that yogic philosophy had on Mexican politics at the beginning of the twentieth century. With a wide range of meanings, yoga here designates an ethical attitude and discipline, more than a bodily postures methodology. Even before the yoga boom from the 1960s onward, yogic ideas were already present in intellectual international circles—usually mediated by esotericism—and often had an impact on social and cultural environments. This enquiry will explore the intricacies of transregional negotiations of cultural items. Also, this article intends to situate expansive intellectual exchange in the light of global networks of knowledge and wider reimaginings of cultural worlds.

Keywords: global yoga—yoga in Mexico—Francisco I. Madero—esotericism and modernity—receptions of the *Bhagavadgītā*

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This article aims to unravel some of the not so obvious channels of "yogic" mobility from South Asia to Latin America, within a larger global history of yoga.[1] Some scholars state that the "reinvention" of yoga in this region, in the period of 1900–1950, "is a unique contribution . . . not established in the literature" (Simões 2018, 291). It will not be possible to offer here a detailed and wide-ranging overview, but only a synthetized insight into the early manifestations of yoga in Mexico, by focusing on a singular case.[2] This specific case is closely intertwined with the Mexican reception and circulation of the *Bhagavadgītā* (BhG), traditionally considered a *yogaśāstra*, or "scripture on yoga." First of all, it is worth pointing out that here yoga is understood in its broad sense, namely a technique, a method, and a philosophy, among other meanings. Regardless of how convoluted the semantics, the term "yoga" is not gratuitously equal to South Asian religiosity or postural global techniques but cuts across rich symbolical, soteriological, and experiential forms of practice. This is how the growing field of modern yoga studies handles the question, not privileging only *āsana*-oriented or postural yoga—a modern, but even more pointedly contemporary development—over all other historical trends in the Indian subcontinent. In fact, Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) is one key subject in the field of modern yoga studies, even if he championed his so-called Raja Yoga (a Neo-Vedantic interpretation of the *Yogasūtra*, partly mediated by Theosophy) as opposed to Hatha Yoga, the more bodily oriented practice that the swami despised.

The topic of this article concerns a period just before the bloom of modern postural yoga. The inquiry raises a number of questions: if not all of the forms of yoga in Mexico are indebted to Anglophone yoga avatars, what other manifestations were important? What were the specific sociohistorical contexts that encouraged the assimilation of yoga in this region? This article critically assesses two major strands of adaptation of Indian ideas and practices in Mexico: (a) an occultist milieu, and (b) a proto–New Age sensibility.[3] These are in turn related to the growth of a loose but strong Latin American orientalism.[4]

Seeking to elaborate on this specific time and space from a regional perspective, I focus on the case of Francisco I. Madero (1873–1913), a prominent statesman and leading actor in the Mexican Revolution, an enthusiastic Spiritualist, and president between 1911 and 1913. A notorious and educated bourgeois, Madero soon took interest in Mexican politics, a vocation partially fueled by Theosophist and Spiritualist ideals that circulated worldwide. This and his understanding of Indian philosophy

were instrumental in his political career: Madero himself was an ardent reader of the *Bhagavadgītā*, and his political vocation seems to have been fortified by his readings of the Hindu text. As I will show, the Mexican case bears idiosyncratic features that can shed light on adaptive forms not merely derived from Anglophone contexts, even though they respond to a wide network of shared cultural ideas.[5] It has to be stressed that Madero's yoga predates the boom of modern postural forms of yoga fashioned by Tirumalai Krishnamacharya, Shri Yogendra, and others. In this way we see how the global histories of yoga and Spiritualism connect with the regional particularities of the Mexican case to offer a new kind of, one might say, "revolutionary yoga."

The field of modern yoga studies has gained significant momentum in the early twenty-first century. Indeed, the nature, history, and forms of yoga in the modern world have become an established and thriving area of enquiry. It is not only about ancient and classical writings in Sanskrit anymore; instead, scholars are paying increasing attention to texts in different languages, practices in different regions, and schools at different points in time. As Andrea Jain (2015, ix–x) and others have noted, "The stories of yoga in South Asia, Europe, North America, the Middle East, and other regions of the world . . . are each a part of a larger global narrative." Nevertheless, the main focus has been on South Asian, European, and North American avatars of the yoga phenomenon. The aura of Anglophone yoga has become mainstream and, rather unconsciously, has extended a colonialist view of the world.

The trajectories of yoga—and other cultural items—in non-Anglophone regions show a wide range of developments that sometimes follow from Anglophone forms, but sometimes convey features of their own. This complex history can best be surveyed by thinking not just locally and not just disciplinarily, but globally and across disciplines. The case study of this article shows interesting aspects that concern Mexican political history but also unravel wider connections geographically and culturally: there is a complex web of networks that link Mexico to Spain, France, the Unites States, even Germany, and some countries in Latin America. Theosophy and Spiritualism prove to be cohesive factors in the present case. Before going into the study, I will first ponder on how to explore a local topic, but trying to think it globally.

The global and the regional (spaces and languages)

The dawn of the twenty-first century heralded a rising interest in globalization and the birth of a new interest in global history. This interest in the twentieth century was driven to a great extent by the collapse of European empires and the rise of the postcolonial, as well as by the influence of "history from below," although global history cannot be equated to these (Drayton and Motadel 2018, 5). It has only accelerated in recent decades. Part of the motivation of the global history approach was to challenge dominant West-centered versions of history, to account for various topics concerning transatlantic affairs. Global history can help us understand different historical processes by paying attention to the relationships, networks, and interactions that exceed the conventional frontiers between states, nations, cultures, and civilizations (Hausberger 2018, 16). One appropriate motivation of global history

has been to counterpoise national histories and area studies. One of its alleged promises is to escape from histories of empires and from teleology (de Vries 2013, 45).

This has led to a growing number of "comparative studies of the East and the West," especially focused on "environmental, migration, slavery, trade, and travel" themes (Berg 2013, 3). The global, the regional, and the particular need to be reflected on, especially in the light of notions such as interaction and transference. For one thing, the category "global" is usually not "universal"; however, it points to specific dynamics of global interconnections that condition various interactions, mobility, and fluidity of multiple items, ideas, and agents (Strube 2021, 58). This invites us to think of the "global ecumene," or what Ulf Hannerz (1996, 7) explained as "the interconnectedness of the world, by way of interactions, exchanges and related developments, affecting not least the organization of culture." Indeed, many momentous issues and events took place in a markedly "entangled global context, in which transfers of knowledge were not monodirectional but polyphonic and often ambiguous" (Krämer and Strube 2020, 1). As will become clear, the shared knowledge and symbolic projections of esoteric groups shaped transnational linkages that connect people in different places and also facilitated local interpretations of distant texts and cultural practices.

The discipline of global history is still struggling to clearly define its orientation, scope, and methodologies of its own. In other words, it has taken pains to distinguish itself from world history or area-specific, yet comparative, case studies. I do not intend to add to this discussion, but it is worth bearing it in mind. A key article has addressed the challenges and detractions to the discipline, for example the allegation that global history somehow rejects "smaller scales of historical experience" (Drayton and Motadel 2018, 2). But even thus, "there is no way back from the 'global turn' in our century, any more than we could go back to a history which paid no attention to women or the poor" (Drayton and Motadel 2018, 5). Indeed, we are living in a world culture, which does not entail an extension of uniformity but rather a growing sense of interconnectedness of different local cultures that somehow organizes diversity; for this reason, it cannot be anchored to any specific terrain, but is diffused (Hannerz 1996, 102).

Mostly dealing with relations between either Europe and China or Europe and India, global history has not avoided the failure of forwarding an Anglophone view of the world. More often than not, historical and cultural phenomena are understood through Anglophone lenses. Here we need to point out the fact that English has been the principal linguistic medium for scholarship in general. Whereas this "global language" acts as a lingua franca that "unites the 'global' community of scholars and reaches the 'global' audience" (de Vries 2013, 39), at the same time, in fact, this somehow neutralizes the globality of voices, as it were. Spanish, another transcontinental language, may have the potential of competing with English, the most cosmopolitan of all tongues (Aravamudan 2009, 2). However, this seems to be limited to specific themes and lines of research. When dealing with South Asian religions and philosophy, English has definitely become the principal linguistic tool, a sort of "theolinguistics" that somehow speaks out the pattern of the global popular (ibid., 29)—and few things are nowadays as popular, globally, as yoga.

Indeed, it has been recognized by advocates of global history that the field has been driven by Western priorities and Anglophone historians (Drayton and Motadel 2018, 8; Douki and Minard 2007, 13–14). This is a flaw. Sometimes, the knowledge of one or more Asian languages are combined, at an international level, but not in substitution of writing in English about world (even Asian!) experiences and issues. This means that the "global" has not yet become fully global, but semi-global. Further work that can deal with similar issues in transpacific regions or other regions and time frameworks also within the Atlantic is called for. But perhaps it is even more important to actually and effectively be able to engage in discussions across languages, not just across regions:

> The edited volume and the work of translation are the natural media of global history. But these volumes, like many conferences, will be dialogues of the deaf if we do not work actively against the idea that the business of history can or should be done in English, or that only that which is translated or translatable deserves our attention. (Drayton and Motadel 2018, 15)

The present article partly seeks to bring these issues to the fore, even though at the same time it does so through the medium of the English language.

By paying attention to other parts of the globe we may gain not only a deeper insight of the diverse ways of enculturation of yoga in the world, but also a better understanding of the very redefinition, adaptation, and transmission of religious traditions and cultural items in the modern and contemporary ages. Thus, among the main approaches of global history, I seek to invoke the connective approach, "which elucidates how history is made through the interactions of geographically (or temporally) separate historical communities" (Drayton and Motadel 2018, 3). Such an approach calls for comparative techniques and a vision for *l'histoire croisée*, and it also involves cutting across Eurocentric chronological and institutional divides (Douki and Minard 2007, 15–16). It is important to stress that such an approach responds to the global, which suggests a degree of interdependency and integration, in contrast to the world, which may be international but does not necessarily imply connectedness and integration (ibid., 10).

A key category in the present project is Latin America. Nevertheless, the category is not exempt of discussion and critique. "Latin America," "Hispanic America," and "Ibero-America" are related terms that overlap easily. Sometimes the distinctions between one and the other are not very clear. In broad terms, Hispanic America refers exclusively to Spanish-speaking countries in the Americas, whereas Ibero-America comprises countries where both Spanish and Portuguese are the predominant languages (all of them having been colonies of the once Iberian maritime powers of Spain and Portugal), namely Hispanic America plus Brazil. In principle, Latin America includes also French-speaking territories, such as Haiti, Martinique, or French Guiana. Thus, broadly speaking, Latin America is composed of all countries from Mexico through most of the Caribbean to Argentina, excluding Suriname and the few English-speaking countries in Central America and the Caribbean. Thus, even though the same region is more or less covered by the three regional labels, the general outlook may change drastically in dependence of which one is being used. All of these

countries share a connected history of European expansionism of colonial powers that speak Latin-derived languages.

To complicate matters, the term "Ibero-America" sometimes encompasses Spanish-speaking countries and Brazil, plus those in the Iberic peninsula (Andorra, Spain, and Portugal), especially in the context of summits. Also, notice that French Canada is usually not included in "Latin America," which is problematic and attests to the porosity and fuzziness of categories. In like manner, one could argue that some parts within North America could also be included in the label "Hispanic America," considering the large and growing number of Spanish-speaking individuals. So, while the labels "Ibero-America" and "Latin America" are useful to indicate certain regions when discussing specific issues, they also fail to account for wider nets of interaction. In such a project, one must necessarily go back and forth from the local or regional to the global. I will come back to this in the next section.

Unlike most global history efforts, I will not focus on either economic or social theory around the early modernity but will seek to coordinate history of religions–related themes with global history's drives well after that period. Also, I would like to probe into the Mexican case so as to find idiosyncratic features that can shed light on adaptive forms not found in Anglophone contexts. The way in which yoga was imported in Mexico responds to a wider network of practices and understandings, but (as is the specific topic of this article) it bore an impact on domestic affairs. This early instance of yoga in Mexico depends on two different transregional interactions: an intellectual one (ties with France and Spain, and reliant on the French and Spanish languages) and an "esoteric" one (the impact of Spiritualism and Theosophy, which *also*—and arguably more pronouncedly—depended on Anglophone channels of transference).

In a sense, my motivation for this topic echoes Maxine Berg's (2013, 9) urge to unravel "narratives of interaction" that would stem from the pursuit of "more open-ended questions concerning global connections: how did the transmission of material culture and useful knowledge across regions of the world affect the economic and cultural developments in any one of these regions?" These "narratives of interaction" are means of transcending traditional area studies and of fostering more intense interdisciplinary efforts, that is, striving for "alternative academic models" (ibid., 13). Thus, I would deal with dynamics of acculturation, transference, and "*métissages culturels*" in a way that carefully pays attention to contexts (Douki and Minard 2007, 19). This also echoes processes of cultural exchange, where "the transfer or non-transfer of [cultural items] depends on how the receiving culture conceptualizes both the reference culture and itself." Thus, "In its new cultural surroundings, the exchanged item often assumes another shape and meaning" (Baier 2016, 315–18). This process is clearly attested in Madero's reception of the *Bhagavadgītā*, as we will see later in this article.

It is important to emphasize that the topic of this article links Mexico, Spain, and France mainly through Theosophical and Spiritualist webs of transregional connections. One wonders if this puts at stake the usual reliance on the much-employed categories of the Global South and the Global North. In instances such as this, the dynamics of exchange do not respond to politico-geographical parameters,

but to intellectual and cultural concerns shared through extensive lines of transmission across diverse regions. Also, it is worth noticing that these lines are usually not motivated by imperialistic drives but by proselytism. The Theosophical Society—or yoga or Spiritualism—sees the world not as a territory to be conquered, but a stage onto which to extend a web of influence and, thus, generate a sense of global comradeship.

Latin America: New routes for research on yoga and esotericism

The shaping of links over long distances may have been motivated by the growth of commerce and the spread of religions, among other factors (Hausberger 2018, 17). Thus, scholars such as Richard Drayton and David Motadel (2018, 11) speak on behalf of "a cis-global history, lived in territories far from the apparent hotspots of transglobal processes or circulation." My contribution pertains to a wider project: the history of reception and practice of yoga in Latin America, a region usually left out of the field of modern yoga studies. This puts into question different sorts of issues, both local and global. To begin with, the label "Latin America" can of course be construed as a regional framework. It is also one that includes a very vast expanse of territory, covering as a matter of fact around two-thirds of the American continent. It is not always easy to define which countries are included in this category, as already discussed in the last section. Indeed, "the concept of region lacks the spatial precision we associate with cities, countries, or the world as a whole"; however, identifying "various regional worlds in the early modern era that can be vantage points from which to look out at larger global patterns is one way to go beyond a European-centered world history" (Wong 2013, 85). This statement is also valid for the modern and contemporary periods.

The Latin American region is an extensive and complex one, as pointed out previously. It can be studied for a wide array of topics and cases "to take the measure," using Bin Wong's phrasing (2013, 88), "of some spatial dimensions of history more effectively." Of course, this region presents a number of similarities and differences that affect in different ways all sorts of social, political, and cultural issues. Although predominantly Spanish speaking, Latin America hosts the country with the highest number of speakers of Portuguese around the globe: Brazil. Most of the countries in the region are an outcome of Iberic colonial projects. As a consequence, the majority of the population here religiously identify themselves as Roman Catholics; yet, there is a growing number of other Christian denominations (notably Pentecostalists). The presence of indigenous communities in most of the Americas further enriches the sociocultural landscape and often permeates political discourse, as can be seen in the cases of Bolivia and Paraguay, for example, but also of Canada. Also, most of the Latin American countries attained political independence long before the majority of colonial territories in Asia and Africa.

Thus, even though it is a handy tool, it needs to be pointed out that resorting to the "Latin America" tag as a conceptual tool or episteme can be misleading, because there are significant differences within, as there are also subgroups. Things that happened in Mexico may not necessarily be true for the rest of the region, even the closest one,

Central America. Many historical, political, and cultural issues in Mexico were tightly tied to either Spain, France, or the United States at different moments between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Many events that took place in South America (especially Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay) do not correspond with those that shaped sociocultural developments in Nicaragua or Costa Rica, for example. Indeed, they also do not necessarily mimic events that happened in Colombia or Chile, much closer countries to the southernmost part of the region. Yet some political events and phenomena did share traits, and some cultural items were, in fact, common, thanks partly to the linguistic medium of the Spanish language (which is shared by most countries in the region), along with many other complex matters.[6]

By paying attention to the story of yoga in Mexico (and Latin America at large), it is also possible to observe more clearly some features of the global narrative of yoga, which is obviously not of one piece. Certainly, the trajectory of yoga can best be understood in the light of a global historical understanding of the circulation of ideas, more than seeing yoga just as an Indian religious discipline going abroad. Moreover, Latin America–based scholars have an advantage: apart from dealing with English and French sources, methods, and critiques, they can also deal with various materials in Spanish and Portuguese, thus being able to cover a vast territory and significant archival material.

As early twenty-first-century scholarship has been showing, esotericism and occultism have played a great role in the making of the modern world. They usually extend their zones of influence across regions and linguistic barriers, the best example of which is the Theosophical Society.[7] The presence of occultist and esoteric groups is indeed noticeable in Latin America, and the reception of yoga and other Asian practices has been filtered by them. Long before the global momentum of postural yoga, some "Eastern" concepts had already been introduced into the West, often through esoteric circles. Texts like the *Bhagavadgītā* became illustrious and often-cited sources of wisdom. Therefore, a global history approach can prove very beneficial in examining the processes of religious transformation, especially by recognizing that such phenomena as esotericism are not gratuitously "Western" but really global (Bergunder 2020, 88). In this context, it is worthwhile to keep in mind that "yoga" covers a wide range of meanings and refers to very different traditions and methodologies. Here I understand "yoga" in a very broad sense, implying discipline, meditation, concentration, and bodywork; in this article, I use the term to refer to notions of discipline and ethics. In Madero's own phrasing (2000b, 187), yoga could be understood as a "*filosofía de la acción*" (philosophy of action); he fervently adhered to the tenet that: "For the *muni* who wishes to attain Yoga, the method to be practiced is action" (BhG 6.3, in Madero 2000b, 220). So, it is important to note that the first uses of the word "yoga" on Mexican soil had nothing to do with corporeal flexibility and *āsana* (physical postures) but rather connoted a philosophical and ethical approach.

Such an understanding of yoga was not uncommon at the time. In this sense, Madero shared a cultural worldview that was open to engaging creatively with the *Bhagavadgītā*. Thus, it is worth pointing out that for such dissimilar Indian personalities as Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Gandhi, renunciation that

entailed detachment from worldly duties was objectionable; the true yogi was the *sthitaprajña*,[8] whose yogic self-control enabled him to carry out social obligations (Davis 2015, 140). This is an underlying motif in Madero's exegesis, as I will discuss later at more length. Indeed, a more comparative analysis of similar enterprises of both nationalistic and revolutionary readings of the *Gītā* across the globe would be highly engaging, but that would fall outside the scope of this article. A related concept, cosmopolitanism, could also expand discussions in this kind of analysis (cf. Hannerz 1996, 103). Madero was somewhat of a cosmopolitan, even though his relationship to India was indirect and mediated by an esoteric global ecumene.

Francisco I. Madero: Prosopography of a Spiritualist politician

Madero's is probably the earliest of the key episodes of the history of the reception of yoga in Mexico (Muñoz 2021b, 339). It would be misleading to suppose that all things Indian or Asian entered Mexico through Anglophone routes. There were also French and Spanish ones. In part, this had to do with the strong influence that esotericism and kindred movements exercised between the second half of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century in many regions. Spiritism or Spiritualism played a major role in widening the minds of aristocratic liberals in both Europe and the Americas, and so occupied an interesting place in Mexican history.[9] Indeed, it can be argued that Spiritism greatly contributed to the shaping of some modern societies in Latin America (Bubello, Diniz-Silva, and Villalba 2021, 233).

Spiritualism is a religious movement centered in the belief that the afterlife is peopled with spirits, or "invisibles," who can communicate with the living. Its practices focused on gatherings known as *séances* (a French word), sessions where a group of people took hands around a table and a "medium" contacted a spirit, who in turn manifested or spoke through the medium. Its proponents presented it as a "scientific religion" capable of enhancing human moral virtues. Interest, suspicion, and curiosity provoked scholars, psychologists, and other professionals to engage in studies on Spiritualist practices. Some concepts were derived from Swedenborgian and Mesmeric ideas (Hanegraaff 1996, 421–41; Clarke 2006, 86, 133), like the notion that a natural invisible force could allegedly control objects and cure different sorts of ailments in human beings, or the notion of the channeling of energies and the pre-eminence of mind over matter, further developed by Allan Kardec (1804–1869) and others. Spiritualism is also heavily guided by ethical values, despite the fact that it is usually associated with the inexplicable movement of tables and other objects during *séances*.

Modern Spiritualism was developed in Hydesville, New York in 1848. It promoted interest in "psychical research" and grew astonishingly rapidly: by 1854, some three million North Americans had become adherents (Hanegraaff 1996, 435–36; Aureliano 2015, 1). After being fashioned in North America with a more or less Protestant outlook, Spiritualism became more universalistic in its European—and specifically French—developments. French Spiritualism, or Spiritism,[10] incorporated the belief in reincarnation, very probably an invention by Allan Kardec (Ceccomori 2001, 40), the major figure and author of French Spiritism. Formerly an educator, Kardec (born

Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail) witnessed events of jumping and moving turntables and developed an interest in communicating with the spirits and gradually more elaborate Spiritist sessions. Among his influential writings, mention should be made to *Le livre des esprits* (Kardec 2020), *L'evangile selon l'Spiritisme* (Kardec 1868), and the periodical *Revue Spirite*. Kardec became widely read within some Mexican intellectual circles in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century.

In Latin America, Spiritualism became very popular and also merged with some local traditions, notably in Brazil, where "possessions" are well known (Aureliano 2015, 2–3).[11] It arrived in Mexico during the 1870s, where proponents publicly defended it, but this open defense declined in the next decade due to objections from both Catholics and positivists (Tortolero Cervantes 2004, 14). Because Spiritualism opposed the established church, it sometimes identified with freemasonry, which also held anticlerical attitudes (ibid., 15).

One of the most prominent proponents of Spiritualism was Francisco I. Madero. He has been deemed the "patron saint" or "*apóstol*" of Mexican democracy (Tortolero Cervantes 2004, 17; Chaves 2012, 77). As Mariano Villalba points out, Spiritism and Theosophy "helped Madero resolve the deep contradiction he found around the idea of starting the armed conflict" (Bubello, Diniz-Silva, and Villalba 2021, 251). Yet while Madero is not an obvious link in the chain of reception of yogic philosophy in Mexico, he is a noteworthy one, both for the political and the intellectual implications of his participation, especially since his espousal of *karmayoga* turned into concrete action in Mexican politics. Also, it is very significant that a politician of this stature embraced *both* Spiritualism and Indian ideas. It was part of the zeitgeist.

A complex figure, Madero was both a political leader and a Spiritualist medium, and these two aspects were inextricably linked from the 1890s until his untimely death in 1913. His activism was crucial in generating the Mexican Revolution, a major armed struggle ignited by a sociopolitical movement that lasted roughly from 1910 to 1920. Yet, its impact was felt during most of the twentieth century (Garciadiego and Kuntz 2010). This revolution was multifaceted; it sought to excise authoritarian regimes (especially Porfirio Díaz's three-decade rule) and foster more egalitarian and democratic forms of government. Madero has inspired a number of laudatory novels and songs, as well as defamatory libels and satires, and has also become a sanctified figure in Mexico's historical pantheon. Since he sparked the Mexican Revolution, his political career has been a matter of constant study and debate among historians. Yet, there has been something rather elusive about his personality: "While these historical and political questions have inspired numerous studies into the biography of Madero and his political beliefs, there remains an aura of mystery that surrounds the leader's lifelong quest to explore all questions spiritual, paranormal, and metaphysical" (Chandler 2010, 6).

Madero's political vision was largely determined by his Spiritualist vocation, as well as by his readings of Asian philosophy, especially from India. Madero's motivations were consistent, whether he was formulating a political manifesto on behalf of democracy or an exposition of his communication with ethereal beings. Such a complex figure demands an interdisciplinary approach of sorts. As a critic puts it: "In

order to better understand the true Francisco I. Madero, it is necessary to consider the importance of these texts, spiritual and secular alike, in his life" (Chandler 2010, 10); therefore, we should attempt "to explore this web of texts, the discursive codes through which Madero formed his understanding of reality" (ibid., 12).

Even though Brian Chandler focuses on literary elaborations about Madero, he is very insistent that Madero combined his own literary inclinations with his incorporation of all sorts of readings. Chandler claims that Hindu and Tibetan texts, such as the *Vijñānabhairava* and the *Bardo Thodol*, were influential (ibid., 7, 10, 13). The influence of these specific texts is yet to be proved (it seems rather unlikely that it was so), but there is ample evidence that the Mexican politician was influenced by South Asian philosophical ideas. This issue has made its way even into a literary narrative inspired by Madero's occultist leanings.

Madero's political career, as well as his former education, made him spend some time abroad. After a brief stay in the United States in 1886, he moved to France and stayed there from 1887 to 1892. In Paris, he felt more comfortable, partly because of his higher proficiency in the French language. As he himself recorded in his memoirs: "I stayed there [Saint Mary's College, Maryland] for less than a year, so I learned very little English and not much else by my not knowing the language" (Madero 1956, 15).[12] He was about twelve years old and also happened to have a French teacher and soon after was taken to study in Versailles and Paris, where he "learned most, for I was in possession of the language" (ibid., 19). Quoting Victor Hugo, he referred to this city as the "brain of the world" (ibid., 18).

As has been noted, Madero in this way expressed the spirit of the age. The editors of *La cruz astral* (The Astral Cross), an esoteric, Spiritualist Mexican periodical, celebrated their first year of publication around 1905, evaluating the efforts of spreading the doctrine. They wrote: "In France, Spain, the United States, and so on, there are confederations or associations perfectly organized and doing very significant work [of divulgation]. In Costa Rica, several societies have been founded both methodically and efficiently and they are disseminating our doctrines among the masses" (in Madero 2000b, 22). Notice that France and Spain come before the United States, which suggests the closer proximity that the editors felt toward the two European countries. It is also noteworthy that the one Latin American country that they mention is Costa Rica, an important foothold for other esoteric circles later on, suggesting possible circuits for the circulation of material culture: ideas, books, pamphlets, and so on.

It may be for these reasons that Madero felt a closer link with the French people and language than with North Americans and the English language. He even goes as far as to write:

> The Frenchman is very hospitable and treats the foreigner with a courtesy brimming with politeness. We of the Latin race, when in France, feel more at home than in the United States, for our character gets along better with the French than with the Anglo-Saxon. (Madero 1956, 20)

Geographical proximity did not match intellectual and cultural affinity in Madero's case, as was also true of most of the Mexican intelligentsia at the time. Madero and his family attended the 1889 *Exposition Universelle*, which the analogous world exhibition

in Chicago four years later attempted to outmatch. Significantly, the Chicago Exposition was also to host the first Parliament of the World's Religions, where yoga and Advaita philosophy were to enter for good the stage of world religious discourse due to the momentous participation of Swami Vivekananda. It was also in 1893 that Madero returned to North Mexico, so as to promote agricultural progress (irrigation and cotton growth, in particular, but also homeopathy) and to follow his political inclinations.[13]

But most important is the fact that during this period Madero came into contact with Allan Kardec's oeuvre and became a fervent sympathizer. From 1891 onward, he became an enthusiastic reader of *Revue Spirite*, Kardec's magazine, and especially adhered to the interpretation of Spiritism by Léon Denis, a follower of Kardec (Bubello, Diniz-Silva, and Villalba 2021, 255). His link with Spiritualism was thus received through a French channel and not directly adopted from North American conduits, despite the fact that modern Spiritualism was initially a North American elaboration. Consequently, in returning to Mexico, Madero held numerous Spiritualist *séances* and became a medium himself. The Mexican Revolution was still some years off, but the *séances* were not altogether separated from Madero's political career. In fact, his Spiritualist activity partly stimulated his political determinations, driven by a desire for democracy and liberalism.

Madero was a prolific author. He wrote several books, letters, and pamphlets advocating for better social justice and less-authoritarian government. He was especially opposed to the administration of Porfirio Diaz, who had been in office for over thirty years. In point of fact, it was because of Madero's effort that there is no re-election in Mexico nowadays, a means of preventing leaders from yielding to the temptation of holding power indeterminately.

It is indeed very interesting to find such apparently disparate traits in a single person: an advocate of liberalism, on the one hand; a promoter of communication with immortal spirits, on the other. Now, this is probably not *that* strange if one considers that, in Mexico at the time, liberals were rejecting social strictures, including institutionalized religion. Regardless of how "Christian" the liberals considered themselves, they usually distanced from institutionalized religion, especially the Roman Church. Liberal thinking implied criticism, both political and religious. Neither the government nor the church would like such stances, here or elsewhere. In consequence, different forms of life and organization were to be devised by freethinkers. Thus, Spiritualism depicted itself as a "scientific religion" of sorts; in a sense, "it is a by-product of modern positivism and owes its accession to methodical observation of the phenomena that were considered supernatural in previous epochs" (Madero, quoted in Chaves 2017, 224).

A Spiritualist revolutionary

By analyzing a novel by Ignacio Solares[14] that was inspired by Francisco I. Madero's persona, Brian Chandler remarks that "recalling the works that have so influenced Madero draws attention to the intellectual and spiritual environment in which he functioned both as a revolutionary leader as well as a spiritualist adept" (Chandler

2010, 11). Yet, it is not only the things he read but also the things he wrote that shaped Madero's career and figure. In his various letters, or communications with spirits, Madero's writing exudes a yogic sentiment of sorts. Even though these letters were technically not authored by Madero (they were allegedly dictated *to* him by the spirits), they can shed light on Madero's envisioning of political duty and human betterment.

What happens in Solares's novel can also be applied to Madero himself: "The leitmotif of the influence of the texts on the leader's life is present throughout the narration, highlighting the connections between reading and identity" (Chandler 2010, 8). It is in this light that we can also ponder the fact that Madero usually wrote under the pseudonym of "Arjuna" when contributing to Spiritualist magazines, such as *La Grey Astral*. Chandler notes (2010, 11): "at any given moment there exists a web of texts which provide a discursive space where all meaning is created." In other words, by resorting to pen names, Madero was not just merely veiling his political identity but was actually constructing a symbolic persona, one that was simultaneously eagerly reading Indian philosophy, holding dialogue with ethereal beings, and planning to take resolute political action. All three activities were, in fact, directed at creating a more democratic environment in Mexican politics. They cannot be separated.

It is important to contextualize Madero's Spiritualist inclinations. In Mexico, Spiritualism had faced severe critiques and attacks from 1890 onward, especially because President Porfirio Díaz had forged an alliance with the Catholic Church. Also, national education was decidedly driven by positivism, which was strongly opposed to such things as conversation with the spirits. Spiritualists, then, had to remain in partial obscurity, but managed to survive, although with some losses. The Sociedad Espírita Central, an association that gathered different Mexican Spiritualist groups, ceased to exist by 1906 (Tortolero Cervantes 2004, 73–79). Nevertheless, a first Latin American Spiritualist Convention was held in 1906 in Mexico City and, later, a second one in 1908. Madero participated in both, and even delivered the closing speech for the 1908 Convention (Madero 1956, 146). He became a defender (authoring books on the subject), a promoter (generously funding meetings and publications), and a practitioner (acting actively as a medium).

In Madero's communication with the spirits, two interlocutors stand apart: "José" and "Raúl," the latter supposedly the spirit of a younger brother who died as an infant while Francisco was studying in Baltimore, in the United States. In one of the myriad letters from Raúl, we read such things as: "I was eager to talk to you in order to revive you, that you do not slacken in your path" (Madero 2000a, 84). The letter is dated March 26, 1902, still a long way before the ignition of the revolution. As we will see, this will be a leitmotif in Francisco Madero's personal communications, and it is also a key theme in the *Bhagavadgītā*, a text he was to grow very fond of.

In said communication with the "invisibles," Madero as a medium channeled and penned messages from different spirits. All these spirits spoke in the same tone and with a shared mood and motif. In one of them, "Raúl" speaks to an audience (of which Madero was the scribe):

> The main thing you need to do is forge your character, that is, educate yourselves, for the character is the individual, the personality; and the chief basis of character, that which gives it its true value, is the will, supreme force of the soul, spiritual force par excellence, a force so powerful that sometimes the solid will of a man has saved nations and even humanity. (Letter of "Raúl Madero," dated October 10, 1903, in Madero 2000a, 133)

The invisible spirit is trying to encourage his liberal audience, a gathering of Spiritualists inclined toward social and political change. In other letters, the spirits are very clear in stating that the foremost tool they have to bring about this change is the spread of the Spiritualist doctrine and its implementation in both private and public spheres:

> Spiritualism brings to you a conception much more precise about the goal of life and palpably proves the need for doing good and getting rid of personal faults. [Hence] you should study this philosophy, so as to be prepared to repel any attack and so that you can talk more steadily and with more data in order to convince the skeptics. (Letter of "Raúl Madero," April 6, 1904, in Madero 2000a, 156)

Around 1906, a couple of years after the previously quoted letters, Madero was appointed chief editor of *La cruz astral*, the *espírita* magazine previously mentioned. In his editorial to the readers, he explains how he had been asked to provide substantial contributions to *La cruz astral*, and he writes these interesting words:

> In order to fulfil this offering, I wrote some articles that I of course did not want to pen under my own name, because I had previous appointments and of a different sort, which prevented me from devoting my whole attention to this task, so I adopted the pseudonym of "Arjuna." (Madero 2000b, 23)

It is no coincidence that Madero chose the *Mahābhārata* hero's name as one of his pen names. It was definitely not a decision out of literary inclinations. Even though Madero would write more overtly about the philosophical tenets of the *Bhagavadgītā* (an important passage of the *Mahābhārata*) in the years to come, he had obviously been reading the text and was already amply acquainted with the text's principles. This acquaintance is concomitant with his understanding of duty, moral virtue, and ultimately of yoga philosophy.

Madero won the presidency in the middle of 1911, after much turmoil and an exhausting campaign, although he effectively assumed the charge from November 1911 until his untimely death. Occultist and Spiritualist magazine *Helios*[15] published a laudatory note on this occasion in October 1911. According to the editors, it was because of his morality that "even the clergy recommended his [Madero's] candidacy, the candidacy of a liberal, a Spiritualist, a Freemason," despite the press having mocked Madero time and again due to his communication with the spirits (Madero 1956, 142). Yet, as a matter of fact, mock and libel against him were intense; there were a good number of publications from detractors that accused him on grounds of him being a Spiritualist, a Jesuit, a Freemason, a neo-occultist, a weakling, superstitious, and demented (Tortolero Cervantes 2004, 22–23). Note that this evinces that mainstream Christianity in Mexico was not openly favorable to alternative systems

such as Spiritualism. *Helios* recalls an editorial from the North American newspaper *The Globe* that had severely criticized and mocked Madero. *The Globe* editors claimed: "We who had made fun of Madero and his Spiritualism promise not to mock again any Spiritualist who decides to depose a tyrant in Latin America" (Madero 1956, 144–45). The Spiritualist publication tries to stress the recognition even from formerly opposed parties; it also, incidentally, evinces a sociopolitical antagonism between Mexico and the US government, who was favorable to dictator Díaz. It should also be noted that on his winning the elections, the government of the United States was at first sympathetic toward Madero, for they hoped that Mexico would loosen its strong ties with Europe; yet, Madero's taxes on oil extraction, the politicization of workers, and other issues eventually triggered Washington's uneasiness about the Madero administration (Garciadiego and Kuntz 2010, 546). In Mexico, there was no lack of detractors either. Eventually, a group of dissidents teamed up with the US embassy, apprehended Madero and his retinue, and took their lives on February 22, 1913 (ibid., 546–47).

For *Helios*, the appointment of Madero as the ruler of the nation was palpably seen as providential and hopeful. It also was destined and deserved. According to the editors, Madero's parents "were inspired by the pure teachings of our doctrine, the same doctrine that both Christna [*sic*, i.e., Krishna] and Jesus preached" (Madero 1956, 143). To some extent, such associations are triggered by the idea of the open landscape or the pool of culture that the global ecumene conveys (Hannerz 1996, 48–50). The praise in *Helios* then soars higher: "Under what tree, what holm oak, just like the ancient Druids and Bodhisatwas [*sic*], did he attain enlightenment?" (Madero 1956, 145). Madero is depicted as an enlightened being, whose ascension was to ensure "extraordinary moral and material progress," because the "sublime doctrine that he preaches is the best warrant of his self-sacrifice as a man, and his virtue as a ruler" (ibid., 149). Indeed, at one public demonstration, a passionate crowd wholeheartedly praised him thus: "Long live the Immaculate! Long live the Incorruptible! Long live the Redeemer!" (Tortolero Cervantes 2004, 23).

Yet, his character stumbled at times, and he was subjected to doubt and anxiety. Then the spirits would communicate and try to remedy Madero's angst:

> Procure for yourself all the moments you can, so as to be absorbed without thinking in anything at all, and with the purpose of letting the fluid currents of the higher spirits that you attract run through you. . . . Remain faithful to your plan; retreat to that isolated haven[16] of yours as much as possible, where you can best re-concentrate, pray more fervidly, and receive with more accuracy our inspirations. (Letter of "José," October 20, 1907, in Madero 2000a, 172)

It is not very difficult to find similarities between the instructions from this spirit and the recommendations commonly found in Hindu scriptural sources, such as the *Pātañjala-yogaśāstra*. Retreat, elimination of disturbing thoughts, concentration, meditation, and the channeling of higher forces are shared items between Madero's ethereal interlocutors and South Asian philosophical traditions. However, as far as I know, Madero was not particularly cognizant of Patañjali's philosophy or Vedantic schools. But these ideas feature prominently in the *Gītā*, for example in BhG 2.47–50:

"Go, then, and find a refuge in meditation and knowledge," and BhG 6.10: "The Yogi should assiduously apply himself to Yoga, residing in a solitary abode, with thoughts and body completely subdued, and free from concerns, affections, and hopes"[17] (Madero 2000b, 182, 221). Madero did read and comment on this, as we will see.

Madero's foremost yogic textual source

Francisco Madero was a keen reader not only of publications on Spiritualism but other topics as well (including growing cotton, herbology, homeopathy, and so forth). He effusively pleaded with others to get copies of spiritual books, many of which were published by the Theosophists, such as *Karma*, *The Voice of the Silence*, or the *Bhagavadgītā* (Tortolero Cervantes 2004, 91). Among his spiritual readings Madero counted the *Bhagavadgītā*, an important Indian text on forms of yoga, pre-eminently the disciplines of devotion (*bhaktiyoga*), knowledge (*jñānayoga*), meditation (*dhyānayoga*), and action (*karmayoga*). The *Gītā* antedates the other famous philosophical text the *Yogasūtra* and is considered a classical yoga treatise, or *yogaśāstra*. Krishna, the divine interlocutor, is commonly referred to as a *yogin*. The *Gītā* was to leave a deep impression on Madero's mind. It is interesting to note that Madero devoted time to write on the *Gītā* while in a forced exile in Texas in early 1911 due to the political turmoil. His reading and understanding of the text encouraged his political career. Even though he never called what he was doing "*karmayoga*," he continually paraphrased the purport of this type of discipline, as we shall briefly see. Also, it could be objected that in his memoirs, letters, and communications he rarely spelled out the word "yoga." Yet, as can be surmised by an attentive reading, his writings are brimming with references to Indian philosophy and most notably to Krishna's teachings in the *Gītā*.

The *Gītā* is one paradigmatic case of cultural transference not just because it has circulated widely, but also because it can link groups of people across boundaries and thus give space for various readings. In this sense, Hannerz (1996, 20) agrees with Benedict Anderson in that the commoditization brought about by the print culture somehow accelerated the capacity for different people to come into contact and partake of a shared intelligibility. Thus, both Spiritualists and Theosophists felt entitled to access the Hindu text. Indeed, particularly from the 1880s onward the *Bhagavadgītā* enjoyed a widespread and privileged status, in no small part due to the Theosophists' interest in the text in the light of the relationship between "Eastern" and "Western" traditions (Bergunder 2020).

The relationship of the BhG with politics is, of course, nothing surprising. There are plenty of well-recorded cases, especially in modern India. Notably, in this sense Madero was among the modern pioneers of a new, political reading of the *Gītā*, even foreshadowing Gandhi's use of the immortal Hindu text. Especially around the end of the nineteenth century and first two decades of the twentieth, different readings were utilized for diverse nationalistic purposes, from reformation projects such as the Arya Samaj, to rightwing ideologies close to the Hindutva ideology. In such variegated readings and interpretations, the *Gītā* was often seen through the lenses of activism, as was the case of agrarian leader Lajpat Rai, Sri Aurobindo, and Bal

Gangadhar Tilak, who claimed that the compulsion to fight (i.e., *karmayoga*) was more important than devotion or knowledge; a "masculine" Indian personality was of special relevance as an anticolonial project (Davis 2015, 125, 128, 131; Bergunder 2020, 84–87). In the various avatars of these hermeneutical readings (sometimes especially within revolutionaries), the *kṣatriya* dharma (or warrior-code) was highly praised (Davis 2015, 127). Aurobindo took to breath control and meditation and expected revolutionaries to become worldly activists "who needed the strength and wisdom that these [yogic] practices might provide" (ibid., 130). I have not found evidence that Madero practiced breath control, but he seemed to have undertaken meditation and certainly thought of himself as a committed *karmayogī*, guided by virtue, moral obligation (*dharma*), and, as in the case of his counterparts in India, a firm devotion toward the nation.

Madero had access to a translation of the *Gītā* into Spanish by Josep Roviralta Borell, a Theosophist from Spain. The Spaniard prepared two editions: one in 1896–1897, based on English and French editions, and a second one in 1910–1912, when he had already studied Sanskrit. The 1896–1897 version circulated widely in Mexico from early on, because most Spanish publications had ample diffusion in many Latin American countries, but also due to the great influence of the Theosophical Society. The translation was also published in serialized form in an occultist periodical when Madero was already president. This translation appeared in the *Helios* periodical between 1912 and 1913 and was accompanied by "commentaries from an adept." We now know that the adept was Madero himself, who did not feel free and confident to pen the commentary under his real name for political reasons (being a public figure, he was liable to constant attack from his detractors). This was not an isolated case; as I have already mentioned, he published other texts on Spiritualism and kindred subjects, always under pseudonyms such as "Bhima" or "Arjuna," two key characters in the Indian epic the *Mahābhārata*. Thus, in his *Manual espírita* (Spiritist Handbook) from around 1909, he chose "Bhima" as his pseudonym; he offers there an explanation of the soul and the path it treads before coming into the human body. (The way in which both the individual identity and the senses manifest in the world is strikingly similar to what Sāṃkhya philosophy expounds.)

There was still another translation of the *Bhagavadgītā* into Spanish, by Federico Climent Terrer, who, in turn, resorted to the Theosophist Annie Besant's version. Originally published in 1908, Climent Terrer's was the third Spanish version of the *Gītā*, as he duly explains in his introduction (Besant 1914, 9).[18] Yet Madero discarded Climent Terrer's edition because he considered Roviralta's a more exact and prestigious translation (Chaves 2017, 221). Even though Madero, a Spiritualist, was naturally opposed to Theosophy, he had to resort to publications and materials by the Theosophists, since they were one of the chief agents in promoting and distributing readings and publications on Indological subjects. In the Spanish language, most of the available material came from the Theosophical Society or was associated with it. In fact, the North American Katherine Tingley had already established a Raja Yoga Academy (dependent on the North American branch of the Theosophical Society) in Havana, Cuba; this was an outpost for dissemination of Theosophical ideas in Mexico,

Central America, and the Caribbean (Simões 2018, 292, 300). To put it in other words, Madero's "orientalism" was nurtured by Theosophical Orientalism.[19]

Here we should also consider that Roviralta's translation (and, occasionally, also Madero's gloss) is amply supplemented by quotes and references to previous translators and commentators. The most important names are: Śaṅkara, H. Blavatsky, Annie Besant, Charles Wilkins, Burnouf, M. Chatterji (who is quoted a lot), Subba Row (most likely Subba Rau, also cited quite frequently), Davies (very likely Rhys-Davies), Thomson (presumably J. Cockburn Thomson, who published one *Bhagadavgītā* in 1855), Sridhara, Pramadadasa-Mitra, William Quan Judge, K. T. Telang, and César Cantú. Of these, H. Blavatsky, Annie Besant, William Quan Judge, Row, and Telang are directly associated with Theosophy, which attests the enormous influence of the Society. Many readers would have accepted the appreciation of the *Gītā* by one of the Theosophical translators into Spanish, who wrote that reading it produces the same profound effect as listening to Wagner's music (Besant 1914, 22).

Indeed, the Theosophical Society was by that time one of the most influential channels for the circulation of ideas, people, and texts, and it had a lasting impact on different linguistic worlds. It was a major agent in the making of a global modernity. All of this implies the types of relationships, interactions, and interdependence, both supra-regional and transfrontier, that have taken place throughout time and which form part and parcel of global history inquiries (Hausberger 2018, 15). Thus, the Theosophical Society became an important and truly global cultural network.

Besant published two books on yoga, in 1908 and 1912. In the second one, in French, *Introduction à la yoga*, Besant gave a telling definition of the Indian discipline: "*une science, un ensemble de lois coordonnées mises en jeu pour obtenir un résultat précis.*" For her, yoga was to aid the evolution of consciousness (Ceccomori 2001, 43, 44). It is uncertain whether the volume was read by Madero, for he was struggling with his mandate, but he probably would have agreed with Besant's definition.

Madero's understanding of yoga

Now it will be convenient to look more carefully at the instances in which Madero addresses yoga either by name or by implication. I will mostly refer to Madero's commentaries to the *Bhagavadgītā* (BhG) but will also allude to other documents when deemed relevant. It is important to consider Madero's expositions and reflections on the topic, but also to note Roviralta Borrell's phrasings, since they determined what and how Madero read and received the BhG's teachings. It is important to bear in mind that whatever the spread of yoga at the time in the region, it mostly was understood as "Raja Yoga," after the fashion of Vivekananda and the Theosophists. It was not a postural understanding.

A telling feature of Madero's attitude throughout his gloss is that he strongly and repeatedly opposes the idea of pantheism and the loss of individuality by merging into the absolute; that is, he was clearly against Theosophical tenets (see Madero 2000b, 259). For example, despite the apparent implications of pantheism in BhG 7.15–19, Madero underlines Krishna's statements in BhG 9.4 ("I do not reside in creatures . . .").[20] Then he roundly asserts:

> This affirmation, done in very precise and categorical terms, without resorting to parable at all, can leave no doubt; it is the firmest negation of the Theosophical doctrines that claim that God resides within every human's spirit and that we all are gods. According to our view, this false idea stems from an error of translation and the lack of equivalent words for it, for through some Buddhist works the word "*deva*s" has been translated as "gods," whereas the word "devas" has a very different meaning from the word "Brahma," that is the indestructible, supreme Being, whereas the "*deva*s" are lesser divinities equal to Catholic saints. (Madero 2000b, 259)

With no real knowledge of the Sanskrit language, the Mexican exegete tried to question the Theosophical understanding of the word "*deva*." Needless to say, the semantic content of the word can vary greatly depending on the context. "Brahma" here is to be construed as "*brahman*," the more appropriate term for the universal, abstract spirit.

In traversing Theosophical and Spiritualist readings, Madero was on par with other similar enterprises; for example, in 1881, an ex-member of the Theosophical Society authored a book that exposed a syncretic Spiritualist-Theosophical theory that relied heavily on the *Gītā* in Charles Wilkins's translation (Bergunder 2020, 75–76). For Madero it was crucial to underpin his Spiritualist agenda, while at the same time finding a foothold for his political mission. Of course, sometimes he takes pains to project his ideological inclinations, because his translated BhG was often phrased in Theosophical terms. Time and again, the Mexican politician reinforces his Kardecian reading of the *Gītā*.[21] Reflecting on BhG 6.41 and 6.42, the Mexican commentator points out (Madero 2000b, 232): "This is extremely important because it is in complete accord with the teachings of Spiritualist doctrine." Indeed, the *Helios* editors were also keen on stressing the Spiritualist understanding of the Hindu text. In the preface to the presentation of Roviralta Borrell's translation, commented by "an adept," they state:

> Our readers will also have the opportunity to note the striking concordance between Krishna's philosophy and the modern teachings of Spiritualism, a concordance that is not restricted to just a few passages but embedded in the very core of the doctrine. (ibid., 163)

A text that constantly and openly elaborates on yoga (or forms of yoga), the BhG was to imprint on Madero an idea of what yoga was supposed to be, not only in the light of his Spiritualist leanings but also regarding his political concerns. The key theme by far in this understanding is action. The commentary to chapter 3 of the BhG phrases Krishna's definition of yoga as "that which rests on the upright fulfilment of deeds" (ibid., 195), a recurrent motif in Madero's annotations. Indeed, instigation toward action is Krishna's main objective toward a dejected and disheartened Arjuna, who has decided not to take part in battle. This seems to have fascinated Madero; the text spoke directly to him.

As I pointed out, it is important to take into account the translator's phrasing as well as Madero's own elucidations. However, it should also be noted again that this article addresses both texts (the *Bhagavadgītā* and Madero's exegesis) indirectly through translation.[22] In chapter 2, verse 39 of BhG, yoga is explicitly defined as a

"philosophy of action" (ibid., 180), and in BhG 3.3 as "Yoga, or practice, which is the devotion that consists of the upright fulfilment of deeds" (ibid., 189).[23] Madero devotes considerable space to this in his commentary. Then in BhG 4.11, the translator provides the following footnote in order to further explain what a yogi is: "Devotees who are intent on the practice of Yoga [are] 'those who possess the upright knowledge of action,' according to Chatterji"[24] (ibid., 211). If the notion of action or deed is already present in the text, it will acquire an even more ample dimension in Madero's understanding.

Madero is especially receptive to Krishna's critique of ascetic inactivity and was inclined to promote "a man of upright action," or yogi, as the footnote to BhG 6.1 remarks (ibid., 219). Paraphrasing Krishna, Madero comments: "It is possible that the life of a man of action may not be as pure as that of the ascetic, but since the onslaughts he suffers on account of his passions are harsher and he is more exposed to temptation, his triumphs are greater" (ibid., 215). Needless to say, he saw himself exactly like the man of action who had to resist and overcome various temptations. Moreover, his political mission somehow purged him from possible moral faults and justified casualties: "the man who, defending his land or society, goes to war, can kill numerous enemies without this bringing a stain on him; just like the lotus's leaf comes immaculate out of [muddy] waters, in like manner the warrior will be immaculate and glorious after battle, where he fulfilled his duty" (ibid., 216).

It comes as no surprise that the Mexican leader had to deal with anxiety and hesitation. In his memoirs, time and again he vents his apprehensions and struggles to regain his resolve. The *Gītā* was no doubt instrumental in helping him deal with such turmoil, as well as in reinforcing the legitimacy of his fight. It would not have been impossible that he considered himself a yogi of sorts, especially when carefully reading passages like BhG 6.19–20: "The yogi who has his mind under control and is absorbed in contemplation of the Supreme I [or "thus employed in the exercise of his devotion," in Wilkins 1871, 58] is comparable to a lamp, whose flame, guarded from the wind, does not experience any oscillation. When he has his mind in repose, chained by the practice of Yoga, when he contemplates the Universal Spirit in his Supreme I" (Madero 2000b, 222).

Insistence on a firm resolution was crucial for the Mexican politician, who stressed also such passages as BhG 6.23: "Know then that that breaching of all association with pain is called Yoga. To attain this Yoga, a firm perseverance and unwavering faith are required" (ibid., 222).[25]

The discipline of action

Nevertheless, there were also those verses that seemed to define yoga as something a bit different. In BhG 4.25, for example, yoga and yogis are explained in relation to devotion (Madero 2000b, 202, 204). Indeed, one of the main motifs in the *Gītā* is to avow for the discipline of devotion toward God, who is Krishna himself. This was not a reading that Madero laid stress on, although he was certainly aware of it. Overtly revolutionary, his yoga paid more attention to the contrast between contemplative meditation and active engagement in the world, as noted earlier in the article.

The contrast was essential for Madero, since it seemed to support his political drives. Through his Spanish *Gītā*, he conceived of "fakirs" as extreme ascetics who mastered bodily functions, as opposed to the figure of the yogi, who was explained as a "*santo*" (Spanish for "saint" or "holy man"), as he very clearly underlined in his comments to BhG 6.15 (ibid., 228). There is a critique of extreme austerities. In the commentator's view, the practices of "most of the Catholic monks and current Indian fakirs" have no other effect "but the weakening of the body, a tool for the spirit, and preventing it from manifesting itself in all lucidity" (ibid., 230). While espousing Krishna's avowal of disimpassioned action, Madero was also finding justification for his sponsoring the political armed struggle, one that in *Gītā* parlance was "dharmic," namely lawful and mandatory, if also bloody.

At times, Madero himself played the role of Arjuna. A year after the previous episode, Madero sent a series of letters to his father. The champion of democracy had just finished his popular *La sucesión presidencial en 1910* (The Presidential Succession of 1910), a polemical book against absolute power that was not going to be welcomed by the status quo and Porfirio Díaz, Mexican president since 1876. As mentioned, "Arjuna" was his favorite pen name, presumably because he saw himself with a similar role in life and office.

Because the book could easily instigate retaliation from the government, Madero's father was reluctant about its publication. Therefore, Madero (1956, 78) compelled his father to "muster courage and energy so that you too can fulfil your mission, which implies not preventing me from taking action." As one critic puts it, for Francisco Madero politics was "Spiritualism in practice," as long as it was undertaken in a just, detached, and salvific action, without craving the fruits thereof, as stated in the *Bhagavadgītā* (Chaves 2012, 75). This is reminiscent of Mahatma Gandhi's similar use of the *Gītā* in his pursuit of Indian independence some years afterward—and it is worth stressing that Gandhi actually came to the *Gītā* in a Theosophical context (Bergunder 2020, 82–83). This is telling of the strategies of reception in modern and reformist contexts worldwide, and the similar tendencies for a "revolutionary yoga." At the same time, the different contexts of reception and strategies of adaption of a given text help increase its longevity and relevance for particular times and places.

Madero's battle had to be fought because the national socioeconomic situation demanded it. It was unconscionable that one person wanted to hold on to power indefinitely, while so many poor were left to hunger, illiteracy, and backwardness. In his commentary to the *Gītā*, he writes: "For example, inhabiting space, we see that a people we care about—whether because we had been a part of [that people] or for whatever other circumstances—is being oppressed and suffers and deems its oppressors a dam that prevents progress, without a doubt this people's lot will concern us" (Madero 2000b, 232). He was evidently justifying himself. A virtuous man had to act. That man would be a yogi of sorts. On reading BhG 6.45, Madero states: "The yogi is superior to ascetics; he is considered more preeminent than wise men and even better than men of action. Thus, Arjuna, attempt to become a yogi" (ibid., 226). Commenting on this passage, Madero draws an interesting analogy:

> Another example: a person considers that the evolution of a people has been restrained by oppression or tyranny; his duty is to fight against those obstacles,

> even to the point of sacrifice if necessary. Acting in such manner, he knows, on the one hand, that he fulfils his duty, and he also has the conviction that his sacrifice will not be sterile. . . . (ibid., 226–27)

This mood finds equivalence in some of his correspondence with the spirits. Two or three years before the *Gītā* exegesis, this letter was dictated to him: "As in evil, so in good, and especially in this one, the light of cause and effect works constantly. Just like in verifying some evil action you have to suffer all its consequences, until 'karma is used up,' as the Buddhists and Theosophists say, in like manner a good deed renders immeasurable benefits to you" (Letter of "José," May 24, 1908, in Madero 2000a, 218). A month later, Madero was victim to doubt and anxiety, so another spirit addressed him:

> Without a doubt, you worry too much about some details and let yourself fall into the ground, and in that position and that circumstance, what are but grains of sand appear to you as mountains . . . . [The tests you are to face] are the last shackles of your karma. (Letter of "Raúl," June 22, 1908, in Madero 2000a, 224)

In these letters, "karma" is explicitly spelled out, but in the sense of the law of cause and effect. In Madero's understanding, karma can be worn out through good deeds underpinned by resolve and rightful action. If one were to put this in other words, it would amount to something like: karma (the energetic consequence generated by past actions) can be used up by *karmayoga* (the discipline of rightful, selfless action).

This was a belief shared by Madero's Spiritualist kindred spirits. The *Helios* editors wrote in the preface to the BhG: "These teachings, as well as the other rules it gives for enhancement, are of the most beautiful morality; it rejects religious practices that are carried on without any criterion and recommends as a most efficient means for betterment, an intensely active life, that is, the philosophy of action" (Madero 2000b, 165). It should also be mentioned that in most Western countries, the *Gītā* was not yet received as a religious scripture but more as a source of inspiration: "knowledge of the *Bhagavad Gita* since the end of the eighteenth century had been at par with ecumenism and never really had a missionary zeal, of religious conversion, but rather a 'spiritual' as well as a 'cultural' sense" (Chaves 2012, 71–72). In any case, Madero only managed to comment on twelve of the eighteen chapters of the *Gītā* due to his treacherous assassination in early 1913. As a homage, *Helios* decided to continue the publication of the rest of the *Bhagavadgītā*, revealing the true identity of the "adept" and giving a farewell to "our brother of unforgettable memory, apostle, martyr, honor, and glory of his motherland and of all humanity" (Madero 2000b, 298).

Concluding remarks

Indian nationalist Tilak called for a historically situated reading of the *Bhagavadgītā*, fit for this "Age of Karma" (Davis 2015, 130–32). In a sense, Madero undertook this approach, although he was far from endorsing such chauvinistic and communalist ideologies as Tilak's. Madero's reading was both historically situated and regionally adapted. Perhaps, however, his fondness for the *Gītā* was a bit closer to Gandhi's

embracing of Krishna's teachings, an "infallible guide to conduct" (ibid., 137). Gandhi wrote the "Anasaktiyoga" or "Discipline of Non-Attached Action" (his interpretive introduction to the *Gītā*) some eighteen years after Madero published his commentaries. Like Madero, Gandhi also interiorized Kurukshetra as a battleground for an inner struggle, by which self-realization could be achieved. Habits of meaning are shared, but they can also become idiosyncratic (Hannerz 1996, 23).

Madero's commentaries on the *Bhagavadgītā* had considerable success and were read by modernist literati in Mexico such as Amado Nervo or thinkers like José Vasconcelos. The general public, in fact, was aware of Madero's unorthodox leanings, despite his resorting to Indian pen names. Thus, for example, on his being elected president of Mexico in 1911, the Spiritualist publication *Helios* issued a substantial note on the occasion, praising Madero wholeheartedly. *Helios* also quoted a note from a North American newspaper that somewhat derisively said that on that day, "the lunatic, Spiritualist, deranged reformer was unanimously elected president by the Mexican people, who consider him a *libertador*, an apostle, and a seer" (Madero 1956, 144).

All in all, *Helios* sought to enhance Madero's ethical virtues. In the same text, the editors wrote:

> Within his spirit, there were no doubt opposing feelings that prompted both inertia and action, which to him perhaps exemplified that fearful scene from the sacred book of the East where Arjuna, in the midst of a battle . . . lays down his weapons, whereupon the god reprimands him and, in superb language, compels him to fight. . . . Thus, the apostle became a warrior. (ibid., 148)

The editors of *Helios* were very clear in presenting Madero as a modern, Mexican avatar of the great Hindu hero. As a matter of fact, they even stressed the fact that, while preparing for the revolution, Madero was also spending some time in writing his commentaries to the *Gītā* (ibid., 148).

The analogy was not just a literary device displayed in *Helios*; Madero himself saw his mission under that light, as was shown previously. There is ample evidence of this, especially in the years prior to the Revolution. In 1908, for example, he records an event in which a friend of his, in charge of installing an electoral stall, was feeling shaken and intimidated. Madero writes: "I was able to revive him, uplift his spirits, and make him understand his duty" (ibid., 56–57). Here Madero plays the role of Krishna, reassuring his downcast friend. A similar event happened with "cultural *caudillo*" José Vasconcelos, once on the verge of relinquishing the party.[26] But Madero more clearly sought to emulate Arjuna, an archetypal *karmayogi*. Through cultural transfer, Madero enacted a "revolutionary yoga" that was enthused by the *Bhagavadgītā*, filtered through Spiritualism and Theosophy, and adapted to Mexico's political changes in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Indeed, "in the maze of action, Madero makes use of the *Gītā* as an ethical and philosophical compass, as a great mirror where to project his personal situation and where to find a Spiritual meaning for his political practice" (Chaves 2017, 226). Without calling it so, Madero puts in practice *karmayoga*, the discipline of action, in his struggle for democracy. His understanding of yoga was indebted to a wide

network of cultural exchange. Moreover, in Madero's case it was a dual network: on the one hand, his Spiritualist agenda was a filter through which to interact with the world; on the other hand, the Theosophical production of knowledge about India was a major point of access to South Asian lore in different parts of the globe. And all of this was then merged in a specific Mexican context and, at least partially, stirred significant political events. For some historians, whereas Madero's opposition to Díaz was indeed successful, his own presidential management failed; he did bring about significant structural changes but was heavily inexperienced (Garciadiego and Kuntz 2010, 541–42). And then he was assassinated. So, despite his confidence in the ethical import of *karmayoga*, his electoral victory did not last long.

It is important to note the influential role of the Theosophical Society as a "truly global movement" that very clearly provides "an outstanding example of the complex entanglements of the global religious history of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Krämer and Strube 2020, 3–4; Strube 2021). Indeed, it has been noted by early twenty-first-century studies that Theosophy, Spiritualism, and occultism ("esotericism," in short) have deeply affected and shaped a wide array of ideas and practices that are still visible today (Strube 2021, 61). In Madero's case, Theosophy and Spiritualism form part of a narrative of interaction through which the *Bhagavadgītā* was received and then utilized as a political handbook of sorts, by underpinning a correct and just action to be performed for the sake of a nation. The cultural transference of the influential Hindu text was refurbished in a distinct political context, but at the same time connected to the larger history of Theosophy and Spiritualism. The present case shows the possibilities of thinking about yoga not just internationally, but transregionally as well. This helps best assess the complex dynamics of intercultural exchange and transfer across regions, languages, and communities.

There is a vast array of significant cases that also call for transregional perspectives, cases that cross boundaries, regions, languages, and actors, for example: the already cited participation of the German occultist Arnold Krumm-Heller during the Mexican Revolution (Villalba 2018), the influential and widely read work of a Chilean diplomat that re-articulated the esoteric Hitlerism of a French fascist (Versluis 2014), or the interesting Colombian conflation of sexual magic and neo-Gnosticism that culminated in the Universal Christian Church (Zoccatelli 2014). These multiple developments (dealing with Latin America, yoga, esotericism, and Asian religions) are still understudied. Also, the involved scholars still need to establish cross-region and cross-disciplinary dialogue.

At least for Madero and his Spiritualist colleagues, the package of cultural transfer (Krishna's teachings, *karmayoga*, Spiritualist ideals, and Theosophical discourse) informed the narrative of an ethical struggle of quasi-mythological propositions. That narrative had enduring consequences in Mexican history. Madero's Spiritualist and yogic agenda enabled a transcendent political event and inaugurated a new chapter in Mexican modern history. It also inaugurated a long history of adaptation of the yoga culture in Latin America.

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Notes

1. The present article is part of a wider research project, "Globalización, percepción y adaptaciones del Yoga en México," financed by the Consejo Nacional de la Ciencia y la Tecnología of the Mexican government. First presented at the European Conference on South Asian Studies (ECSAS) in 2018, this text has had numerous incarnations, throughout which many people have provided me with useful comments and observations. I would like to specifically acknowledge José Ricardo Chaves for corrections and details in two different readings of the text. I also thank Bernd Hausberger, Keith Cantú, the editors of this special issue, and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions.

2. Simões (2018) offers a pioneering, brief overview of this Latin American history; see also Muñoz (2021b) for a more detailed introduction.

3. In strict sense, the so-called New Age phenomenon began as a movement during the counterculture of the 1960s, boosted by the activities and writings of influential figures such as Peter Caddy and the Findhorn Foundation, David Spangler, Alice Bailey, Benjamin Crème, and the Esalen Institute, among others. A loose compound of beliefs and practices, the New Age movement has affinities with both previous and newer approaches toward spirituality and the development of human potential, for example: Immanuel Swedenborg, Franz Mesmer, New Thought, Spiritualism, and Theosophy. For a more profound and better insight, see Clarke (2006, 22–37). Important monographs on this are: W. Hanegraaff (1996), and James Lewis and Gordon Melton (1992).

4. See Muñoz (2021a, 182–88) for a nuanced discussion of Mexican Indology.

5. Similarly, Simões (2022) focuses on interesting cases in Brazil in order to shed light on the dynamics of some yogic developments that do not depend on South Indian lineages.

6. To cite but one example: Venezuelan Simón Bolívar (1783–1830) inspired and promoted the independence not only of his land but also of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Panamá, and Perú. He became an admired figure in the rest of Hispanic America. In consequence, different Pan-American or Pan-Hispanic and nationalistic discourses—opposed to imperialism and expansionism, especially of Spain and the United States—that have developed in the region since the nineteenth century are known as Bolivarianism.

7. The Theosophical Society is an international organization that promotes "a divine wisdom" (Theosophy) that is to be found in the amalgamation of Neo-Platonism, Vedanta, Kabbalah, Buddhism, and other philosophies and religions (predominantly Eastern), and which was formerly opposed to Spiritualism. It was founded in 1875 in New York by Helena P. Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott, and William Q. Judge. They started their own journal, *The Theosophist*, protested the colonial regime, and experienced several internal struggles. Their headquarters

were moved to Adyar, Madras (India) some years later, and they soon opened branches around the globe (Krämer and Strube 2020, 6–9). For more in-depth information, see Rudbog and Sand (2020), Godwin (1994), and Chajes and Huss (2016).

8. That is, an adept with firm and steady wisdom, as characterized in BhG 2.55.

9. The history and context of Spiritualism in Mexico is rich and long; I will not try to survey it here. For a good historical account, I refer readers to Tortolero Cervantes (2004), and Bubello, Diniz-Silva, and Villalba (2021).

10. There is a linguistic differentiation in Spanish: "*espiritismo*" refers to Spiritualism in general, whereas "*espírita*" specifically designates its Kardecian version. Similarly, in French "*spiritisme*" can be distinguished from "*doctrine spirite*," Kardec's development. I owe José Ricardo Chaves this pertinent reminder. "Spiritualism" is the larger term, "Spiritism" a specific form therein. For the sake of fluidity, I will be using Spiritualism as a general name for these practices.

11. The strong influence of Kardecian Spiritualism in Brazil is attested by the release in 2019 of the biographical film *Kardec*, directed by Brazilian filmmaker Wagner de Assis. As of 2024, it was still available on Netflix.

12. All translations from Spanish are my own, unless otherwise stated.

13. It is also worth mentioning that Madero's own personal physician was no other than Arnold Krumm-Heller (1876–1949), a German occultist who worked in Mexico for a long period not only as a doctor, but as an occultist, a Rosicrucian, and an intelligence agent. He also participated in Spiritualist activities. After Madero's death, Krumm-Heller continued to work with other Mexican leading figures. Germany saw a shared interest with Mexico in trying to resist the advance of the United States (Villalba 2018). Still more work on this relationship is needed.

14. Ignacio Solares (1945–) is a well-known Mexican writer and playwright. Among other works, he has published *Madero, el otro* (Solares 1989), a historical novel based on the political figure and legacy of Francisco I. Madero.

15. *Helios* was published by a Spiritualist Mexican organization that depended on various benefactors, including Madero. It had domestic circulation mainly. Yet, due to links with other Spiritualists, it probably also reached—albeit in very limited numbers—countries such as Spain, Argentina, Cuba, and maybe Costa Rica. Among *Helios*'s editors was the Costa Rican politician and writer Rogelio Fernández Güell (1883–1918), himself a Freemason and noteworthy Spiritualist. I thank José Ricardo Chaves for this information.

16. Madero owned a ranch in the mountain range of Coahuila State, in North Mexico. The ranch was known as "Australia"; it was a rather modest, one-storied house located in an isolated spot. This was a favorite place for Madero to take some time off and to host Spiritualist séances. He even gave instructions that no metal should be placed in any of the rooms, lest it hinder his mediumship efforts.

17. Cf. "The Yogee constantly exerciseth the spirit in private. He is recluse, of a subdued mind and spirit; free from hope, and free from perception," and "Seek an asylum, then, in wisdom alone," as translated in the popular, first translation to English by Wilkins (1871, 38, 57).

18. The first one was an 1893 Argentinian version from the French translation by Burnouf; the second one was Roviralta Borrell's. For the history of the early editions and translations of the *Bhagavadgītā* into Spanish, see Figueroa Castro (2017, 324–29). Annie Besant's translation/edition

of the *Gītā* had appeared in 1895, just a year and a half before the Spanish version resorted to by Madero.

19. Theosophical Orientalism was a complex, multifaceted phenomenon. It depended on joint processes of transculturation and deculturation, relied on an established community of intercultural learners, and saw itself as "the Easternized Other." See Baier (2016, 310, 318–24).

20. *mayā tatam idaṃ sarvaṃ jagad avyaktamūrtinā / matsthāni sarvabhūtani na cāhaṃ teṣv avasthitaḥ* // "This whole world was spread abroad by me in my invisible form. All things are dependent on me, and I am not dependent on me" (Wilkins 1871, 69).

21. The debates and tensions between Kardecian spiritualism and broader Theosophical interpretations of reincarnation have been addressed in Chajes (2019).

22. That is to say that we have to remember that the BhG primarily employed here is not the Sanskrit original but a Spanish translation, with a Spanish-language commentary by Madero. Both the translation and the commentary (as other primary sources) have been translated into English by me.

23. "It had before been observed by me, that in this world there are two institutes: That of those who follow the Sankhya, or speculative science, which is the exercise of reason in contemplation; and the practical, or exercise of moral and religious duties" (BhG 3.3., cited in Wilkins 1871, 43).

24. The reference is very likely to Mohini Mohun Chatterji (1858–1936), a Bengali Theosophist who often spoke of a cooperation between Hinduism and Christianity. Irish poet William Butler Yeats composed a poem in praise of him.

25. *taṃ vidyād duḥkhasaṃyogaviyogaṃ yogasaṃjñitam / sa niścayena yoktavyo yogo' nirviṇṇacetasaḥ* // "This disunion from the conjunction of pain may be distinguished by the appellation Yoga, spiritual union or devotion. It is to be attained by resolution, by the man who knoweth his own mind"; Wilkins (1871, 58).

26. Vasconcelos was reassured by his friend. After the revolution, Vasconcelos became an important intellectual figure and key actor in the modernization of public education in Mexico. His project was dependent on his own philosophical theories and understanding of South Asian cultures; in 1920 he authored *Estudios indostánicos* (Vasconcelos 1938), probably the first Mexican Indological monograph. For a detailed discussion of this interesting case, see Muñoz (2021a).

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Female Collaboration at Regional Junctions

Traveling Pakistani Cinema and Unmoored Militarism in the 1980s

This article examines the material culture of Urdu action heroine films released in the era of Pakistan's Islamization (late 1970s through 1980s) by a woman-led company called Shamim Ara Productions, which was headed by the illustrious female star, director, and producer of the Urdu screen Shamim Ara. With titles such as *Miss Hong Kong* (1979), *Miss Colombo* (1984), *Miss Singapore* (1985), *Lady Smuggler* (1987), and *Lady Commando* (1989), the action films released by Shamim Ara Productions bear the imprint of a traveling culture of production roving through urban South and Southeast Asia. Not only do we find here a mobile industry, headquartered in Lahore, fostering collaborations between small-scale film and tourism entrepreneurs strewn across South and Southeast Asian cities (Colombo, Dhaka, Manila, Hong Kong), but we also encounter a hybrid cinema led largely by women and cross-fertilized by global images of female action and public mobility flowing into Pakistani cities with the video trade and its piracy, and satellite television (video and VCR having come to the country in the late 1970s). In this article, I situate the gender politics of the ensemble heroine narrative *Lady Smuggler* (1987) in its material culture of production and reception, with attention to the diverse locations of that culture.

Keywords: Urdu—film—Shamim Ara—South Asia—Southeast Asia

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This article examines the ambivalent spatiality of a women-led, collaborative production culture of heroine-fiction films that flourished in Pakistan under the militarized Islamic economy and Cold War maneuvers of the 1980s. My focus is on a company headed by the illustrious female star, director, and producer of the Urdu film industry, Shamim Ara. With titles such as *Miss Hong Kong* (1979), *Miss Colombo* (1984), and *Miss Singapore* (1985), the fiction films released by Shamim Ara Productions bear the imprint of a border-crossing practice of coproductions. While the company was headquartered in Lahore, the films indeed were shot on location across South and Southeast Asia through collaborations between small-scale film and tourism companies. The ensemble action-heroine film *Lady Smuggler* (1987), which followed soon after *Miss Singapore*, is exemplary both of this border-crossing production culture as well as the leading roles taken by women in the growth of a small-scale traveling cinema in the 1980s. Shot in the Philippines and advertised in its poster-booklet as a "Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sari [*sic*] Lanka Joint Venture," the film is known to have been directed by Shamim Ara and coproduced by Shamim herself, star and producer Babita of Bangladesh, star and producer Sabita of Sri Lanka, and tour-entrepreneur Mary of the Philippines (albeit she is unnamed in the credits). This article situates the gender politics of the ensemble heroine fiction *Lady Smuggler* in its contexts of production and reception, with attention to their diverse and conflicting locations. I argue that a reading of the coproduced work in relation to available production records illuminates the filmic text as an archive bearing the traces of regional junctions—that is, as an imaginary that assembles dissimilar regional ways of belonging and being. On the one hand, we find a women-centric imaginary of give-and-take that exceeds conventional national and culture boundaries, seeming to embody a collaborative practice. On the other hand, we encounter signifiers of violently masculine spatial control that encroach upon boundary-defying lives and ways. Invoking a masculinized military region of violence and sexual censorship, the latter gestures at a Pakistan that was transforming in the 1980s under the US-backed military Islamist dictatorship of Zia Ul Haq, which intersected with the economy of the Afghan War in the region (Pakistan-Afghanistan).

That being said, chroniclers and historians of these small, region-roving film companies of South Asia paint a picture largely at odds with my approach. What they do acknowledge is that small-scale production companies and artists collaborated across religious, linguistic, and ethnic differences from the late 1970s through

the 1990s, with the multi-sited films being released in local-language versions to audiences across the participating countries (Ziad 2010, 261; Ahmed 2015). *Lady Smuggler*, for instance, was dubbed in Bangla and released in Bangladesh in 1990, three years after the release of the original Urdu version in Pakistan. Yet, the recent accounts of these small-scale transnational film circuits of South Asia typically ascribe an instrumental logic of competitive expediency to such low-budget coproductions, especially since these inexpensively made films mostly doubled on the spectacular action and adventure genres rising from the big budget industries of the 1970s and 1980s (Hollywood, Bollywood, American television, Hong Kong martial arts). Mushtaq Gazdar, for one, maintains that film entrepreneurs from Lahore (such as Shamim Ara) were "compelled" to move beyond national borders in search of spectacles that could stem a decline in the local film business and manage rising production costs (Gazdar 1997, 205). In a similar vein, Abdullah Ziad argues that Bangladeshi film producers were led to collaborations by a poor market and the dearth of stars (2010, 260). The underlying assumption that film producers were driven solely by an instrumental logic of competition to reach across borders for new sensations and markets forecloses the possibility of meaningful correspondences between filmic aesthetics and the heterogeneity in their production and circulation process. We are led, instead, to a nationalist picture of native capital out to exploit and commodify regional resources.

Accounts from 1980s Pakistan, being specific in delineating the momentum behind coproductions, are somewhat more helpful for my study. While such accounts from the time similarly reinforce the view that an instrumental thinking drove the small-scale collaborative cinema from Pakistan, they also highlight a compelling logic of regional diversification behind the routes of coproduction. As put by the (unfavorable) words of an article titled "Government Sponsored Film Awards" published in 1987 by the state-sponsored *Platinum Jubilee Film Directory* of Pakistani cinema: "With the wild expansion of video piracy, the cinemagoers wanted . . . new exotic locations, fresh faces and high adventures . . . [such that] the [Pakistani] filmmakers had little choice but to go [down similar routes]" (Slote 1987, 42). Infrastructures of video piracy—rampant under the state-supported parallel economy in 1980s Pakistan—have been known to generate diverse modes of spatiality that link disparate social geographies and imaginations and foster hybrid spatial exchanges (Larkin 2008, 240). By inhabiting and doubling upon the infrastructures of video piracy, such Pakistani filmmakers as Shamim Ara were actively pursuing the same logic of diversified linkages. They were forging connections between regional geographies, resources, creative entrepreneurs, and audiences available in the small-scale, low-budget production routes they traversed. Yet, if collaborations between multi-sited producers meant that the films were distributed in different countries, their primary frames of reference and concern tended to be that of Pakistani directors and producers, Shamim Ara's in our case at hand.

The production archive of *Lady Smuggler* that I assembled, from oral histories given by the late Shamim Ara's crew members and family as well as tidbits from Urdu magazines, offers us glimpses of a women-led informal process of border-crossing collaborations. Forged through cultural commonalities (of language, sensory

inclinations, and attitudes) that bridged national and religious borders, the Shamim Ara production process seems to have functioned to an extent like a pre-capitalized economy flourishing through reciprocity and interdependency. Far from unusual, such imperfectly capitalized economies of film production as these were habitual to the South Asian region in the eras preceding state-supported corporatization of film industries (which began in Pakistan in the 2000s and in India in the 1990s). The allocations of labor and authority within the Shamim Ara production economy arose from what is well-described in terms of Madhava Prasad's study of the early Hindi film industry as a "heterogenous" process of producing the filmic commodity, an interdependent process "in which the whole is assembled from parts produced separately by specialists" (1998, 32). Still, the specificity of the small-scale traveling production companies of Pakistan or Bangladesh lay in the fact that the specialists and their repertoires came together from across national and cultural borders; mutual negotiations of both of resources and of difference were integral to the assembled whole. As such, the bridgework is noticeable not only in the records of offscreen production activity but also in the expressive and narrative modes of commodifying difference on the screen.

In the ensemble text of *Lady Smuggler*, coproduced from different countries by women and female stars, figurations of female solidarity embody a territorial boundary-defying logic suggestive of a mimetic correspondence to the familial gift-type economy characterizing Shamim Ara's production mode. We find looping through the combined production records and profilmic text an archive of reciprocity that conjures a new kind of region as collaborative practice. Yet, this vision of collaborative regionality remains partially forked, engaged in contestation with a masculine statist conception of region and social space (De 2020, 2021). In short, the text of *Lady Smuggler*, working in the tradition of a popular Urdu cinema prone to internalize historical contradictions (Dadi 2016, 90), constitutes an archival junction of conflicting regional traces. The following sections elaborate how the film form at once interacts with and internalizes the territorial tensions of militarizing Islamic Pakistan and at the same time repurposes the gift-type energies of a female-led production economy thriving through regional commonalities and collaborations.

Female solidarity and unmoored military manhood: *Lady Smuggler* (1987)

Lady Smuggler is an ensemble heroine action drama depicting three women who meet in a Philippine prison cell. Played by female stars from three different countries—Babra Sharif from Pakistan, Babita from Bangladesh, and Sabita from Sri Lanka (the latter two coproducers as well)—the roles themselves evoke diverse ethnicities and religions not only offscreen but also onscreen. While an outreach to audiences from multiple regional and religious backgrounds is implicit in the diverse narrative roles, the stardom of the heroines in their respective countries only reinforces the appeal of cross-regional collaboration in the circuits of reception. The bulk of the plot itself depicts how these three women who meet in prison forge what is essentially a cross-border friendship to avenge the violence inflicted on them and their families by misguided and territorial masculinities. They have all landed in prison either because

they were framed by drug lords and their loved ones captured or massacred, or they were misrecognized by unjustly righteous state officials as drug smugglers.

Objects in the orbit of the filmic text reinforce the narrative of female solidarity through evoking desirable linkages. Noteworthy in this regard is the film poster of *Lady Smuggler*. Pirating the logo of the American television serial *Charlie's Angels* (figure 1), the poster explicitly doubles on the American female buddy action genre of the 1970s and 1980s, effectively mining the infrastructure of audience desire constructed in and beyond Pakistan through the circulation of pirated videos of American productions. The narrative of *Lady Smuggler* at the same time refuses the assertion of women's independence customary to the liberal Western action-heroine genre embodied in works such as *Charlie's Angels* (Tasker 1993, 18–19). The heroines of *Lady Smuggler* fight, instead, on behalf of honorable patriarchs and take up familial causes in lieu of men. Yet, the complexity of the plot lies in the fact that the ideal men are all slaughtered. Those men who remain active are emblematic either of militarized violence and social impurity (as drug dealers) or of a righteous pursuit of statist-patriarchal boundary logic that grows blind to the latter's injustice (policemen and a prison warden acting on behalf of an unjust Pakistani state embody this category of manhood). The action heroines, on their part, bond together to reclaim righteous indignation against territorial phallic violence as a women's prerogative. Dramatizing the purity of female outlaw anger against militaristic boundary logic, the three heroines strike a friendly pact to share their obligatory missions of vengeance and of rescue (of an abducted sister, played by Nepalese actress Dolly) by escaping from prison. This familial story of female friendship is choreographed onscreen as ludic juxtapositions both of dancing and touching female bodies and of a contagious feminization of phallic forms that visibly unmoors militaristic manhood. Focusing on scenic juxtapositions in this vein, I consider how the images could have been collaboratively constructed and inflected offscreen. My point is to follow the images and their masculine boundary-defying logic as objects made and changed

Figure 1. *Lady Smuggler* poster-booklet. Source: Salman Carim. (The error in spelling "smuggler" suggests the painter's incomplete knowledge of English; in 1980s Lahore, poster-painting was still a hereditary artisanal trade practiced by non-Western-educated urban men.)

within available geographies of cultural resources, creative talent, and audience expectations.

Medium-long takes track the mobility of a strong working woman. We see the expatriate Pakistani woman and snake farmer Momie (played by Pakistani star Babra Sharif) in a white sleeveless blouse cruising in her motorboat. With a smile of confident freedom, heightened by a montage of the blue lagoon against verdant greenery, she effortlessly swoops her hand into the waters to grab up snakes for her pail. This euphoric imagery of the independent mobility and deportment of Momie, clad in a sleeveless Western-style blouse, is soon to be comically contained by her boyfriend's (Nepalese actor Shiva) head bobbing up next to the boat to remind her of the tryst she failed to keep. If the frame is set for a narrative of bourgeois heterosexual coupling common to the Urdu Social and other South Asian screens, the visual configuration of seemingly companionate manhood implies a phallic formation poised to control and censor the woman's freedom of mobility. The heightening of sexual censorship in Zia's Pakistan seems immanent to the scenic configuration—especially if we consider the fact that this Urdu film, by Shamim Ara's own testimony (*Film Asia* 1987), was submitted and approved by the Censor Board and thereafter was a commercial hit in Pakistan. Setting up a male-dominant couple-mode, the scene leads to the dance sequence expected also of couple-forming narratives from Urdu and Hindi screens. Yet, precisely the dance performance starts to unmoor the stable coherence of the masculine form.

The performance, which commences with shots of dancers in myriad colorful costumes and headgear presenting folk dance moves from the Philippines and neighboring regions, cuts to frequent medium close-ups of Momie and her boyfriend executing Pakistani dance moves. In the diversity of these performance shots we find a hybrid aesthetic containing traces of participatory regional talent and their respective gendered performativity. Since Shamim Ara's collaborators on the Philippine location shoots, including coproducer Mary, were tour operators, the material resources (dancers, exotic tourist spots) and sensuous attractions (images of villages and folk dancing) customary to their entertainment and advertising practices were being repurposed for the screen performance. What is noteworthy for my argument is that the collaborative business practice of invoking tourist attractions of performance and location comes to be internalized by the semiotic form and politicized by gender. The community performance in a substantial sense turns into the performance of a female-focused community. First, it limits the form of heterosexualized couple-dancing commonplace to the Hindi/Bollywood screen, including the blockbuster Hindi action-hero film *Sholay* (1975, directed by Ramesh Sippy) upon which the outlaw friendship narrative of *Lady Smuggler* doubled. While the narrative similarity reveals that *Lady Smuggler* was inhabiting the infrastructure of viewership set in place by the trade and piracy of Hindi film videos both in Pakistan and across the collaborating countries (Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, in this case), the sensuous telos of the female-directed action-heroine narrative clearly differs. Second, the juxtaposition of dancing bodies in the performance under discussion begins to comically unwind the coherent male form through contagious correspondences with feminizing moves.

As panoramic shots of ensemble folk dancing cut to medium-range focus on the couple dance, we find a queer synchronicity of body movements beginning to characterize the romantic performance. Momie's artistry starts to prevail over her male partner's in its skillful boldness and titillating curvature. Performed by the talented *mūjra* (courtesan dance) virtuoso Babra Sharif, Momie's moves execute, in a muted form appropriate for the censored Urdu screen, the defiant hip and breast jiggles and writhes of the upstanding female body known to typify the Pakistani version of the celluloid *mūjra* (Ahmad 2016b, 11). What is provocative about the screen choreography in this case is the mimicry by her male partner of Momie's hip and shoulder jiggles (figure 2). The man's movements are repeatedly led by Momie/Babra Sharif's superior dancing skills into reproducing these feminine sexual motions, enhanced by hand and leg loops. Beyond this, the euphoric femininizing of the man's movements comes to be accented time and again by de-coupled formations. In more than one shot, we see the gyrating man performing at the forefront of (female) Filipina folk dancers (figure 3) rather than the few male folk dancers who also appear onscreen. There is little doubt that heterosexually arousing spectacles do appear, accompanying a wedding song playing on the soundtrack.

Figure 2. Synchronous writhes and jiggles. Source: *Lady Smuggler*.

Figure 3. Female focus and the male mimic. Source: *Lady Smuggler*.

For example, a momentary odalisque pose is struck by Momie and felt over by her partner. However, these occasional shots pale in impact by comparison to the man's comically emasculating moves. What these provoke is the consumption of cinema as a physical experience—an experience driven by a "contagious movement that renders . . . porous the boundaries between inside and outside," subject and object (Bean 2002, 436). In mimetically tracing these movement arts to their making, I seem to see the bodies and the corporeal choices at once of the Pakistani *mūjra* virtuoso Babra Sharif, the star-director Shamim Ara, who also was known for her expert exposition of the celluloid *mūjra* (Gazdar 1997), as well as the Filipina tour and film entrepreneur Mary and her women-dominant dancing troupes combined.

Being choreographed through a mimetic juxtaposition of male with sexy female moves is a softening down of potentially violent phallic musculature in favor of the corporeal dexterity of the dancing woman to turn action heroine. The viewer is being affectively conditioned to expect the narrative role of this hero as a secondary figure, a relatively inactive guardian of patriarchal territories of domesticity and the military state alike. For, soon enough, a dwindling of bourgeois domestic patriarchy begins entwining with that of state patriarchy. While her father is killed and sister abducted by the arch villain drug lord of the narrative, Momie herself also is mistaken by an unrelenting police force to be a smuggler and hurled into prison. Thereafter, the plot arrests Momie's heterosexual romance. Her boyfriend, himself a policeman in military uniform righteously safeguarding state regulations, embarks on his territorial pursuit of the outlaw women after Momie and friends break out of prison. This boundary logic of the legal narrative jostles, however, with that of an overpowering story of boundary transgression mobilized both by female rebellion against injustice and by mutual emotional solidarity. Leading up to the escape is another euphoric performance by women that is to turn vicious in its ludic inversion of military masculine guardianship.

Wide-angle frames capture a women-only prison yard in which Momie frolics hand-in-hand with newfound female friends, the other two heroines also betrayed and set up as smugglers. The collaborative and co-creative regionality spawning *Lady Smuggler* comes alive onscreen as Shamim Ara's lead Pakistani heroine Babra Sharif is showcased alongside the Bangladeshi and Sri Lankan heroine-producers, Babita and Sabita, respectively. The three smiling women turn and twist as they lip-sync a song about *dostī* (friendship). They sing of how *terā dūshman* has become *merā dūshman* (your villainous enemy has become my enemy), of being together in life and death, and of a mutual *vādā* (promise) never to be forgotten. The camera follows the euphoric abandon of interdependent female homosocial desire, lingering on the women's bodies moving together and caressing one another. Soon after, the camera is pulling back to frame a field full of women prisoners moving and circling in synergy around the three friends. This harmonious, region-girdling collective of women, enervated by the jubilation of female *dostī*, has displaced earlier scenes in which the inmates of this women's prison grouped themselves under separate regional identities and randomly attacked one another (the South and Southeast Asian inmates displaying mutual hostility). The montage of harmony is dialectically juxtaposed, however. Menacing images of rifle-bearing guards, dark phallic shapes

that stand tall upon the prison walls, frame the dancing women and bear down upon the kinetic synergy of the feminine space. Indeed, this montage of a dance of cross-regional female mutuality bounded and patrolled by military men nicely embodies the overall claim of this article—my argument that the ambivalent spatial politics of the profilmic text seen in relation to the production economy offers us an archival junction of conflicted regional ways of belonging. One of these ways to belong in sociopolitical space through being menacingly bounded and censored by phallic identities refers to the Islamizing military region of Pakistan and contiguous Afghanistan (being maneuvered in this era by Cold War flows of arms and cash). The other and more compelling way to belong—at least within the scope of the filmic imagery—is that of women who breach boundaries of state and region through rendering phallic domination and military manhood ineffectual. Precisely along these lines, the phallic shapes of guards and rifles are rendered inert at the same time that key symbols of a militarized legal system are unmoored and upended. For one, the heroines are shown at medium close-up twining with careless mockery between the erected guns and hardened musculature (figure 4). Note also that look and frame are made frontal, such that the dancers break the invisible fourth wall and gaze out of the frame as if to address and to include female audiences in the fold of defiance. For another, emasculated queerness is soon found at the heart of the prison itself and, more generally, of the state and its legal system.

The camera pans to show the prison gate being held open. Enter the prison warden, Rangila Jailer, played by the eponymous comedian. The trailblazer of gender-queering artistry on the Urdu screen of this era, Rangila was a "polysexual" (Ahmad 2016a, 472) male performer of *bhānd* comedy indigenous to the South Asian region (Pamment 2017). Having directed a carnivalesque drag comedy titled *Aurat Raj/Women's Rule* in 1979, Rangila grew to be Shamim Ara's steady collaborator and became active in coproduction routes across the region (we see images of Rangila in Bangladeshi coproduction stills as well). In this instance, the stocky, uniformed figure of Rangila Jailer is hurrying and tripping, Charlie Chaplin mode, until he

Figure 4. Female moves and military-phallic inertia. Source: *Lady Smuggler*.

Figure 5. Unmooring militarized manhood. Source: *Lady Smuggler*.

arrives center-frame. He whips out a phallic cigarette and turns an exaggerated glare upon the dancing heroines. Then shot-reverse-shot show him at close range looking and beginning to twitch in uncontrollable mimicry, breaking and curving up his militarized heterosexual musculature (figure 5).

The implication of performing tactile perception in the Pakistani legal context of the time would have been profoundly unsettling for the sexual-boundary logic of censorship. For, through playing upon masochistic anxieties the performance undoes the proprieties of dominant gazing relations and invokes the offense of *zina* (illicit intercourse), to be further discussed in the following paragraphs. In effect, Rangila performs the masochistic man prone to gaze into a secluded women-only space, such that he implicitly touches the frolicking women and loses his militarized, heteromanly resolve. Soon enough, he is surrounded by the three dancing heroines who further entice his body into jiggly moves. Having let down his sexual guard, Rangila Jailer visibly unsettles phallic stability. Therewith, he has forfeited his symbolic guardianship of unjust state discipline and paved the way to the women's lawless fight for justice. Taking Rangila Jailer as hostage, the three women prisoners steal a truck and escape. As the stolen truck pulls away from the prison gate, we hear Rangila's enamored voice asking in a self-indulgent tone: "where do you take me, *haseené* (pretty ones)?" In a ludic vein, this region-girdling cohort of heroines and filmmakers confronts boundary logic at different levels—that of an unjust patriarchal statist system, of policing and incarceration, and of the potentially violent identity of a militarized religious-state representative (a prison warden in uniform).

Soon thereafter, the ludic performance of cross-gender play transforms into a violent one. The heroines' anger against systemic tyranny leads into intense confrontations as the three proceed to exact revenge on the *dūshman* (villainous enemies) who have destroyed their families and lives. The climax is a prolonged slasher sequence that locks heroine Momie in mortal combat with arch opponent Mashiyar, played by the leading villain of Urdu and Punjabi screens, Humayun Qureshi. Shot in Hollywood-style slow motion, constituting yet another cinematographic trace of infrastructures of video trade and piracy, this sequence is overrun with sadomasochistic "bodily sensations . . . [that invite] cross-gender identification"

(Clover 1987, 215): a sharing of masculine aggression and the reducing of male bodies to abjection. In these hybrid performances by Pakistani artists Rangila and Humayun Qureshi, we find a robust play on local and global (Hollywood) tropes of gender queerness. The performers inhabit images and genres found in videos and selectively repurpose the influences. What we find in these images are traces of collaboration between the male artists and a women-dominant production and performance mode. Moreover, the collaborative mode of creativity takes boundary-defying paths to a collective regional screen. Along these lines, affect shifts again in the closing shots of *Lady Smuggler*. As the soundtrack picks up the familiar song of female *dostī*, we see the prostrated and blood-bathed bodies of the three heroines, who have triumphed over Mashiyar and gang at the cost of their lives. While separated takes seem oriented to the multiple audiences of this coproduction in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka—and to the desires to gaze upon the local star—the final long takes emphasize female friendship. The heroines reach out to one another with rays of smile, and they touch and caress in ways that imply a quintessentially erotic union—in effect, a union between the regions, bodies, and desiring peoples of a divided and war-torn South Asia replete with commonalities. The women's bodies are shown to be sinking to a happy death.

Regional crossings and familial bridges: The production archive

If we take the images studied in the preceding paragraphs as objects made and located in the multiple production and reception sites of the itinerant film company of Shamim Ara, we find in them sentient emissaries of a women-prone practice of familial collaboration bridging regional, religious, and linguistic divides. Familial depictions of film business relations recurred at once in the oral histories given to me by Shamim Ara's crew members, in photographs taken on sets, as well as in news tidbits and interviews found in the extra-cinematic Urdu sphere of promotion and publicity at this time. In exploring the familial and women-focused metaphors of work relations in extant accounts of Shamim Ara's company, we excavate a mode of film production engendered as something of a traveling gift-type economy.

Parallel stories of the familial route along which *Lady Smuggler* came to be shot in the Philippines were told to me at different moments both by the late Shamim Ara's associate director Syed Hafeez Ahmed (2015) and by the local facilitator and line producer for *Lady Smuggler* in the Philippines, Raja Riaz Khan (2016). A Pakistani Muslim himself, Raja Riaz described that he had been running a small tour company in the Philippines in partnership with a Filipina Catholic woman named Mary and an Indian Sikh man named Mohan Singh Makkar when word came to him that a Pakistani company wanted to shoot a film in that country. On his part, Syed Hafeez Ahmed (2018) elaborated on this linkage process by noting to me that Shamim Ara Productions frequently made word-of-mouth contacts, based on familiarity and trust, even though contracts were later signed for "tax purposes." Speaking of coproductions from the Dhaka end, Md. Fokrul Alam, who introduced himself as the research officer at the Bangladesh Film Archive, illuminated for me an inclusive and

polycentric linkage by noting that these small-scale collaborations required bringing in (*neeté hoto*) "local talent" and resources (2014).

On location in the Philippines, this "requirement" was fulfilled by the woman tour entrepreneur Mary becoming another coproducer of *Lady Smuggler*, in line with Shamim Ara herself and the female stars and producers Babita and Sabita. There is little doubt that, in the various accounts he gave of the coproduction experience, Syed Hafeez Ahmed sought to hold on to the familiar nativist logic that Pakistanis maintained authorial control over directorial and aesthetic directions; the underlying implication, not unlike Fokrul Alam's, would be that local people were recruited to play instrumental parts. Yet, on more than one such occasion, Ahmed went on to note, as if to throw in a caveat, that work relations with Filipina coproducer Mary were extensive *and* familial. Reminiscing in the latter vein, the elderly Ahmed would break into smiles anytime he spoke of Mary. He would add quite unrelated stories of how she came to be a "sister" to him, and that, to this day, they exchange letters and greeting cards on birthdays and celebrations.

The photographs from his personal archive shared with me by Syed Hafeez suggest that the physicality of work relations on the set may well have fostered familial affect. One such photograph taken during a *Lady Smuggler* shoot shows Shamim Ara flanked by Mary and Syed Hafeez Ahmed seated in close proximity in a cramped and sweaty studio space pouring over what appears to be a script (figure 6). Another photo (figure 7) of crew members on the set reveals one man busily holding up another's body to mount a camera on a tree (rear of photograph), while others squat around to share a moment of relaxation. Stories told to me by Syed Hafeez Ahmed illuminated that mutual corporeal aid was a practice central to gathering resources for these low-budget productions. For example, the "manual crane" was a standard practice (i.e., men climbed up on one another to hold the camera at a high angle). A third outdoor photo, taken on the set of *Lady Smuggler*, reinforces how female-familial and cross-regional relations led these collaborative efforts. We see a smiling Mary posing

Figure 6. Mary, Shamim Ara, Syed Hafeez Ahmed. Source: Salman Carim.

Figure 7. Manual mounting of a camera for high angle shots. Source: Salman Carim.

Figure 8. Mary behind camera and Shamim Ara seated (with hat on). Source: Salman Carim.

behind a camera on tripod with Shamim Ara seated next to her, bearing the trace perhaps of the latter's role of an elder sister and maternal guide on how to shoot film (figure 8). Known in the Lahore context to have been a maternal mentor to women in the industry (Khan 2014, 19), Shamim Ara may well have been building similarly familial work relations with women across the regional routes of production.

We find in these photos of production activity configurations of bodies and things that could be useful as a "methodological *bricolage*" for studying the cultural production of (familial) memory knitting together visual text and material context (Kuhn 2007, 283–84). Whereas I learned from Ahmed that a still photographer would accompany the company on its production routes (2019), I did not hear of any clear destination for these photographs. Pakistani magazines and government reports do publish occasional stills from coproductions of this era, but none that I have seen carry such behind-the-camera photographs of the production unit. Where these photos from Shamim Ara Productions do reside today is as private treasures of the late star-director-producer's crew members, helping them to remember the familial ties and retain contact with erstwhile colleagues. In this light, a *bricoleur* approach to the processes of bonding made tangible by photographs taken on the sets of this

small-scale film company permits an understanding of how tangible affect circulating in the physical form of photos cemented and extended familial infrastructures for film production across national borders as well as within. As meticulously delineated by Gwendolyn Kirk, to this day, the Lahore film industry survives on kin relations, be they based on blood ties or on cultivated "fictive kinship ties" (2016, 91). The tactile habits of cultivating kinship as the way to sustain film business were extending across cultural and geopolitical borders in the 1980s.

This fact is well illustrated by a captivating account published in the Urdu periodical *Film Asia*. Titled "Eid Mubārak," the article graphically describes the Islamic ritual of giving gifts of sacrificial meat on the occasion of Eid-ul-Adha in order to cement family ties and kin-like relations with close friends. We learn that Shamim Ara and other industry stalwarts distributed packets of sacrificial meat to film personalities located not only in Lahore or Karachi but also in neighboring countries such as Nepal (1987, 25). All in all, habits of cultivating sociality in palpable forms of affect seem to have worked as a regionally recognized way to sustain both economic interdependence and co-creative cinema across cultural differences and statist divides.

Dependent on contributors and specialists in diverse locations, such small-scale traveling film companies as Shamim Ara's seem to have functioned, at least to an extent, through what Michael Taussig describes as the "sentient reciprocations" immanent to pre-capitalized economies (1992, 72). Exceeding the capital logic of accumulation and ownership, pre-capitalized economies initiate "cross-connections" between giving gifts, practicing "mutual aid," and building economic relations (ibid., 68, 72). Taussig adds the provocative point that these economies generate tactile reciprocations between the spirit of giving or trading things and the spirit of miming another's sensory aura (sights, sounds, motions, speech forms) in order to be on an even footing with the other (ibid., 70–72). I have recently demonstrated that a similar gift-type logic of trading in cinema in a multireligious and multicultural region animates Shamim Ara's own descriptions of her artistic practice (2020, 170). Intertextually examining the oral and visual records of Shamim Ara's familial and multi-sited cinematic trade in relation to the filmic text of *Lady Smuggler*, I find the traces of a sensory miming and correspondence along the same lines. Yet, as discussed in the previous section of this article, the sensory mimicry works in opposite ways. On one side, performances of tactile reciprocity and mimicry overrun the female-focused imagery such that sentient bridges are built across differences of regional, ethnic, and religious identities. On another side, the very staging of mimicry and correspondence between dissimilar identities and conflicting gender norms unmoors the boundary-keepers and unsettles (militarized) territories. In the entwined archive of cinematic text and context, then, we see how the reciprocal sensory aura born of a gift-type region-crossing economy is comprehended and repurposed anew in relation to the intense contradictions of body politics within a militarized-religious structure of regionalism. Seen another way, the different locations of the production process, replete as these are with multiple ways of social and economic belonging, trigger textual interactions with the militarized formations of gender and aesthetics

in 1980s Pakistan and contiguous war-torn spaces. I round out the article by briefly considering the latter.

Female action and Urdu cinema in a militarized region and Islamizing state

The Shamim Ara action artistry in *Lady Smuggler* arose from a local and global boom in this era of what Tom Gunning calls the spectacular new "cinema of effects," a film form whose primary appeal and meaning are "rooted in stimulus" rather than in the narrative (cited in Tasker 2004, 7). Scholarship on action cinema in 1980s Pakistan situates this proliferation of confrontational stimuli on popular screens in relation to the prevalent culture of gun violence and brutal censorship, under an Islamizing regime and the Afghan War. Ali Khan and Ali Nobil Ahmad delineate the rise of an influential Punjabi action-hero genre, addressing the everyday oppressions of peasant and working-class men under the gun-and-drug economy in the region, which dramatized the purity of violent anger "against an oppressive state [embodied in a] monstrously impure society" (2016, 124, 126). Iqbal Singh Sevea, while concurring with the view that the new Punjabi hero depicted an "unabashedly violent" masculine type that had "little to do with the nation-state" (2014, 132), remarks upon the patriarchal inflection of the Punjabi manly code. He observes that even though strong women figure in Punjabi action films, and they "infringe" on typically male forms of activity, these roles "ultimately serve . . . to further entrench a code of masculinity" (ibid., 130–31). This Punjabi macho tradition at the same time was being complicated through the agency of actresses who crisscrossed the screen and the commercial stage. Entwining confrontational physicality with irreverent dances and acts, their performances evoked a carnivalesque sexual practice overlapping with the *māhi mūndā* or Punjabi tomboy theater. The queer burlesque tradition of *māhi mūndā* combined "macho-body language" with seductive moves (Pamment 2015, 207–8, 213).

While these insurgent Punjabi aesthetics of pure anger, masculine violence, and burlesque were influential on the Pakistani film market of the time, their impact on the Shamim Ara repertoire was mediated by its own Urdu legacy of a cinema made in the national language. This linguistic parameter accounts for its relatively close relationship to the state and script surveillance as well as its historically urban middle-class address. As such, the body politics in *Lady Smuggler* must be seen in relation to the altering middle-class urban formations in the Cold War–governed state of 1980s Pakistan. Women's workforce participation was fast expanding under what Saadia Toor describes as a Cold War–fueled "macro-economic revival" (2011, 154). Hand in hand arose a groundswell of Pakistani women's movement against the brutally censorious Islamist dictatorship (ibid., 138–49). Thus, in the ludic camaraderie and the technological independence of the Shamim Ara heroines we find, on the one hand, a euphoric celebration of women's upward mobility and collective freedom under urban change. The combative cross-gender action, on the other hand, combines insurgent local imaginations with global forms to produce a practice that is politically referential, entwined with what Lalitha Gopalan describes, in the context of the Indian Rape Revenge heroine from the same period, to be a practice "throw[ing] up the aggressive strands of feminism" (2002, 51). Yet, the impact of liberal ideas such

as female freedom and rights, found from local and global sources, necessarily was mediated by the popular Urdu address of Shamim Ara's repertoire.

In Pakistan, as elsewhere in the Muslim world, women's mobility and feminist mobilization alike are located in a culture inextricable from religion as well as the state's regulation thereof (Weiss 2012, 52). Beyond this, vernacular entertainment cultures such as Shamim Ara's Urdu cinema appealed to tastes across urban class divides. In these vernacular domains of women's entertainment, liberal representations of "individualized agency," argues Kamran Asdar Ali, could well be "tempered with other visions of the self . . . [such as] the desire to be . . . modest" (2004, 140). At the core of feminine modesty, explains Hamid Naficy with reference to post-revolution Iranian cinema, is a premodern supposition that the self is "more collective, communal, familial and hierarchical [such that] . . . women are a constitutive part of the males to whom they are related" and hence to be shielded from other men (Naficy 2012, 8). The encoding of modesty in this communal male filmic gaze makes looking relations more tactile than voyeuristic (Mottahedeh 2008, 9), such that men are seen as prone to be "masochistic" (Naficy 2012, 106–7) in looking and effectively engaging in *zina* (illicit intercourse) if nonfamily women expose themselves in public without a proper "visual shield" (Mottahedeh 2008, 9). To remain attentive to the specificities of Pakistani women's bodily practices of modest segregation, prior to and during Zia's Islamizing regime, we must also note that Pakistani women's somatic practices of nationalism, shared among women across South Asia, had always been both voluntary and fluid (Rouse 2004, 98). What came with Zia's state was a brutal proscription precisely of the fluidity of women's illiberal modern life-worlds, in the name of corrupting men. The sphere of obscene exposure necessarily included the cinema, such that the revised Motion Picture Ordinance of 1979 banned no less than three hundred Pakistani films.

How is *Lady Smuggler* emotionally triggered by these boundary logics of militarization and censorship in Pakistan at the same time that it moves against the bounds in reciprocal ways, mobilized by a women-led process of crossing cultural borders and mimicking the others? As earlier detailed, the ensemble filmic text, coproduced by four women from different cultural and political regions, depicts appealing ways in which "impurities" of militarized and statist regionalism are decentered in favor of a heroic female friendship forged between three strangers. Coming hand in hand are emasculating performances of manhood that suggest resourceful collaborations between female and gender-queering artists (from Lahore and elsewhere) and the tour operators who brought the production to the Philippines. Bearing sensory auras of multiregional collaborations, the text and context of *Lady Smuggler* entwine to constitute a gender-focused archive of collaborative regional sensibilities that repurposes the masculinist boundary gaze in order to unmoor militaristic and heteropatriarchal formations in South Asia.

Conclusion

I have argued that in exploring the South Asian region through the lens of cinematic archives, we learn to think transregionally (Chowdhury and De, 2020). For, we grow

alert to the heterogeneity of cinematic movements. These encompass aesthetic and material processes moving both across borders of states and cultures in South Asia, and beyond the historical space of the subcontinent to interrelate with other regions of the global South. Such region-crossing film cultures reveal that, as a "collaborative medium" (Cook 2012, 252) of producing knowledge in multiple sensory forms, the cinema could well be open to hybrid social claims made by makers, financiers, and target audiences. The film form could be deployed to exceed or riddle division and hierarchy—be they statist or regional—through the very processes of shooting, editing, and interweaving expressive and narrative codes. If we approach popular South Asian cinema as a collaborative mode, in other words, we find archives of contradictory insights on sociality and social emergence that embody conflicted regional junctions of belonging, of resistance, and of border-breaches. As shown by my study of Shamim Ara's coproduction *Lady Smuggler*, these archives of sociocultural border-crossing must be sought both onscreen, in the aesthetic politics, and offscreen, in the materiality of a region-traversing production and reception scene.

Author

Esha Niyogi De's research interests lie in postcolonial South Asia, gender, cinema, and screendance. Her new monograph *Women's Transborder Cinema: Authorship, Stardom, and Filmic Labor in South Asia* is forthcoming from the University of Illinois Press in 2024. Her other publications include the coedited scholarly volume *South Asian Filmscapes: Transregional Encounters* (University of Washington Press, 2020); the monograph *Empire, Media, and the Autonomous Woman* (Oxford University Press, 2011); another coedited volume from Duke University Press; articles in such journals as *Third Text* and *Feminist Media Studies*; as well as many peer-reviewed book chapters. She is a senior lecturer in the division of writing programs at UCLA.

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Reviews

General

Ogihara Shinko
***Inochi no genten "umai": Shiberia shuryōmin bunka no seimei kan* ("Umai," the Source of Life: The Concept of Life in Siberian Hunting Societies)**

Tokyo: Fujiwara Shoten, 2021. 248 pages. Indices of names of persons, names of major populations, and of major geographical regions. 29 illustrations, 2 diagrams, 3 groups of references (Japanese, Russian, and other European languages). Hardcover, ¥2,860. ISBN 9784865783186.

In the title of this book, as it is printed on the cover, a single term in red katakana letters strikes the reader's eye. If that person happens to be Japanese or at least fairly knowledgable in the Japanese language, two possible meanings of the term might come to its mind: "tasty" and "skillful." However, the meaning the author Ogihara Shinko unfolds to the reader is quite different, since here *umai* means something related to the "origin (or source) of life." Yet, this is not the origin of life identified by modern scientists of biology or chemistry; rather, it is an expression for how certain traditional populations imagine what life is, from where it comes, and how it originates. Such peoples are societies of hunters and gatherers, who chase game animals and collect food plants for their daily needs to survive, while at the same time they are also concerned about the survival of these sources to the benefit of their own life. The author says that she encountered the term "*umai*" in a folk story of the Udeghe, a people of the Amur Land, who speak a Tungusic language (209). The discovery put her on track for a long journey through immense spaces of time and continents in search of a plausible solution to the Japanese folklorist Yanagita Kunio's puzzle concerning the gender of the Japanese mountain deity, the *yama no kami*.

The term "*umai*" is originally a Tungusic term for the vulva or the womb, but it may also mean various matters related to childbirth, such as umbilical cord or afterbirth, as well as concerns about the health and safe development of babies and young children. It is not only a term of many meanings in various Tungusic languages but also part of groups of terms with related meanings in the languages of still other indigenous peoples of Siberia and Central Asia.

Ogihara's longtime experience with the Russian language and Russian sources allows her to make good use of the data from old field reports of Russian ethnologists and linguists who have spent extended periods among Siberian indigenous populations

around the 1900s, a time when these populations were not yet brought under the impact of the Russian socialist revolution (37). These reports provided her with a window to look at the real lives of some hunter-gatherer societies as they may have been at the most ancient stage of human culture, the stage of hunter-gatherers. This window was decisive for the direction her research would take. It inspired her to ask if there might be a line connecting the cluster of meanings of *umai* in present-day Siberian indigenous societies with representations of the vulva in cave paintings of southern Europe (Spain and France) during the Late Stone Age. The reports of the Russian ethnographers concerning their observations in living hunting and gathering societies during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Siberia inspired her to attempt to supply an "informed speculation" about the meaning of certain images found among the southern European cave paintings and the way actual Siberian indigenous people think about "life" today. In both cases—that of the cave dwellers during the Old Stone Age and the modern hunters of Siberia—"life" is a matter of quotidian concern. But what did or do these people think of what "life" actually is? Is it a spirit, a soul, or still something else? In this context Ogihara, based on findings of the specialist of Ket culture Alexeenko, says that the Ket of western Siberia have a term, "*etles*," which means "life force." It is a term related to a similar one, "*il'*," which means "breath." *Etles*, however, does not mean "breath" but "life force," something that leaves a deathly hit moose when it raises its head for one last time. This movement signals the moment the animal's "life force" flies away into the universe. At the same time, the Ket believe that life force resides individually in many parts of the animal's body, such as its blood, each of its organs, and even in its shadow. Because of such differences in the use and meaning of vernacular terms, Ogihara warns researchers to be careful using seemingly generally applicable scientific terms such as, for example, "soul" (44–46). In the reviewer's view, this warning is fully justified with respect to the variety of ideas about life and its source in the thoughts of people representing the oldest level of humanity's culture that the author unfolds before the reader.

This book is described as being "a journey to reflections about life (*seimei*)," a journey that covers the Eurasian non-tropical landmass from west to east and from its mountain ranges in the south to the polar coasts in the north. Furthermore, it covers the temporal and spatial beginnings of European cave dwellers of the late Old Stone Age up to Siberian hunter-gatherers of the nineteenth century. Both these society clusters built their lives on what they could reap from nature either by hunting animals or by gathering plant food. However, for information on life in societies of the last two or so centuries, the author makes good use of precious ethnographic reports about what (mainly) Russian ethnographers or adventurers had observed or heard in Siberia. To study the life and thought of people living tens of thousands of years earlier, though, she needs to rely on archaeological data, which she interprets in the light of findings from the relatively "modern" societies of Siberian hunter-gatherers.

Ogihara prepares the reader for the journey with a brief introductory chapter of short notes about the landmass Siberia: about its populations under Russian colonization and, connected with it, about ethnological research, local languages, and finally their way of life. The last point is especially important, because it clarifies the basic idea guiding the author in her approach, namely to study how people living the oldest form of culture think of what it means to "be alive, to live" and how they mentally perceive the "source of life."

In the first part of her argument, she discusses in five chapters ethnographic data of how indigenous people of Siberia and Japan (the Ainu) think and feel about life, whose origin they observe and experience, in particular when a woman is preparing for and giving birth to a baby. In this context *umai* is not only related to the birth of new life, but it is also conceived as a powerful entity that protects the mother during birthing as well as the new life emerging during the birthing process, and furthermore the newborn's first months or years after birth. Along with questions about where the source of new life is to be found and what may threaten it, Ogihara discusses the question of why a dead baby is buried in a box put on the branches of a large tree, that is, the question of what the reason for a tree burial is. The tree is imagined as standing on the top of a mountain, and life is thought of as a bird perching on one of the tree's branches until this bird can move to a tree at the mountain's foot, where it eventually will get a chance to return into the womb of a woman and so to be born again.

In the five chapters of the second part of the argument, Ogihara turns her attention to the significance of mountains and their relation to the meaning of *umai*. For the present-day hunters and gatherers of the Altai ranges, a mountain is the place where the ancestor of the clan, whose hunting ground is also the mountain, is thought to have first been living in a stone cradle deep in one of the mountain's caves. The mountain provides and guarantees the clan's life and is, therefore, thought of as a mother deity. But since it provides game and other food as a gift to the clan, the mountain is called the "lord" and "owner" (*nushi*) of these gifts. This is an idea the author finds expressed already in images of the Old Stone Age cave paintings in Spain and France, where, for example, young (small) deer seem to be jumping out from an opening in cave walls that look like vulvas. Here is the moment and place where Ogihara sees the earliest expression for an idea of life's origin that, together with the wanderings of that early time's cave dwellers in chasing their game, was carried to the eastern end of Siberia. The geological conditions during the last interglacial period in these areas did allow wide movements of game animals and, as one of their consequences, also of the animals' hunters. In these movements the hunters brought along with them the concept of the source of their own life being based on the life of the game provided as a gift from the mountain, the "lord" of their hunting ground.

My account of this study hardly does justice to the effort of Ogihara's long period of intensive preparatory work. What her background work suggests can be gleaned after reviewing the impressive list of her previously published articles related to the book under review here together with her autobiographical preface and afterword included in this work. At some points in her argument, she mentions that what she says might sound like a dream. Keeping in mind the huge geographical space and long time period she endeavors to bridge so to connect the reader with an immensely deep past, one might be prepared to acknowledge that not all of the relevant questions raised are definitely answered. Her effort bears fruit, however, in that she can show that immense distances across time and space need not necessarily mean separation but rather development of relations based on a common ground, in this case, the appreciation of the source of life as the source of a precious gift and respect for it.

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Japan

Fujihara Tatsushi, ed.
Handbook of Environmental History in Japan
Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023. 304 pages. Hardback, €198.00. ISBN 9789048559893.

Environmental history is among the fastest-growing fields of history, according to the American Historical Association (Townsend 2015). Universities and colleges are creating new environmental history courses and degree programs in droves, and academic publications in the field are keeping pace. JSTOR reports that over the last half century the number of documents published annually about environmental history has grown tenfold (Constellate n.d.). Western historians of Japan have joined the movement and to date have generated a strong body of anglophone scholarship on the topic. Unfortunately, to date little of the research being conducted at Japanese universities has been made available to anglophone audiences.

Fujihara Tatsushi's edited volume *Handbook of Environmental History in Japan* is the first ambitious attempt to rectify this problem. Broad international exposure to Japanese work in this field is important, Fujihara asserts, for it "is full of clues to solve . . . current global environmental problems" (xv). "Handbook" in the book's title suggests an approach to the topic that privileges breadth and accessibility, and Fujihara affirms that he tasked each contributing author with conveying "both a general story that is easy for readers to learn and detailed content [from] their own research" (xiii). Many of the volume's sixteen short chapters prioritize the first task, which is more easily accomplished in ten to fifteen pages than the second. Designed to serve as both a sourcebook and a textbook, *Handbook of Environmental History in Japan* assumes no prior knowledge of Japan or environmental history. Given its dual objectives of providing broad, interdisciplinary coverage and introducing anglophone readers to Japanese research in the field, this review shall assess the book's effectiveness in both of those areas.

The volume offers considerable thematic and disciplinary breadth. In part 1, titled "Topology of Environmental History," three contributors examine the historical significance of the nation's natural landmass. Their respective studies include cultural landscapes formed by human-nature interactions; colonialism's environmental impact, particularly greening projects and cherry trees in Sakhalin, Taiwan, and Korea; and early twentieth-century national parks, including conflicts between land use, land protections, and war-related pressures. Part 2, "Pollution Incidents," focuses on well-known environmental pollution events in Japan. Its four chapters cover the Ashio Copper Mine incident, modern Japan's first case of widespread pollution; Minamata disease in Kumamoto and Niigata; the aftermath of the atomic bombings, including discrimination against "black rain" victims; and the lesser-known issue of noise pollution from the Tokaido Shinkansen. Part 3, "Between Nature and Human," explores the interactions between the human body and the natural environment. Its three chapters consider smallpox epidemics and countermeasures in early modern Japan, the use of human waste as fertilizer, and the development of modern Japanese agricultural technology. Part 4, "Seas, Lakes and Shores," focuses on water resources. Its chapters construct a regional environmental history of Lake Biwa, summarize environmental changes in Tokyo Bay, and discuss US thermonuclear tests in the Marshall Islands and their impacts on

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Japan's tuna industry. Part 5, the final section, contains three chapters on forestry. They examine the development of swidden farming, imperial Japan's afforestation projects, and postwar Japanese forestry development in Southeast Asia.

This lineup covers the topics one would expect, as well as some unexpected areas. Its two chapters on nuclear issues, typically absent from environmental histories, are especially welcome inclusions. Nakao Maika's "Black Rain, Lawsuits, and Compensation" covers a historically taboo issue: how scientists and government authorities have responded to nuclear radiation's damage to human populations. Yuka Tsuchiya Moriguchi's "Tuna Fisheries and Thermonuclear Tests" extends that discussion by considering the relationship between the anti-nuclear movement and tuna fishermen. Two transnational studies, chapter 2 on colonial environments and chapter 16 on Japanese resource extraction in Southeast Asia, both long-standing sources of international consternation, also stand out as unexpected but important inclusions.

Fujihara admits certain lacunae in the volume's coverage, attention to wildlife and religion specifically. These omissions are important and regrettable given broad interest in Japanese religions and general awareness of Japan's commercial whaling, exotic pet trade, and other wildlife-related controversies. Readers may also be surprised to find a dearth of coverage on the archipelago's native environment—that is, analysis of its biodiversity, habitats, natural forests, and ecosystems in their wild state. In fact, they will soon discover that many of the book's chapters adhere to human-focused perspectives that differ from most anglophone historiography. The four chapters in part 2, for instance, focus specifically on human impacts of environmental pollution incidents, including human rights, lawsuits, discrimination, and victim compensation. Other sections likewise focus more on select human industries than on the status of the natural resources themselves.

Anthropocentric approaches to environmental history remind us that environmental history *is* human history, but for many readers they will also evoke long-standing controversies over "Japanese" and "Western" perceptions of nature and the environment. Japanese have long asserted their comparatively eco-friendly cultural heritage by citing the nondualistic nature of Japanese religion and the nation's history of semi-vegetarianism. The Western side, in contrast, has been widely critical of Japan's allegedly non-ecologistic perceptions of nature. Japan's purported "love of nature," it maintains, is a misunderstanding stemming in part from early Meiji translators' choice to translate the English term "nature" as "*shizen*" instead of the more accurate term "*tennen*." As a result, *shizen*, literally "things as they are," started to be applied to human matters, acquiring a meaning closer to "as the human world goes." As Taichi Sakaiya asserts, echoing this well-established argument, the Japanese appreciation is not directed toward untamed, original nature but rather toward that which has been perfected by human hands (Sakaiya 1993, 183).

Regardless of one's position, the debate does raise important questions over environmental history and historiography. It also invites discussion of language and its role in shaping historical discourse, for *shizen* is not the only term dividing Japanese and anglophone perceptions of the environment. The standard Japanese translation of pollution is "*kōgai*" (literally, "public harm"), a utilitarian term that understands pollution as a predominantly humanistic and legal issue rather than an ecological one. A multitude of chapters in *Handbook of Environmental History in Japan* indeed adhere to a view of environmental problems as "public harm" in the sense that they foreground

the degradation of the human living environment. While English speakers may not view smallpox, the topic of Kozai Toyoko's chapter, as an environmental issue, for example, for early modern Japanese it most certainly was a source of "public harm" (pollution) that entered the body from one's environment.

The term "environment" is itself a source of cross-cultural disagreement. Yuzawa's chapter on night soil defines the Japanese term ("*kankyō*") as "the relationship that exists between humans and their natural surroundings" (132). This definition certainly reflects this book's perspective, though Western readers might dispute the need to include humans as a frame of reference, just as many would likely dispute the need to foreground humans as the central objects of attention in a volume on environmental history.

Language and translation matters evoke important questions about how to define the field itself, the type of questions well-suited to an undergraduate course in Japanese environmental history. *Handbook of Environmental History in Japan*'s chapters are easily adapted to such a course. While some merely summarize well-known cases of "public harm," others are rife with rich, provocative fodder for classroom discussion. Hashimoto's chapter on Lake Biwa approaches its topic as a regional environmental history to, as Amino Yoshihiko put it, "shed light from a variety of angles on the infinite depth of the natural world" (168). Takemoto's chapter on tree planting likewise seeks to advance the field by shifting interest away from "forestry history" toward "forest history" (i.e., forest conservation). Although Hashimoto's and Takemoto's studies remain rooted in relationships "between humans and their natural surroundings," they nonetheless seem to call for more holistic and naturalistic reappraisals of Japanese environmental history. If this is the case, then this book represents a credible starting point for such.

As already noted, the book also offers points of historiographical comparison with anglophone scholarship. It stands in interesting contrast, for example, to *Japan at Nature's Edge: The Environmental Context of a Global Power* (Miller, Thomas, and Walker 2013), whose fifteen chapters were authored almost exclusively by American scholars. Though the two works cover considerable common ground, their approaches and analyses differ notably. Chapters in *Japan at Nature's Edge* are generally more historical, theoretical, and ecological; those in Fujihara's tend to be more utilitarian and data-driven. The juxtaposition reminds us of the self-evident yet often forgotten truism that history and the environment are cultural constructs. Whether as a stand-alone text or as a pedagogical foil for other scholarship, *Handbook of Environmental History in Japan* will be a valuable resource for researchers and teachers seeking to incorporate Japanese historiography into their work.

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South Asia

Eben Graves
The Politics of Musical Time: Expanding Songs and Shrinking Markets in Bengali Devotional Performance

Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Hardcover, $85.00; paperback, $40.00. ISBN 9780253064370 (hardcover), 9780253064387 (paperback).

I was once at a music teacher's house in Diglipur, a town in the north of the Andaman Islands, where hundreds of Bengali families displaced from East Pakistan have resettled after Partition. The music teacher explained that the Bengali devotional music corpus known as *padābalī kīrtan* is very technical and has extensive rhythmic cycles. While having lunch, he started chanting the fourteen-*mātrā* (beat, the smallest subunit of *tāl*) pattern of a song by Chandidas, sounding out its solfeggio in linguistic-percussive syllables named *bol*s. He then juxtaposed this elongated and complex pattern to the *tāl* (metric cycle) used in the *kīrtan* of the Dalit religious community that I was studying, declaring that the only rhythmic structures (*ek tāl*) of those uneducated country bumpkins is a short, simple, and repetitive 4/4 (*cār cār chanda*). Despite the short *tāl*, he noted that their songs are exaggeratedly long:

> I told them several times, this style is not for this modern age! Imagine that, every song in their (Matua) *kīrtan* lasts for 40 minutes! Nowadays nobody has that patience. People pay the ticket to sit comfortably in the cinema with air conditioning, and nevertheless after one hour they will stand up and leave! So, I told them (the singers) to shorten their songs. But they won't listen.

After reading Eben Graves's book, I can clearly interpret this exchange now as a conversation about the politics of musical time. The extensive meter and slow tempo of the *padābalī kīrtan* of Chandidas that the music teacher alluded to evoke specific values. It is associated with notions of sophistication, cultural pride, devotional authenticity, and the interwoven dimensions of theological and performative aesthetics. However, extended time frames of musical duration are also interpreted as incompatible with the rhythms of modernity. For a matter of time, then, the *kīrtan* of my Dalit research participants was deemed as both antimodern as well as unsophisticated. Graves's book takes the reader through a journey in the history and the ethnography of expanding songs and shrinking modern markets to precisely reveal these understudied connections between musical time, historical consciousness, and the rhythms of social life.

This book is about a genre of Hindu devotional song called *padābalī kīrtan* that developed in the historical region of greater (undivided) Bengal in the past five centuries, hand in hand with the theological and performative sphere of Gaudiya Vaishnava religiosity. The genre was supported by the patronage of a landed class of wealthy *zamindār* in the early

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modern period. In the late nineteenth century, it underwent a process of classicization, as a Western-educated class of urban upper-caste gentlemen (*bhadralok*) elected it as a cultural form that articulated a refined Bengali regional identity.

Padābalī kīrtan is characterized by its large meter (*baṛo-tāl*) and slow tempos. The singers are called *kīrtanīẏā*. The verses of the songs describe divine plays (*līlā*) of the past, immersing the listeners in the sacred episodes and life-stories of gods and saints. The temporal features of this *kīrtan*, including extended duration, large meter, and slow tempo, are perceived as inextricably linked to devotional and meditative practice. They allow the listener to experience absorption and remembrance (*smaraṇ*) of the holy characters. The lyrics are composed after a direct vision of the enlightened meditator-composer (*mahājan padakartā*), thus providing simultaneously a record of, and guidance to, the practice of devotional visualization through musical sound. Nineteenth-century Kolkata-based authors emphasized the relationship between the lyrics and the images it sought to bring to life in contemplation using the term *śabda-citra*, translated as word-pictures (169), although *śabda* entails the double meaning of sound and word simultaneously.

This book is a meticulously contextualized study of *padābalī kīrtan* through historical and ethnographic research, enriched by embodied practice and long-term connections with the region, the musicians, and their cultural landscape. Not unlike the songs of this very style of *kīrtan*, the book is expanded in multisensory and multimodal ways: by numerous audio and video samples, transcriptions, translations of multiple songs of the corpus, musical notations, and transcriptions of the rhythmic structures that characterize this repertoire. The holy drum named *khol*, the percussion instrument that is central to *kīrtan* sessions, plays the role of implicit protagonist in the book. While focusing on the music genre, the author also gives space to ritual significance and concerns for auspiciousness, actions and gestures that are not directly musical but are indeed inextricably part of *kīrtan*, like the offering of flower garlands and sandalwood paste to worship the *khol* at the onset of any performance. Despite my personal disinclination toward the transliteration system, and the less-than-ideal translation choices of some Bengali terms and verses, this work fills a tremendous gap in the extant English-language academic literature on *kīrtan*, and it will be of great interest to any researcher concerned with the religious and musical history of Bengal, the cultural economies of *bhakti*, the temporal features of sacred music, and the modern transformations of musical careers in South Asia.

Graves's book debunks (1) the assumption that religious sounds following conventions of a traditional music genre are recalcitrant to change and adaptation to new technologies, and (2) the assumption that *kīrtan* is a form of popular devotional music for the non-erudite that allows the masses who are uneducated in classical music to participate in devotional singing. *Padābalī kīrtan* emerges here as an extremely complex and highly theorized repertoire that has evolved over the centuries through the lives and livelihoods of theologians, playwrights, devotees, percussionists, composers, and meditators. One individual song may use as many as five or six *tāl*s in performance. It may take one hour to go through the sequence of meter structures that dictate the duration of one single (*gaur-candrikā*) song. Furthermore, melodies used in song performance are determined by the specific *tāl* being used (and not informed by the concept of *rāga*). These features present *padābalī kīrtan* as a rhythm-forward and music-dominated genre. Far from being stagnant remnants of a glorious past, however, these features are constantly negotiated by practitioners as they interface with changing social time, constraints of the market, and affordances of various media formats.

The overarching frame of analysis is the generative concept of musical time. Time does not only refer to temporal aspects of performance—rhythmic form, tempo, meter—but to multilayered meanings of temporality. The expansive musical aesthetic of *kīrtan* is explained through a combination of characteristics: *baṛo-tāl* (composed of twelve or more *mātrā*s); the use of interstitial lines and quasi-improvised verses that lengthen and clarify the song; and storytelling and didactic speech, employed by the main singer-narrator to provide interpretations and moral guidance, actualizing the song's message for contemporary times. On a broader level, expansion is provided through the aesthetic theology of the devotional-performative *rasa*, as formulated by sixteenth-century Gaudiya Vaishnava authors like Rupa Goswami.

This musical time immerses and transports the listeners in a meditative time-traveling machine that connects the performative present to a double sacred past: the mythical time of the amorous *līlā* of Radha and Krishna; and the medieval time of the saint Chaitanya's ecstatic identification with the divine characters of Vrindavan in fifteenth-century Bengal. On yet another level of musical temporality, the slow tempo of *padābalī kīrtan* is evocative of an idyllic and nostalgic past of cultural authenticity. Far from the urban present of colonial subjugation in nineteenth-century Calcutta, the expansive *tāl* became associated with the chronotope of the nation's uncontaminated past. Through processes of synchronization (22), the musical time of *kīrtan* recalls simultaneous temporalities, evoking divine pastimes and mythical tempo-spaces, remembering past events, and recovering times that are perceived to be lost.

However, for musicians who are also active participants of neoliberal capitalist music markets, time is money, and making time for lengthy performances of *padābalī kīrtan* is not remunerative. Paying attention to the dimensions of labor and cultural economies, Graves examines the ways in which musicians had to transform this *kīrtan* form due to shortage of stage time allowances in music festivals and the format constraints of digital media. As an example of the first case, the author discusses how *kīrtan* troupes modify the sequence of sections from the traditional repertoire, and even complement it with popular devotional tunes in Hindi, to fit into the competitive scene of Jaydeb Mela, where *kīrtan* ensembles are offered but a one-hour stage time. To illustrate the second case, the author examines how *padābalī kīrtan* is represented in VCDs (video compact discs), an audiovisual format that was extremely popular in the 2010s for regional and rural music markets. The eclectic combination of pictures, visual effects, and devotional images in these VCDs are interpreted by urban and middle-class sensitivities as cheesy, cheap, and unprofessional. As short lived as they were ubiquitous, VCDs came to represent a low-class and subaltern devotional aesthetics (349).

The author did the bulk of his fieldwork between 2010 and 2012. While several transformations in the technological remediation of *kīrtan* have occurred since then, this time span gives us the opportunity to engage with his ethnography of a format that quickly fell into obsolescence and is now almost extinct. The VCD then worked as a sort of business card (159) for the entrepreneurial *kīrtan* singer; the profit from the sale of VCDs was negligible, but they enhanced the chances of finding paid gigs and live events. Graves's ethnography presents two settings in the local cultural economy of *kīrtan*. One is the instructional cultural economy located in university settings and private lesson contexts. Here, teachers can afford the privilege of time to go through the transmission of the complex and large rhythmic structures. In exchange, they receive a *dakṣinā*, a nonspecific amount given as a form of reciprocation for the knowledge

received. The second one is the professional cultural economy where musicians depend on paid live-music performances. The amount they receive is fixed and exact. The study of transformations at the intersection of *kīrtan* and musical time pertains to this second domain. That is, while the book closely examines the strategies musicians adopt to represent this genre in the short time allotted by festival organizers and digital media in the age of global capitalism, we do not know if these transformations affect the pedagogical sphere of transmitting musical knowledge. After learning *padābalī kīrtan* songs and *khol* with masters like Pandit Nimai Mitra and Kankana Mitra, in both domestic and institutional settings, Graves feels that the abundance of time in these pedagogical environments (138) was conducive to learning features of the large-meter style. This does not sound like a universal feature of pedagogical settings. In most busy cities of the global north today, and in Kolkata too, corporate-style music schools have mushroomed, where parents send their kids for exorbitant forty-five-minute classes. This contrast helps to frame the pedagogical setting of the *kīrtan* teachers' homes as a different educational ecology, where a different idea of sharing time is enacted, together with other epistemic and ethical values around knowledge, profit made from it, lineage legacy, and responsibility of the teacher-*kīrtanīẏā*.

Highlights of the book comprise delightfully micro-level descriptions and analyses of meter, verses, song taxonomies, and full multi-hour performances of *līlā-kīrtan*, as well as thick historical texture in dissecting the modern construction of *padābalī kīrtan*. The author emphasizes that the cultural recovery of *padābalī kīrtan* privileged noncosmopolitan male performers of rural lineages at the cost of marginalizing female performers. The story is unsurprising; in the search for modernity and respectability, female performers have been removed from the stages of several genres of traditional performance, once appropriated by upwardly mobile classes of cultural reformers moved by nationalist sentiments (see Paik 2022 for modern Tamasha in Maharashtra). Women performers of short-meter *kīrtan* in early twentieth-century Calcutta were thus denied ritual and musical expertise, and pejoratively called *kīrtan-wālī*s (someone who sells *kīrtan* as a commodity). Concomitantly, noncosmopolitan male musicians of rural lineages became the template to develop the new image of the pious *sādhak kīrtanīẏā*. The *sādhak* singer, not unlike the *sādhak* Baul, so often contrasted with the mere musician Baul (*śilpī* or *gāẏak bāul*; see Lorea 2016, 209–25) is ideally proficient in music, religiously pious, adept in meditative techniques, and inclined toward religious worship. The romantic *bhadralok* construction of the *sādhak* singer contributed to the notion that *kīrtan* is incompatible with commodification and show-business.The final part of the book, "Shrinking Markets for Expanding Songs," describes promotional music events and media production, both crucial for the livelihoods of professional *kīrtan* ensembles, and yet detrimental for the continuity of large-meter *kīrtan*. From cassettes to YouTube channels, the large meter (*baṛo-tāl*) of lengthy *kīrtan*s is conspicuous for its total absence. The accelerated time of communicative capitalism, in its technologically mediated search for simultaneity and instantaneity, is blamed for these truncated versions of *padābalī kīrtan*. One might wonder whether the demand and expectations of new publics are in part responsible too. Shortened performances would satisfy the shortened attention span of the audiences. The cognitively entrained capacity of the listeners to concentrate on sonic contemplations for an extended period might have radically changed. As the music teacher in my opening quote emphasized, people today do not have the same patience; or in the words of art theorists, histories of media use cannot be separated from

the history of attention, because "the ways we intently listen to, look at, or concentrate on anything have a deeply historical character" (Crary 1999, 1).

Besides the transformed social time of neoliberal capitalism, one might wonder whether other and more state-relevant political shifts had significant repercussions on musical time. While the book is already a well of information, it also generated unresolved questions, perhaps for future articles to address. Space and time—as both Graves's and Aniket De's (2021) book on yet another genre of Bengali traditional performance do not fail to recognize—are two inseparable dimensions, and spatial divides do not neatly overlap "with the flows of folklore performance and transmission" (37). With a similar premise, I was expecting to learn more about the ways in which *kīrtan* was broken in half when a new, hastily drawn international border was imposed on the cultural region of Bengal. Since 1947, *kīrtan* institutions, lineages, instrument-makers, festivals, and audiences have been split between two countries. When devotion to Chaitanya became the sonic prism to imagine the Bengali nation in the late nineteenth century, the contours of such a nation certainly did not coincide with the present frontiers of the state of West Bengal. While Graves's research is anchored in institutions and locales of West Bengal, the book is interspersed with references to authoritative figures, festivals, and even influential YouTube channels based in present-day Bangladesh. After massive migration of Hindu devotional performers and their listeners, what happened to the shrinking markets of *kīrtan* in Bangladesh? In West Bengal, with Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool government in place since 2011, could the social welfare scheme Lokprasar Prakalpa (Government of West Bengal 2017), implemented for *kīrtan* musicians alongside other traditional artists, account for the increasing supply of professional *kīrtan* singers? Although occurring only after the author's fieldwork time frame, how is the progressive Hinduization of Indian politics, with its significant effects on the social climate of West Bengal, influencing the musical time, labor, and value of *kīrtan*—for instance, by legitimizing swelling ranks (5) of Gaudiya Vaishnava practitioners to take over the alternative space of Jaydeb Mela?

Jaydeb Mela, a large gathering in the Birbhum district of West Bengal, is portrayed in the book as a promotional music event where an increasing flow of *kīrtan* singers floods the music market and hundreds of thousands of visitors gather to attend all-night *kīrtan* performances. Jaydeb, however, is particularly famous for stage-tents (*akhṛās*) of Baul and Fakir musicians. My research suggests, and Graves confirms (289), that these subaltern groups of heterodox singers-practitioners of antinomian songs feel threatened by the ever-expanding presence of the more powerful and orthodox Gaudiya Vaishnava *kīrtanīẏās* on the Mela ground. For Baul singers and their stages, the blatant loudspeakers of competing groups of *kīrtanīẏā*s are encroaching their territory and transforming the meaning of the gathering. Inhabiting a coevalness of temporal limitations, Baul singers equally complain about the shrinking time of stage performances, which do not allow for the longer and elaborate compositions of the old masters (*mahājan padakartā*). While digitizing the family notebooks of contemporary Baul performers, for example, the singers pointed at compositions of Haure Gosain (1796–1911) with stanzas running across and beyond two pages and lamented that nobody is singing these songs nowadays (EAP 2019). With its engagement with the trope of loss and the lived reality of cultural labor, *The Politics of Musical Time* is a precious work to understand the many ways in which performers mediate temporal disjunctures between their tradition's pasts and their professional futures.

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Max Stille
Islamic Sermons and Public Piety in Bangladesh: The Poetics of Popular Preaching

London & New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020. 282 pages. Hardcover, $121.50; ebook, $97.20. ISBN 9781838606008 (hardcover), 9781838606015 (ebook).

In his pioneering book, Max Stille attempts to examine the *waz mahfil*s (Islamic sermon gatherings) held in present-day Bangladesh as a mass religious and participatory public practice of the working classes. By engaging with recent studies on media, religious emotion, and popular culture (Hirschkind 2006; Eisenlohr 2016; Millie 2017), Stille attempts to rethink the role of the senses and religious aesthetics in public piety in the broader context of the public sphere, which gets caught between Islamic political mobilization and national electoral politics.

Stille's work rescues *waz mahfil*s from getting reduced to the teleological narrative of Islamic terrorism prevalent as the blind spot in the scholarship on Islam in Bangladesh. Instead, *Islamic Sermons* proposes to read multivocality in *waz mahfil*s and the contentions of different actors to investigate motivations of preachers and listeners across various gatherings. In doing so, *Islamic Sermons and Public Piety in Bangladesh* fills the gap in global scholarship not only on Islam in Bangladesh but also cultural history and popular piety to redraw their frameworks by reading Islamic sermon gatherings as popular communication in the public sphere.

By going beyond the binary between indoctrination and entertainment, Stille reads Islamic public preaching, so far linearly understood as a form of religious propaganda, as civic participation by highlighting the role of communicative conventions, aesthetic norms, the speech genre, and the power of the vernacular rhetoric. In his reconsideration of sermons as a narrative and performance genre, Stille rethinks religious communication as shaping the subjectivities of the audience and patterns of imagining and embodying the community in unique ways. Stille emphasizes the very specific regional context of communications that offer utopian, conservatory, and activist roles to the Muslim

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audience of Bangladesh, but never pits the forms of local Islam and its improvisations and a more normative global against each other.

Stille also explores how the global template is enriched through various located acts of vernacular and popular mediation. Stille's work unravels sermon as a speech and performative genre, which along with the bodily dimensions of sound and music weaves together the "theological, narrative and rhetorical artifice" (3) in directed or undirected reception processes. Based on his fieldwork in various districts of Bangladesh from 2012–2016, he situates his study of the complex homosocial spaces in sermon gatherings in the broader political and social perspectives of Bangladesh, which often place the *waz mahfil*s "against the master discourse of 1971" (6)—the secular ethos of the Liberation War of Bangladesh.

The backdrop of Stille's book is set in Bangladesh's "era of polarization and democracy's retreat" (9). The landslide victory of the Awami League (AL) in 2008, which was the pivotal force in the political mobilization during the Liberation War of Bangladesh against West Pakistan, connected the public sphere with the memory of the birth of the nation. As the AL promised trials for the war criminals of the Liberation War, claiming justice was long overdue, it impacted national politics and strengthened unease toward the Islamic bloc in politics and the middle-class disavowal of religious sermon gatherings as religious chauvinism. One of the major accused, Abdul Quader Molla, was a regular preacher at *waz mahfil*s. When the first verdict of his life imprisonment by the International Crimes Tribunal was announced instead of a death sentence, the collective mass sentiment transfigured into two distinct axes in 2013. The Shahbag Movement of the common people, university students, and women, outside the established party structure, showed their displeasure at a "lesser" punishment for a grave crime committed by a member of the orthodoxy. Contrary to Shahbag, the Hifazat-e-Islam gained national prominence with its demand on compulsory Islamic education to "protect" Islamic symbols. As the Shahbag movement shifted from its initial pluralistic agenda to become a loose platform to criticize the faith and practices of the people involved in war crimes, the Hifazat-e-Islam became more rigid as the self-proclaimed protector of Islam with a more structured mass mobilization. In this process of polarization between free speech and blasphemy, between a secular public sphere and an Islamized orthodoxy, *waz* was interpreted as counter-discourse to the public sphere.

For each of the five chapters of this book, Stille has chosen different angles to shed light on the Bengali *waz* sessions. Chapter 1 discusses the trajectories ranging from the global format of Arabic Friday *khutba* to Bengali *waz* preaching. By situating the forms of gathering and listening in a *waz* performance, the image and the role of the individual preachers—Allama Mahmudul Hasan, Abu Kashem Nuri, Tophajjal Hosen, Zaman, among others—across regions (Dhaka, Chittagong, Bhairabi) have been explicated as a broader template across the country, though the role is often context bound (age, training, lineage, location) and temporal. Here, after depicting all practical elements for setting up the *mahfil* performance as a coded surrounding, the author goes on to engage with the recent scholarship on Islamic religious mobilization (Pernau 2017; Schulz 2006; Stille 2016) to describe the preacher's roles, the audience's expectations, and transactions between the audience and preacher to understand the basic parameters and forms of affective and social mobilization. The author, here, proposes a reading of sermon as a form of storytelling that presupposes the copresence of the audience as attentive and "well-guided" listeners and followers to be persuaded to create consensus in a

call-response manner (formula exchange, feedback phrase, patterns of coded question and answer). He opens a separate discussion of the female audience too. Here, the author also recognizes major shifts since the 1980s with the advent of new media to mark not only heightened transterritorial exchanges with an increasingly global Islamic soundscape, but also new modes of personalization and branding of this speech act as it enters the domain of recording and technological reproduction.

Chapter 2 elaborates on the textual and performative features of the sermons. Here, a study of the multiple roles of the preacher as exegete and religious authority shows how he acts as "a translator and a master of a multilingual aesthetic repertoire" (75). For Stille, the sermons attain multilingual stature with the presence of Bengali, Arabic, and Urdu idioms, prompting him to trace the functions of "multilingual code switching" (75–88) and identities borne by these languages. Stille dwells at length on the role of the Qur'an and the Qur'anic translations in *waz* preaching. He starts analyzing the narrative structure of introduction, its persuasive techniques, and the main part of the sermon to analyze the relevance of the processes of translation by the preacher for the interpretation of the Qur'an and mark the use of various rhetorical elements (the use of synonyms, antonyms, and semantically close combinations) to produce religico-aesthetic emotions. Stille also explicates in this chapter the employment of nationalist emotion by the preachers to formulate the rhetoric of religious nationalism so unique for Bangladesh and places religious nationalism in the broader pan-Islamic framework.

By focusing on the structure of the sermon as religious and social speech, chapter 3 looks into the ways the sermons involve the audience with the lives of the heroes of Islam—the Prophet, his companions, and others—to inculcate Islamic ethic-moral behavioral codes in them. The emotional and ethical narratives connect "theological consequences" (25) with eschatological issues as the everyday morality of the Muslims. Following the tenets of narratology and drama theory, Stille shows that dramatic emotions are inherent in religious narratives, culminating in religious supplication. He also explains how, through such dramatization, the traditional thematic becomes an efficacious tool for mass mobilization, with human compassion as a binding factor.

In chapter 4, Stille argues that the melodic coding of the narratives, "prose chanting" (174), based on the double "allegiance" (160) to melodic *puthi* reading and the Qur'an, enhances and enables the impact of the affective narrative by acting differently on the bodily reception of the audience. By addressing multilingual code switching and analyzing pitch patterns (in Hosen's speech, 182–83) and the music-rhetorical encoding of vocal performances (in Sayeedi's speech, 185–86), Stille adds an important observation in the study of the connect between voice, pitch, self-affliction, and religious emotion. He develops a structural study of the production of aesthetic-affective response from an array of cultural vocal techniques. For this, he draws upon the contentious debate on the spectrum of musicality and its permissibility in Islam as interpreted and practiced by individual preachers across regions.

After a close analysis of the musical structure and emotional efficacy of the sermons, chapter 5 focuses on one ubiquitous theme and technique to induce narrative pleasure: humor. After discussing the use of humor as integral to Islamic didactic communication, which has a status removed from other kinds of social entertainment, Stille discusses its "transformative and mobilizing potential" (192) as political speech. Focusing on language, performance roles, and genre particular to humor in sermons, he discusses how humor has been creatively and strategically narrativized for popular mobilization,

against the collective Other. Going beyond the prevalent binary between didacticism and entertainment, the scriptural and the popular, global versus local ideas of Islam, Stille reads the *waz* as a local rhetoric of Islam enacted through dynamic multilingual mediations and "music-rhetorical encoding" (179). He blurs the disciplinary boundaries by reading sermons as public speech and goes beyond the restrictions of musicology and literary studies by reading communication as sensory guidelines embedded in the melodic structure of the "scriptural" text. Thus, he offers a new reading of the public marked by Islamic popular piety as a challenge to the theories of global publics.

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Southeast Asia

Yves Goudineau and Vanina Bouté, eds.
From Tribalism to Nationalism: The Anthropological Turn in Lao; A Tribute to Grant Evans

Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2022. 384 pages, 25 illustrations, 10 maps. Hardcover, $90.00; paperback $32.00. ISBN 9788776942960 (hardcover), 9788776943035 (paperback).

This compilation of essays is not only dedicated to the memory of Grant Evans (1965–2022) but will surely also be connected to the memory of Boike Rehbein, one of the contributors, who died unexpectedly and untimely in the summer of 2022. These two grand figures of international Lao studies have invested their work in strengthening research ties and collaboration with Lao colleagues and institutions and supported subsequent cohorts of scholars. Evans was one of the most prominent social science researchers on Laos, whose hospitality and generosity toward incoming researchers and colleagues are as famous as his commitment to the country in which he not only conducted research but to which he permanently moved in 2005 until his premature death in 2014. His influence materializes also in publications dedicated to him. This includes, apart from *From Tribalism to Nationalism*, a special issue in the *Journal of Lao*

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Studies (edited in 2016 by Peter Cox and Rehbein) and another one published in *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* (edited in 2019 by Paul Cohen and Olivier Évrard).

This volume consists of an introduction and twelve chapters, all authored by renowned colleagues who conducted their first ethnographic fieldwork in Laos in the 1980s at the earliest and in the 2000s at the latest. These chapters are—with one exception (Oliver Tappe, see below)—reprints or translations of earlier published articles and book chapters, some of which were published already in 2008 in *New Research on Laos—Recherches Nouvelles sur le Laos* (Goudineau and Lorrillard 2008). The idea behind this, as the editors explain in their introduction, is to make these texts available to a wider, international, and English-speaking audience. The aim of bridging Francophone and Anglophone audiences and researchers is a very honorable one and thus has my sympathy. For those familiar with the original texts, there might not be much to gain from this volume—were it not for the introduction, which situates the volume against the backdrop of Evans's oeuvre and research life, and for Tappe's newly composed chapter on Houaphanh, which will be presented in relatively greater detail for this reason.

The introduction sets the scene for this volume comprehensively. Yves Goudineau sketches the development of scholarly interest in Laos and the various research collaborations that have formed the field of Lao studies. The impact of Evans on Lao studies and its "anthropological turn" that he has contributed to is discussed thoroughly by Goudineau, capturing the different projects and visions that Evans has pursued. Goudineau highlights Evans's call for ethnographic fieldwork, a critical anthropology that does not shy away from dissonance, and, finally, a commitment to fostering collaborative ties to Lao colleagues and institutions with all eventual challenges implied. Lao studies, markedly influenced by Evans's work, was further shaped not least by the contributors to this volume who have devoted their careers to commencing fieldwork-based Lao studies.

Nick Enfield's chapter sets the tone that is also to be found in several of the contributions by pointing to rampant research lacunae, here in the field of studying the diversity of languages spoken in Laos. Rehbein deploys his variation of Bourdieu's concept of "fields"—not rice fields, although there is an interesting twist here when it comes to professional language (43)—and their differentiation. Evans's review of what happened with peasants and peasant studies in Laos (as of 2008) calls for more expertise in economic anthropology and understanding of economic strategies of peasant households for researchers but also declared "experts" consulted by international development funding agencies. Tracing the development of monasteries in the twentieth century and, especially, their decline as an educational institution, Patrice Ladwig analyzes the historical and political factors that have led to a formation of religious versus secular spheres, thereby tackling these fraught terms against the Lao background. Also looking back into the early phase of the Lao revolutionary fight, Vatthana Pholsena's contribution is based on oral historical evidence for southeast Laos; it aims at illuminating different ways of relating to the past—contrasting Lao historiographical accounts of the "liberation" of Southern Laos and the experience-based retelling of a Vietnamese-born Lao war veteran. Goudineau's overview on the state of the art of the anthropology of Southern Laos (as of 2008 but with some updates in the footnotes) highlights some of the then common misunderstandings and relative neglect of this area and discusses the problems of conceptualizing (and naming) ethnic groups using the example of the Kantu.

Ian Baird's chapter discusses a spatial concept of the Brao in Southern Laos, *huntre*. *Huntre* denotes a spatial prohibition that governs the organization of the swidden fields

and beyond. According to Baird, this shows that spatial notions and ideas of borders existed in precolonial times. Évrards and Chiemsisouraj Chanthaphilith's historical and ethnographic contribution on the different mythical versions of the genesis of the town of Vieng Phoukha in Laos's northwest province of Luang Namtha captures and weaves together different pieces of historical, mythical, and oral historical evidence. Guido Sprenger discusses the discontinuation of (certain) rituals and religious practices of Rmeet speakers against the background of cultural values that inform which (parts of) rituals are deemed worthy of retaining. Vanina Bouté traces the relationship between Buddhism and animist ritual specialists among the Phunoy, residing in the uplands of Phongsali, carefully discussing and tracing the different roles and functions ascribed to Buddhist and non-Buddhist officiants in the context of rituals to ward off misfortunes.

In his fresh ethnographic chapter, Tappe shows that Houaphanh Province and its capital Sam Neua are currently changing due to Vietnamese investments and development initiatives. The new city pillar monument and a town park showcasing the province's multiethnic cultural heritage are aimed at broadening its self-image from the cradle of the revolution to a site of prosperity and (multi)cultural wealth. Tappe deploys the concept of "mutual mimetic appropriation" (296) in order to shed light on interethnic dynamics in this ethnically highly diverse region, thereby contributing innovatively to the debate on Tai-ization that Evans provoked. Taking the transethnic prominence of *lao hai* (the locally produced rice beer drunk from jars through straws) and the ubiquitous *taleao* bamboo signs (used for ritual purposes), both being primarily associated with upland lives, as examples, Tappe asks us to inquire more into the "long-term processes of mutual cultural borrowings" (298), thereby indicating that the mimetic appropriation is not a one-way road but rather a mutual process.

This chapter, which engages also explicitly with Evans's work (which is not the case for the other chapters, which were, of course, not written with this aim in mind), prepares the reader for the last chapter, again by Goudineau, in which he recalls his role in raising awareness for the need to study and take seriously the cultural diversity for which Lao is unique in this part of Southeast Asia, including also its consideration in policies. He also traces the development of the rather paradoxical situation of unprecedented public acknowledgment of cultural diversity and, also unprecedented, standardization of the same that has led to odd forms of visualizing the multiethnic heritage in Laos.

From Tribalism to Nationalism can be said to be a materialization of a piece of a recent history of Lao studies. This cohort of scholars has conducted research in Laos at a time that all readers may not easily be able to imagine—such as those like me, who only started working there after the 2010s. In fact, these colleagues have, like Evans, contributed to paving the way for future researchers. It appears as if this volume, or at least some contributions, were not only written to represent a new state of the art of the then expanding research on Laos (based on prolonged on-site fieldwork) but also to highlight potential future directions and persistent gaps of knowledge that, hopefully, an increasingly diverse range of researchers heading to stationary field research in Laos will continue to work on—most likely bringing up new questions in the process.

And, indeed, much has happened after and in the wake of the contributions published in *From Tribalism to Nationalism*, more than can be seen from this book. The community of scholars working on Laos continues to grow (rapidly) and diversify (less rapidly), which will be noticeable in print in the upcoming years when the dissertations of aspiring ethnographers of Laos will see the light of day in the form of books (at least they should).

What we also need, as especially the contribution of Goudineau shows, are efforts at fostering ties with Lao colleagues and institutions that will establish sustainable research partnerships. This volume bears testimony to the honorable commitment of the editors, Goudineau and Bouté, as well as that of NIAS Press, and especially the editor in chief, Gerald Jackson, to the study of Laos. Given its tragic closing, this volume can be remembered as the last volume on Laos published by NIAS Press. As a final comment, the choice and combination of chapters in this volume respond well to the words from Evans with which Goudineau closes his chapter (327): "Sensitivity to the complexities of ethnic identity and to the different levels which notions of identity or matters of cultural similarity or difference are salient must become the hallmark of future anthropological research in Laos and in the region generally" (Evans 1999, 186).

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South Korea

Andrew Jackson, Codruţa Sîntionean, Remco Breuker, and CedarBough Saeji, eds.
Invented Traditions in North and South Korea

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2023. 408 pages. Hardcover, $68.00; paperback: $28.00. ISBN 9780824890339 (hardcover), 9780824890506 (paperback).

One of the defining characteristics of Korean culture and civilization in the twentieth century has been its expression in relation to more powerful neighbors. Ever since the Royal Asiatic Society Korean Branch—the first academic society dedicated to Korean studies—took up the matter of "Chinese influence on Korea" in the inaugural issue of its organ journal *Transactions*, the tendency of the West to view Korea through the prism of more "familiar" nations like China and Japan has influenced much of the field and has challenged Korea to articulate its own unique and independent identity. From the dominant Sino-centric civilization that defined the premodern era, to the subsequent layer of Japanese cultural residue wrought by colonization, to the hegemonic American cultural forms that have inundated postwar South Korea, Korean culture and traditions have often struggled to find an independent voice among more populous, influential neighbors. The division of Korea and the creation of separate antagonistic regimes

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vying for legitimacy further complicates the articulation of a clear and unified national identity as each country selectively appropriates cultural commodities to project its own vision of the nation.

As increasingly informed and diverse knowledge of Korean culture enjoys unprecedented reach in the twenty-first century, *Invented Traditions in North and South Korea* provides a welcome reflection on various aspects of the Koreas and shines a spotlight onto the twentieth-century process of articulating Korean cultural identity. The substantial volume, edited by Andrew David Jackson, Codruţa Sîntionean, Remco Breuker, and CedarBough Saeji, offers a panoramic view of invented traditions in the Koreas in the following four parts: "Reimagining Tradition: History and Religion"; "Rewriting Tradition: Language; Consuming and Performing Tradition"; "Music, Food, and Crafts"; and "Embodying Tradition: Space." The diversity of the topics covered conveys the comprehensive nature of nation-building in twentieth-century Korea and the long shadow cast not only by Korea's neighbors but by the respective regimes on either side of the 38th parallel that also engendered "ideological uses of the past."

Jackson offers a cogent discussion of Hobsbawm and Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) in the introduction. Acknowledging scholarly critiques of the theory, notably its claims to universality beyond Europe, Jackson reminds readers of the actual limited scope of the theory's original application to specific case studies. The case studies, he writes, "are related to the revival of *distinct* types of cultural practice during periods of *particularly* extreme social and political change—especially during the process of nation building" (4), suggesting clear parallels with similar processes in twentieth-century Korea. As Jackson claims, the convincing quality of *The Invention of Tradition*'s accounts of the utilization of traditional culture for political purposes during state formation helps to explain why criticisms of Hobsbawm's work have been largely limited to the theory's claims of universality rather than the actual application of the theory. By the same logic, the careful application of the theory to the articulation of Korean culture and the formation of the Koreas under similar conditions is equally robust. Jackson's justification for considering North and South Korea in tandem in the present volume is likewise a welcome approach to the expanding field of Korean studies, which often subconsciously (or consciously) assumes an insurmountable chasm between the two countries that precludes any meaningful cross-border analysis, or makes "generalizations about what constitutes 'Korea' and 'Korean culture' while limiting [its] discussion to the South" (7), indirectly bequeathing the mantle of cultural legitimacy to the more accessible and "credible" of the two nations.

The chapters are of a uniformly high level of scholarship, meticulously researched, and thought-provokingly presented. Part 1 on history and religion offers a welcome intercession into the growing issue of pseudo-history in South Korea, and in the process skillfully demonstrates how ancient history continues to have extraordinary relevance in today's Koreas. Breuker offers an illuminating introduction to this section in his discussion of "forgeries," noting that the English language (and Korean language) have only words with a negative connotation to designate such a product, while reminding the reader of the dual nature of the forgery: "in its instrumental mode it is deceptive, but in its teleological mode it is authentic" (44). This reading of "forgery" informs much of our understanding of the concept throughout the book, as something that may intend to deceive but that nonetheless becomes a tradition in its own right. Andrew Logie provides a concise primer for different issues in Korean historiography related to "pseudohistory,"

connecting these to the unifying tether of colonial conspiracies and the "enticement of empire," showing their relevance to contemporary geopolitical issues such as China's Northeast Project and Japanese textbook revision. Donald Baker offers a concise and coherent chapter on the fabrication of the Sŏndo tradition that is as always accessible, thought-provoking, and compelling. Baker's firm command of the historical material is clearly on display in this withering critique.

Part 2 on language presents a welcome challenge to the received nationalistic narratives of politeness in Korean society and the place of Korean literature in classical Chinese in Korean culture and identity. Eunseon Kim's chapter enlists an impressive array of primary sources in a well-documented overview of the changing mobilizations and interpretations of the concept of politeness (*yeŭi*). Kim moreover deftly integrates the major historical points in Korean history with language, demonstrating how the two are intertwined. Andreas Schirmer charts the rapid transition of centuries of literary production in Literary Sinitic into writing in hangul almost exclusively, resulting in the severing of today's South Korea from its literary tradition and the subsequent government-led effort to champion vernacular translation for cultural curation and preservation. Schirmer's chapter is a welcome addition to an area of Korean studies that is scandalously under-researched.

The disparate topics of music, food, and crafts examined in part 3 are ably unified and contextualized in Saeji's introduction. Laurel Kendall's chapter on the split bamboo comb (*ch'ambit*) is illuminating not only in describing the gradual decline of the comb and the method by which a product becomes a national treasure after its practical use has been eclipsed, but also the nature of the "important intangible cultural property" law itself. Keith Howard offers an extremely detailed tracing of two important musical genres in South Korea, deftly demonstrating the link between premodern court sponsorship and the modern state. For any reader interested in contemporary K-pop, this is a necessary dose of Korean music history that offers perspective. Jan Creutzenberg writes a thought-provoking chapter on *p'ansori*, examining the moment that the tradition of "full-length" (*wanch'ang*) performances became established as the new standard to which to aspire. Creutzenberg's concept of "staging genealogy" is an especially intriguing one, as a phenomenon that performatively re-enacts the process of transmission from a master to an apprentice, establishing a "link between past glories and future prospects" (290–92). Maria Osetrova provides fascinating and informative insights into the invention of tradition in North Korea in the context of Kim Il Sung and "guerrilla cuisine," as a phenomenon of either wholesale invention of tradition or the breaking with tradition in favor of the country's "new" and revolutionary roots.

Part 4, on embodying tradition, offers an intriguing look at the reconceptualization of space in North and South Korea, an appropriate bookend to a volume that promises a cross-border analysis of the two countries. Sîntionean provides a revealing, cogent chapter on the Park Chung Hee regime's defining of the parameters of "traditional" Korean architecture in the contemporary nation by the amalgamation of tradition and modernity through a "present-centered selective process" termed "purification projects" (*chŏnghwa saŏp*). The term "*chŏnghwa*" interestingly dovetails with discourse on "purification" of Japanese remnants from the colonial period, most notably in the realm of postliberation language policy where it pertains to unwanted Japanese borrowings. Robert Winstanley-Chesters writes a fascinating and theoretically informed chapter on North Korea as a "theatre state" in which performativity has a vital political function

that explains its longevity, and a regime in which these same theatric energies "are rescaled across time and space through the processes of what Deleuze and Guattari term deterritorialization and re-territorialization" (1984).

Overall, *Invented Traditions in North and South Korea* is a very welcome addition to Korean studies, providing a diverse sampling of such inventions that illuminate Korea's own process of articulating a modern, independent identity in the recent past and continuing into the future. The volume and section introductions effectively contextualize topics that are at times disparate, and the groupings of chapters themselves are informative and skillfully compiled. The editors and contributors are to be commended on a level of scholarship and a consideration of primary and secondary sources that is consistently high. The chapters would make appropriate readings for upper-level undergraduate courses in Korean civilization and society, as well as scholarly sources for academics. A drawback for some readers may be that the diversity of topics covered and the depth of examination means that parts of the book may seem beyond the interest or aptitude of some readers, while the unifying theme of invented tradition may not seem enough to justify reading the entire book. However, the reader should be assured that all topics are covered in a highly accessible yet sophisticated manner, with a consistently high level of interest maintained across all topic areas.

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Tibet

Holly Gayley and Andrew Quintman, eds.
Living Treasure: Buddhist and Tibetan Studies in Honor of Janet Gyatso

Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2023. Xii+518 pages. Hardcover, $59.95. ISBN 9781614297796.

Janet Gyatso, Hershey Professor of Buddhist Studies at Harvard Divinity School, is a scholar who has made significant contributions to Tibetan studies as well as to Buddhist studies in general. Her publications range, among other topics, from gender studies to biographical literature, Tibetan medicine, and philosophical inquiry. This volume contains twenty-nine chapters and a substantial introduction in the form of an intellectual biography of Janet Gyatso by the editors, Holly Gayley and Andrew Quintman, and a bibliography of her major publications. Perhaps the best characterization of her research is that offered by Jacob P. Dalton (255): "Her work has been particularly remarkable for its focus on Tibetans as human beings—not just fonts of Buddhist doctrine, but people negotiating their places in the world . . . consulting regularly with native Tibetan readers." The same

approach is reflected in many of the contributions in the volume, with the authors often acknowledging the influence of Gyatso as their mentor.

Given the limitations of a review, it is impossible to present every single contribution; the choice of chapters, briefly commented on here, has therefore been guided by a wish to show their overall diversity, in this mirroring Gyatso's own research over more than forty years. The first of the five sections into which the contributions are grouped, "Women, Gender, and Sexuality," consists of six chapters. Donald S. Lopez Jr., in "Sex, Part Two," focusing on Indian Buddhism, discusses elements in the Vinaya containing obscene narratives and sexual fixations side by side with misogynistic works in Buddhist literature. Holly Gayley in "The In/Visibility of Nuns and Yoginīs in Dudjom Lingpa's Songs of Advice" examines "how Tibetan women are rendered both visible and invisible as interlocutors to renowned male religious figures in dialogic literary works" (47). The second of the five sections, "Biography and Autobiography," corresponds to one of Gyatso's main interests, represented by her study, *Apparitions of the Self: The Secret Autobiography of a Tibetan Visionary* (1998), where she focuses on the visionary experiences and subsequent activities of the Tibetan visionary Jigme Lingpa (1730–1798). This book has inspired Elizabeth Angowski to repeat the word "treasure" in "Auto/Biography for the End of the World: A Treasure Theory of Reading Revealed Life Stories," the reference here being to the Tibetan class of revealed texts, in Tibetan known as *terma*, treasures. The chapter discusses how life-stories that are at the same time *terma* engage with readers, and how "a revealed auto/biography can quickly become much more than a story of a single remarkable life" (141). Matthew T. Kapstein's chapter is remarkable for dealing with a highly unusual topic, namely the personal memoirs of a Tibetan *tulku*, a (re)incarnated lama born in the mid-19th century, who begins to doubt his "tulkuship," ultimately abandoning it.

This section is followed by "The Nyingma Imaginaire," of which two chapters deal directly with Jigme Lingpa, mentioned above, who belonged to the school of the "ancient [tantras]" (Tib. *rnying ma*). This section contains, together with other equally excellent contributions, a substantial chapter by David Germano, "Divine Creation and Pure Lands in Renaissance Tibet." It should be noted that by "renaissance" Germano (and other Tibetologists) refer to the renewed efflorescence of Buddhism in Tibet in the eleventh and following centuries.

The fourth section, "Literature, Art, and Poetry," comprises eight chapters, reflecting the importance of literature and poetry in Janet Gyatso's own work. Among these chapters, I would like to point to that of Sonam Kachru, "What Did Śāntideva Learn from Lovers?," one of the few contributions to the volume dealing entirely with a topic related to Indian Buddhism, the other one being that of Lopez mentioned above. In "A Sad Song of Jonang," Andrew Quintman recalls his three visits to Jonang, an illustrious religious establishment founded in the fourteenth century, briefly reactivated in the early 1990s after the ravages of the Cultural Revolution, only to be forcibly abandoned a few years later. Visiting the site in 1998, by then completely deserted, one of his students found a tattered booklet in a pile of destroyed wooden printing blocks. This turned out to be a Communist re-education booklet, on a blank page of which was written a lament in verse by a Tibetan monk. Quintman translates the poem and places it in its contemporary context as well in the context of the theme of religious sadness in Tibetan religious literature.

Finally, the section "Early Modernity: Human and Nonhuman Worlds," gathers a range of chapters on topics so varied that the singling out of any of them must inevitably be somewhat haphazard. In "My Life as a Parakeet: A Bönpo Version of the Conference of the Birds," Charles Ramble presents a delightful Tibetan version of the widely diffused idea of a conference of birds, found as early as in Aristophanes (*c.* 446–386 BCE) and later in the writings of the Sufi Farid ud-Din Attar (twelfth to thirteenth centuries) and Geoffrey Chaucer (1343–1400). The chapter contains an outline of a Tibetan fourteenth-century version, paraphrasing parts of the texts and translating the final passage in which all the birds are listed, each being assigned its place in the natural world and its appropriate task. Heather Stoddard, "From the Blue Lake to the Emerald Isle via the Kingdom of Sikkim," presents several aspects of the life of the Tibetan monk and "dissident" (before the word) Gedun Chopel (1903–1951), a unique personality on whom she is the foremost specialist. She discusses his repeated, but little-known, visits to Sri Lanka, at the same time providing information on several Sikkimese who were ordained as Theravāda monks on the Emerald Isle in the early decades of the twentieth century and with whom Gedun Chopel was in touch.

Living Treasure illustrates the flourishing state of Tibetan studies in North America; of the twenty-nine contributors, twenty-four are either American or are based in the United States. Of the remaining five, three live in the United Kingdom, one in China, and one in France. Perhaps the chapters, broadly speaking, reflect certain characteristics of Tibetan studies in the United States. It would be a risky enterprise to try to define these characteristics, but perhaps one could note, at least in the present volume, the near absence of contributions with a distinct historical focus, the only clear exceptions being the chapters of Samten G. Karmay and Amy Heller, both dealing with the Fifth Dalai Lama (and both authors, incidentally, living in Europe).

Be that as it may, *Living Treasure* is an attractively produced volume from any point of view. The layout and editing are excellent. I have only found one little slip: in a reference on page 330, the archaeologist (Sir) Aurel Stein is confused with the French Tibetologist Rolf Alfred Stein, the author of the book *Tibetan Civilization* (1972), correctly entered in the bibliography of the relevant chapter.

Leaving that trifle aside, *Living Treasure*, fascinating in its manifold contents, is a treasure trove—not surprisingly, as Gyatso herself is, as the editors put it, "herself a living treasure within the fields of Tibetan and Buddhist studies" (xii). The volume's call was, as one contributor points out, "to be creative, broadly accessible, and theoretically oriented" (139). It certainly fulfills this ambition, and studying it will richly reward anyone interested in these fields of scholarship.

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Yannick Laurent
Spiti: The Gigantic Valley of Many-Hued Strata; Archaeological and Historical Research in the Western Himalayas

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While there is a substantial and growing literature on religion, political history, art, architecture, and social life in Western Tibet—comprising the Ngari Prefecture of the Tibetan Autonomous Region in China and the ancient kingdom of Ladakh (now a Union Territory in India)—scholars have paid less attention to other adjacent Himalayan regions situated to the south and west of Ladakh, such as Lahaul, Kinnaur, and Spiti in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh.

The present work is an immensely important contribution to the study of Spiti, one of the many former Himalayan polities strung out along the Tibetan border, including Ladakh, Zanskar, and the kingdoms of Sikkim in India and Lo Monthang (Mustang) in Nepal. As the author points out, the study of Spiti has generally been neglected, having too often been "pushed into the background as part of Ladakhi history" (53). Yannick Laurent has spent much time in Spiti as a researcher focusing on archaeology, social history, and art history, with the present volume (an enlarged version of his doctoral thesis from the University of Oxford) being the most significant result of his research so far. It consists of two volumes, the first being a historical study of Spiti, the second a significant collection of relevant illustrations of architecture and art history, as well as of legal documents.

Spiti, a part of the Tibetan Empire until the latter's fragmentation in the ninth century, adopted Buddhism in its Tibetan form in the eleventh century. The only historical site in Spiti that has received in-depth attention until now is the Buddhist monastery of Tabo, which was likely founded at the end of the tenth century. Tabo is famous for its exquisite mural paintings, which are remarkably well preserved and have been extensively studied by scholars (see Klimburg-Salter 1997). Laurent, however, focuses on the much less explored settlement of Dangkhar, which has, as he points out, "never received more than cursory references in secondary literature" (175). The following overview of the contents of the two volumes shows the range of topics dealt with in these volumes. Chapter 1 of volume 1 contains a brief introduction to the location of Spiti, the role of Buddhism—about which the author remarks that "The history of Buddhism in Spiti is not well-understood beyond generalities concerning the religious activities carried out by the great translator Rin-chen bzang-po (958–1055) under the aegis of the Western Tibetan royalty" (21)—the etymology and history of the place name of Spiti, and the Spiti language, a dialect of Tibetan. Chapter 2 provides an extensive survey of the reports and publications, including visual documentation, from Spiti produced by Western, mainly British travelers. Chapter 3, "Researching the History of the Spiti Valley," discusses the contribution of various scholars with a carefully argued and useful periodization of its past and an overview of the fluctuating territorial organization of Spiti over the centuries until the end of the British colonial period in 1947.

This is followed by a detailed description of the territorial organization of Dangkhar (chapter 4), including the geological setting and toponymy of the valley, roads, boundaries, fields, and the all-important water resources, as well as fortification works. Chapter 5, "Residential Area and Social Structures," deals with local taxation systems

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and social stratification, whereas chapter 6, "The District Fort and the Local Government of Spiti," is a study of the most prominent edifice at Dangkhar, a fort or castle situated strategically on a cliff above the settlement, probably dating from the sixteenth century, although earlier structures on the site might be as early as from the eleventh century. This chapter also discusses the relations between the local leaders of the Dangkhar valley and the traditional ruling elite of Spiti and is rounded off by a study of the two territorial deities of the fort.

Below the fort is a monastery, in historical sources referred to as Lagope (the meaning of which is unclear) monastery, now known as Dangkhar Tashi Chöling, to which chapter 7, "The Monastery of 'Lagope,'" is dedicated. In the seventeenth century, the Lhasa-based Tibetan state conquered Western Tibet, with the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism becoming dominant in Spiti as well, although it remained a semi-independent polity until the nineteenth century when it was incorporated into British India. Lagope monastery has adhered to the Gelugpa school since 1618 (117), although other schools of Tibetan Buddhism were not entirely eclipsed and are still to be found in Spiti. The chapter discusses, among other topics, the name and foundation narratives of the monastery, its architectural development—possibly dating to the mid-fifteenth century (111)—and its mural paintings and their iconographic programs. This chapter also contains a study of the abbatial lineage of the monastery, as well as its administration and estates, the latter topic being dealt with in considerable detail. The final chapter, chapter 8, again focuses on the history of Spiti, especially its relationship to the economically and militarily far more powerful kingdom of Ladakh as well as to the Tibetan government based in Lhasa. Spiti's importance was due to its straddling one of the trade routes between Tibet and India; consequently, Ladakh, whose wealth was based on the same trade routes, was generally the dominating power among its neighbors. With Ladakh becoming part of British India in the nineteenth century, Spiti also came under (largely nominal) British administration.

In the context of Laurent's otherwise excellent historical overview, one may be permitted to question the assertion that the Zhangzhung kingdom, of which Spiti probably was a part, and which was conquered and assimilated into the Tibetan Empire in the seventh century, "has generally been associated with pre-Buddhist beliefs, and notably for its sponsorship of Bön" (144). Although this association is asserted by many writers, it is, in fact, not documented until after the demise of the Tibetan Empire and the emergence of a coherent system of ritual and belief known as Bön (more precisely, Yungdrung Bön, "Eternal Bön") in the ninth and tenth centuries. Thus, by the time Bön emerged, there was no longer a Zhangzhung kingdom to sponsor it.

Volume 2 contains a rich and varied visual documentation organized in a series of appendices, of which the following are of particular importance. Appendix 2, "Maps and Architectural Documentation," opens with a collection of maps dating from 1841 up to the present, as well as schematic drawings, cross sections, and storey plans of the monastic buildings. This is followed by color photos and detailed iconographic inventories of the interior walls of the Upper Temple of the monastery. Appendix 3 contains material from various visual archives, the oldest being based on drawings of Dangkhar made in the 1820s (although only published in 1841). There is also a collection of unique photographic material of architectural and ethnographic interest, going back to 1863 and the following decades. Appendix 4, "Visual Documentation," spans a variety of material, ranging from rock inscriptions to detailed photos of various ancient

remains at Dangkhar dating from 1863 as well as, for the sake of comparison, from recent years; there are also numerous photos of fragmentary murals from monastic buildings at Dangkhar. An important body of relevant epigraphic material is found in Appendix 5, "Epigraphic Documentation and Donor Prefaces," including material originating from Tabo monastery and the village of Kyi. Appendix 6, "Legal and Diplomatic Archives from Dangkhar," continues the presentation of written sources in the form of twenty-six documents, the majority of which have been photographed in Spiti by the author. The texts included in these two appendices are presented in facsimile, transliteration, and annotated translation. As these documents make use of a technical legal terminology, Laurent has provided readers with a unique and accessible study tool in English, as only a few other scholars have previously published similar legal documents in Tibetan from the Himalayan region and translated them into English (see Ramble 2008), relevant research having hitherto largely been published in German.

Spiti: The Gigantic Valley of Many-Hued Strata is an important book from several perspectives. It is based on extensive and original archaeological and ethnographic research of this region of the Western Himalayas. At the same time, it provides a very clear overview of the cultural and political history of this former semi-autonomous polity and suggests a highly useful periodization of its history. A particularly commendable approach adopted by Laurent is the combination of archaeological, philological, and social data, making the presentation of architecture and other aspects of material culture meaningful for social scientists and historians of religions also. The two volumes fill a major gap in research on Spiti and the Western Himalayas, and one must hope that it will inspire other scholars to proceed along similar lines.

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