https://doi.org/10.34074/junc.25055

EWA A. ŁUKASZYK

CULTURED READINGS: TRANSCOLONIALITY AND AESTHETIC JUDGEMENT IN GLOBAL LITERARY CRITICISM

INTRODUCTION

My reflection revolves around the aporiae of critical appreciation in World Literature, suspended between an educated, erudite—or *cultured*—set of criteria and the expectation of extracultural validity of literature. I play, deliberately and ironically, with the double resonance of the adjective 'cultured', evoking concomitantly the profundity of cultivation and the limiting inscription in the boundaries of a culture (in the singular). Evoking the evolution of literary criticism as it constantly strives to enlarge its horizons and overcome limitations, be they of classical Comparative Literature, the postcolonial school, or new approaches to World Literature, I will argue in favour of radical aesthetic pluralism, and thus postulate readings that transcend the limitations of the *cultured* perspectives.

Contrary to various attempts at formulating the premises of universal aesthetic judgement—contrary even to postcolonial critical frameworks—such radical pluralism, respecting the spheres of obscurity and untranslatability, creates sufficient space for the recognition of idiosyncratic values of texts, including, as I will later exemplify, those of West African Pulaar literature. Tracing a possible continuation of the historical line of criticism, which has constantly striven to transform and adapt its theoretical premises to include greater and greater variety of literary creation, I will argue in favour of transindigenous and transcolonial approaches as means of drawing, in the minutest details, the global map of literatures.

THE EXPANDING HORIZONS

On the one hand, critical appreciation is rooted in an informed, educated, *cultured* horizon from which the aesthetic criteria for any valid, intersubjective judgement must come. On the other, there exists a persistent expectation that literary work will remain valid and valued beyond its 'locatedness,' the cultural, linguistic and geographic area where it originated. Even if the concept of universalism, as a reminder of Western pretension of symbolic hegemony, has been deconstructed and rejected, there appears, repeatedly and at various points of the globe, the expectation that literature will open

cultural horizons, contributing to some cross-cultural affinity.[1] This expectation remains valid, although the European—thus naturally Eurocentric—project of Comparative Literature, formulated by Goethe at the end of the eighteenth century, gave way at the beginning of the twenty-first century to the new conceptualisation of World Literature and the global understanding of literary studies. The *annus mirabilis* 2003 brought about two almost parallel developments: Spivak's daring statement of the "death" of Comparative Literature (understood as the downfall of the Eurocentric discipline)[2] and David Damrosch's globalising question: "What is World Literature?"[3]

I start my reflection over twenty years after Spivak's and Damrosch's seminal publications, and with even greater chronological distance to other works and ideas that have shaped Western literary studies. The exhaustion of paradigms grounded in resistance to symbolic dominance, such as postcolonial theory, is a natural development as cultures that once suffered colonial oppression embark on new paths of autonomous evolution and gradually disengage from colonial legacies. It is also important to notice that the idea of global validity of literature is no longer based on the criterion of taste connected to the pleasurable experience of reading as defined by Roland Barthes.[4] Rather, it is rooted in the ethical dimension exploited in the Schillerian concept of "aesthetic education," redesigned by Gayatri Spivak.[5] In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes distinguishes between two types of readerly experiences—*plaisir* (pleasure) and *jouissance* (bliss)—using them to critique traditional literary consumption. *Plaisir* refers to the comfortable enjoyment that a reader experiences when engaging with a text that aligns with their expectations, cultural codes and values. These texts are typically *lisible* ('readerly')—coherent, familiar and easy to consume. They reinforce identity, social norms and established ideologies. They satisfy but do not challenge. In contrast, *jouissance* (a complex French term that can mean bliss, orgasmic intensity or transgressive pleasure) involves a more intense, unsettling and transformative experience. It occurs with *scriptible* ('writerly') texts that are fragmented, experimental and challenge the cultural status quo.

Spivak, on the other hand, although drawing from the ethical premises of the postcolonial school, steers away from its classical formulations toward a broader understanding of the global age in which otherness and cultural distance are more important than hegemony and subalternity (a crucial concept Spivak herself contributed to postcolonial discourse). In the first decades of the new millennium, she reconsiders the purpose of reading literature in terms of ethical training rather than mere pleasurable experience. Her notion of 'aesthetic education' is a critical reworking of the concept originally associated with Romantic thinkers like Friedrich Schiller, who saw aesthetic education as a way to harmonise reason and emotion, and thus cultivate moral and political sensibility. Spivak transforms this tradition to suit not only her postcolonial, deconstructive and feminist commitments, but also the requirements of a global mindset. For her, aesthetic education is not about cultivating taste or appreciation of beauty, but about training the imagination in ways that foster ethical responsibility and action, despite large distances and cultural differences. It helps individuals imagine the world from others' perspectives—particularly those of the disenfranchised and subaltern, but also culturally alien.

Gayatri Spivak argues that contemporary education systems—especially in neoliberal and globalised contexts—prioritise utilitarianism, technical skills and market-driven

outcomes. Aesthetic education, in her view, works against this by nurturing slow, careful, non-instrumental thinking. In her work—especially in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalisation* (2012)—Spivak uses aesthetic education as a framework for thinking about how to make ethical and political engagement across cultural boundaries possible, without unduly appropriating or speaking for the cultures not one's own. Aesthetic education creates the space for the other to be heard, if not understood, and is a necessary preparation for learning from the other, which includes unlearning privilege and habits of domination. It is aligned with deconstruction, where the goal is not the mastery of content but openness to difference, otherness and ethical discomfort. Literature enables the kind of *teleopoiesis* (making-a-distant-other-present) that is central to her ethical project. Overall, Spivak's aesthetic education is designed not merely as a basis of critical judgement but as a transformative process that trains the ethical imagination through engagement with literature and the humanities, fostering responsibility to the other in a world dominated by instrumental reason and neoliberal globalisation.

In a broad chronological perspective of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the evolution of ways of understanding the importance of literature, marked by the influential conceptualisations of Barthes and Spivak, accompanies the multifaceted process of cross-cultural broadening of horizons and expectations related to literature. Individual modes of reading are less and less *cultured*, or informed and predetermined by received legacies, ethnicity, class and geographic location. At the same time, they acquire an ethical dimension that decentres purely aesthetic questions. With *teleopoiesis*, cultural distance shortens. Cultures become mutually more visible and accessible, without becoming entirely transparent to each other. Ties of cultural identification loosen, making the reading subject migrate through various aesthetic locations and sets of coordinates. This process has profound implications in matters of judgement.

HOW IS CROSS-CULTURAL CRITICAL JUDGEMENT POSSIBLE?

In *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), one of the most influential works of literary theory in the twentieth century, Northrop Frye attempted to create a systematic, coherent framework for literary criticism, drawing on four key aspects of literature: modes, symbols, myths and genres. His goal was to move beyond impressionistic or ideological criticism toward a structure rooted in literature itself. Hypothetically, such a structure could be universal. The approach was designed to free criticism from being historically—and, in a way, also culturally—contingent. The modal classification of literary texts based on the power of the hero (superior or inferior to the power of other men, gods or environmental factors) or the theory of symbols based on five levels of meaning (from literal to anagogic) seem abstract enough to encompass a great variety of literary texts. This is why it provides a tempting framework, or at least a starting point, for the critical appreciation of global literature(s). Certainly, pre-structuralist and structuralist approaches more generally were rooted in Western literary patrimony. Yet Frye (like Auerbach[6] and other giants of twentieth-century literary criticism) contemplated a broad chronology from Graeco-Roman Antiquity to twentieth-century realism. In his attempt to encompass a variety of potential texts in a hypothetical 'grammar' of the mythical, he was opening a gate to even more varied forms of literature. Through the new discipline of ethnology, which

in Frye's time introduced materials from outside the Western world, it was hoped that non-European mythical narratives would intersect with the archaic beginnings of Mediterranean literatures.

Undoubtedly, Frye's aim was to maximise the divergence of aesthetic choices that could be approached through his definition of criticism. Yet in the decades that followed, the adaptability and limitations of his abstract model (and similar systems created by other scholars) were repeatedly put to the test. One recent circumstance appears as a particular challenge: the chronological, geographical and cultural diversity of forms of literature entering scrutiny within transnational academia has grown exponentially. Any "anatomy of criticism" today must be inscribed in an ever-broadening horizon.

The process of testing theories across cultural contexts has not proved twentieth-century literary theory wrong; it has merely made patent the necessity of adding new chapters to the approaches that departed from what was essentially a single line of tradition. Twentieth-century critics strived to capture the Mediterranean beginnings of the European evolution and follow it along a continuous, undisturbed timeline. The current challenge of global literary theory is incomparably more complex. Instead of a clear, unified line of tradition, it looks like a network or a bundle of timelines, contaminating, criss-crossing, patchy, disappearing and reappearing over geographic expanse and incommensurable chronologies. Contemporary literary theory, to become truly global, must deal with a far greater number of factors; it must contemplate multiple literary histories and describe their mutual connectivities. Obviously, such a discipline is still in the making. Its ambitious aims stand far apart from existing approaches that often merely collect those predominantly Western-centric methodological insights that might eventually 'go global' and re-employ them for World Literature criticism.[7]

Contrasting boldly with Eurocentric Comparative Literature, World Literature studies, as they were designed at the beginning of the twenty-first century, were supposed to be a confluence of different cultural traditions and lines of aesthetic development rather than an emanation of the Western tradition in literary criticism. However, the heterogeneous forms, contents and points of view that make World Literature 'worldly' constitute a vast, unexplored field. Perceptions of 'worldliness' range from appetite to frustration. David Damrosch has speculated on a global literature (as distinct from World Literature) "that might be read solely in airline terminals, unaffected by any specific context whatever." Not only would this literature be deprived of any defining locatedness, but it would be read "in ways profoundly shaped by home-country norms."[8] Such a global literature and definition of reading experience would thus be situated on the antipodes of radical aesthetic pluralism that I search to define and defend in this article. It would also be distant from the ethical dimension of *teleopoiesis* as the representation of and advocacy for distant otherness.

In many ways, the concept of World Literature emerges—through the intellectual mediation of Gayatri Spivak—from the deconstruction and the ethical legacy of Jacques Derrida and his concept of hospitality. The very notion of *a* (rather than *the*) world implied in the name of the discipline is associated with the advent of otherness, which should be admitted and welcomed in the spirit of Derridean hospitality. It is the coming of the radically other that "opens a world" and leads, to use the phrasing of Pheng Cheah, to "a conception of the world as the text … a nontotalizable whole constituted

by a movement of overflowing."[9] Adopting the welcoming attitude grounded in the perception of dynamic diversity and 'overflowing' abundance, Cheah is sceptical about a static notion of 'the world.' Derived from or shaped by the historical experience of expansion, colonialism and the globalised economy, such a notion implies unhindered traversability of geographical space. This post-expansionist vision of 'the world' privileges or presupposes the facility for penetration, translatability, transparency and knowability of cultural presuppositions. On the other hand, a recent popular usage of the term 'worlding' rather than 'world' reflects the priority given to fluxes and dynamic processes of becoming over static realities and cultural status quo. The uncontrollable 'overflowing,' or the 'worlding' of World Literature—its dynamic aspect differentiating it from the old, Goethean vision of *Weltliteratur* as 'the great conversation' involving Greek and Roman classics—is conditioned by the emergence of radical aesthetic pluralism.

As we pass from the geographic to the aesthetic plane, it becomes apparent that the 'smoothness,' 'traversability' or penetrability of literary territories have never been evident. Each literary tradition is characterised by a varying degree of opaqueness, rather than transparency. It builds up its own set of codified genres and imageries, ideological starting points, criteria and definitions of literary mastery. Does it mean that critical judgement in World Literature is impossible, or possible only as an intuitive appreciation of what resonates with an individual criticising subject, working privately beyond the frontiers of their *cultured* erudition and competence? Does the aesthetics of 'overflow' in World Literature impose fluidity of criteria? If informed, professional judgements reinforce cultural hegemonies, should not they rather be deconstructed than practised? Or rather, does the task of deconstructing hegemonies necessarily imply a suspension of judgement? These questions put to the test the flexibility of new theoretic approaches created to describe the full scale of complexity implied in a truly globalised perception of literary studies.

TRANSPARENCY AND CIRCULATION VS "UNTRANSLATABLE CROSSINGS"

Just as we saw in relation to the crucial term '(the/a) world,' in global academic literary studies there coexist two functional, partially overlapping understandings of the concept 'World Literature.' One apprehends World Literature as a unified, globalised circulation of texts that are untranslatable and, as a consequence, barely say those things which may be expressed in the dominant languages and aesthetic codes. The spheres of culture-specific obscurity—related to untranslatable concepts, idiosyncratic aesthetic criteria or simply exotic literary genres—remain outside the scope of the globalised concept of literariness and literary communication based on translatability and circulation of translated texts. Such a sphere of 'marketable' (and thus digestible), readable, shared texts produces a space of clarity, understanding and shared values, but also one of silencing. This is why Aamir Mufti admits that World Literature is a fallacious construct, derived from the old, imperial image of the world "as a continuous and traversable space."[10] A second, fuller, truer apprehension of World Literature must admit zones of opacity, complexity, idiomatic concepts and values unshared.

The very phenomenon of global circulation—if this is regarded as the phenomenon making World Literature possible—is based on a shared model of *cultured* critical

judgement and involves only those texts which fall into the paradigms that such judgement is nimble enough to accommodate. The marketable World Literature, put on sale by leading global editing companies, reflects the status quo derived from Western symbolic hegemony, and so does the most widespread practice of literary criticism in transnational academia. Evidently, in this everyday practice of reading World Literature, shaped essentially by the postcolonial school, the paradigms appear to be plural. Nonetheless, I argue that the literary landscape shaped by postcoloniality has its own insufficiencies and shortcomings, necessitating the transcolonial approach I address below. Postcolonial studies are essentially based on power asymmetries and differentials rather than horizontal relationships of co-existence and co-creation. They assume as their starting point the centrality of colonialism as a key historical phenomenon enabling the transition of non-Western cultures towards modernity and modern literature (destined to replace traditional oralities, performativities or alternative forms of penmanship). Certainly, postcolonial criticism advocated pluralism, yet typical postcolonial literature, striving to deconstruct the dominant languages, discourses and sets of aesthetic criteria, remained in their orbit. This is why the pluralism achieved inside the postcolonial framework is still an order of magnitude lower than the effective aesthetic plurality created by humanity. The postcolonial school opened new windows upon global landscapes, yet many idiosyncratic forms of creativity, thriving in the margins of colonial dynamics, remained invisible.

Also, we are far from encompassing all the variety of forms of literary expression that exist among human cultures, because the popularity and productivity of the postcolonial school contributed to a widespread academic practice that derived from formerly dominant aesthetic values. It privileged (as the object of studies) those forms of expression that are rooted, however remotely, in Western tradition or share common denominators with it. As a consequence, in perspectives that take the postcolonial status quo as their starting point, World Literature remains, to quote Emily Apter, a discipline policing “untranslatable crossings” in which cultural idiolects are reduced to those categories that may be expressed in the dominant languages.[11]

An even broader, more encompassing and problematic understanding of World Literature is possible, if we agree—and intellectually dare—to include dark, unexplored and untranslatable spheres of radical aesthetic pluralism. Such an endeavour may come at the price of tolerating the unknowability and obscurity of texts, as well as essential incompetence of the scholar or critic. Stepping beyond the tradition of *cultured* readings, they must present any judgement as suspended or provisory, striving to acknowledge and describe—yet not necessarily to include into a coherent totality—the disparity of origins, histories, genres, imageries and culture-specific criteria of aesthetic appreciation. As Daniel Heath Justice of the Cherokee Nation has said: “It’s about the ways we understand that vexed and vexing idea of *literature*, and how assumptions about what is or is not ‘literary’ are used to privilege some voices and ignore others.”[12] The stake of provisory practice of *uncultured* reading, at least initially, is purely negative. Its aim is to deconstruct any concept of ‘the literary’ that would fall short to include manifestations of human creativity, fostering the fallacious understanding of World Literature.

TRANSINDIGENOUS AND TRANSCOLONIAL UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF WORLD LITERATURE

World Literature in the latter sense of the term—the inclusive, yet often obscure sphere of radical pluralism, reflecting the complexity, disparity and precariousness of human expression—poses an additional challenge to any project of literary criticism, yet creates fertile ground for transindigenous and transcolonial approaches. Transindigenous studies is already a recognised field that explores relationships, solidarities and intellectual exchanges among Indigenous peoples across geographic, national and cultural boundaries. Over the last decade or so, its methodological consistency has been provided by such scholars as Chadwick Allen.[13] Transcoloniality, on the other hand, is a recent concept,[14] built on an awareness of the exhaustion of the postcolonial approaches, based on the recognition of power differentials and exploiting the implications of oppressive vertical and hierarchical structures. Rather than leading to successful healing of cultures, 'postcoloniality' as a state of mind reaffirmed the opposition between hegemony and subalternity, and led to the further proliferation of mechanisms of oppression in a new cultural status quo that Achille Mbembe defined as "postcolony."[15] As an emergent philosophical notion (rather than merely a term for a given chronology or point in cultural evolution), transcoloniality moves beyond the confrontational posture of decolonial philosophy.[16] The old premises of resistance, opposition or protest are replaced by a more peaceful, harmonious philosophy. Transcolonial studies and literary criticism strive to make visible the horizontal structures that were omitted by postcolonialism, privileging networks, partnerships, co-creativity and coexistence (exemplified in the African notion of Ubuntu).[17]

Here, I would like to reflect further on transcoloniality as a viable concept of literary criticism. Its core consists of the idea of closing the colonial-decolonial-postcolonial cycle in local cultural histories, achieving a stage of healing in which the historical fact of colonisation is no longer treated as the central, determining factor. Transcolonial cultures develop a clear awareness of their deep temporality—a past that lies beyond Westernised notions of history and time. The Western tendency is to build up shallow time perspectives limited by the milestones of colonial chronology, from so-called 'discovery' to settlement, further developments, events and consequences that hardly reach beyond the boundaries established by the essentialised coloniality.[18] The development of a concept of deep temporality, on the other hand, consolidates and valorises formerly marginalised legacies. Traditional modalities of expression, genres of oral literature or currents of thought that developed in the shadow of the mainstream colonial history of countries and regions, and that were often silenced or simply absent in the postcolonial literary awakenings, may now appear in the limelight. Tanscoloniality may also be a nimble tool for the study of minoritarian ethnic/tribal cultures that stood apart from decolonial movements and postcolonial projects of nation-building, and, further, in critical Indigenous studies, as an intellectual and aesthetic response to colonial realities that have not been satisfactorily resolved through successive phases of 'decolonisation.' As a tool of literary criticism, the concept of transcoloniality helps to distinguish and valorise the overlapping layers of expression, often masking or making invisible one another. It privileges the ultraminor voices rooted in deep temporalities that differ, by their specific aesthetic idioms, from the dominant strands of postcolonial literature—often produced in the same countries and regions—that enter without any hindrance the global routes of circulation of translated literature.

TRANSCOLONIALITY AS A CONSOLIDATION OF LEGACIES

Transcoloniality as a process of healing involves a novel approach to the patrimonialisation of literary expression (independently of its character or modes of transmission, such as oral, written or through digital records). A closer look at a West African example may help to understand the stakes and utility of a transcolonial approach in fostering aesthetic abundance and preserving the diversity of human expression against the often cited danger of the "white noise" or "global babble"[19] of World Literature degenerating into a standardised, interchangeable form of literary expression marketed by international editing houses. The global omnipresence and unhindered accessibility of standard postcolonial literature tends to hide minor presences, the idiomatic expression of marginalised cultures. The case of literature in Pulaar is exemplary in this context. Fulani (Fulfulde, Fulɓe) is a nomadic, semi-nomadic or sedentary ethnic group inhabiting the Sahara and Sahel from the westernmost tip of the African continent to the gates of Sudan. In totality, this dispersed ethnic group encompasses, according to various estimates, between 25 and 40 million people. Nonetheless, the Fulani are not majoritarian in any territory. This predominantly Islamicate population adopted written expression in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, due to non-colonial factors and processes, such as the expansion of Sufi brotherhoods. Their literary production, in Arabic, or in Pulaar written in Arabic script, was occasionally studied by the colonisers with whom this ethnic group came into contact: the English, French and Portuguese, who encountered the Fulani in their minuscule West African colony, today Guinea-Bissau. Already in 1948, José Mendes Moreira enriched his monograph on the Fulani from the region of Gabu not only with a tentative grammar of Pulaar but also a translation of some fragments of their *tarika*—historical writings, written on coarse, locally produced "marabou paper."[20] Nonetheless, the early scholars introducing the study of postcolonial literature in Portugal did not imagine any possible continuity between this tradition of penmanship and 'literature' as they understood this concept. No wonder that they discoursed on the scarcity of literary expression in Guinea-Bissau,[21] and, further, accentuated the link between colonial history and the emergence of modern literature.[22] Nonetheless, traditional penmanship gave rise to contemporary literature in Pulaar, relying on the Fulani diaspora and transnational networks of cultural activists. Mélanie Bourlet narrates her encounter with this largely invisible yet vivacious literary reality spreading across Senegal, Mauritania, France and beyond. At the same time, she accentuates the community-building aspect of literary creativity and circulation. Books in Pulaar create a transnational network of their own, including "sites of militancy that could be incarnated in a single individual, an association, a suburb, a neighbourhood, a building, or a private publisher."[23]

As Bourlet admits, the emergence and development of new Pulaar writing may be closely associated with circumstances of migration and the literacy courses provided to immigrant workers in Europe. Nonetheless, the rapid succession of such biographical events as learning how to write and the decision to develop one's own literary creation testifies to the existence and vitality of a cultural background in which penmanship is highly valorised. This legacy, awaiting consolidation, makes possible the emergence of such figures as Baylaa Kulibali, an immigrant worker in France and the author of the autobiographical narration *Nguurndam Tumaranke* (The Life of a Foreigner), published in fragments in 1981 and 1983, and in its complete form in 1991.[24] According to Bourlet, "it is marked by a sober writing style that reflects the author's project to unmask

the difficult life conditions of immigrant workers," provoking spontaneous emulation as other immigrants shared the desire to write about their own experiences.[25]

Questions of taste and cultural identity appear as tightly interwoven in this context. For individuals and communities involved in the preservation of this West African legacy, the literature in Pulaar is significant enough to justify considerable investment of their—most probably rather meagre—resources. It is 'good' enough to be highly valued, appreciated and carefully preserved. At the same time, virtually none of those books is likely to enter the dominant networks of global circulation. It is 'not good enough' to interest the mainstream publishers and marketers of literature. These contradictory judgements have less to do with the degree to which the Fulani authors master their means of expression, and more with the fact that those means remain culturally idiomatic. Contemporary literature in Pulaar, written in the Latin alphabet since the 1960s, includes poetry in free verse (an innovation in relation to traditional genres derived from broader Islamicate tradition), fiction and autobiographical narratives, maintaining a minoritarian capability of challenging the major literary traditions, such as the Arabic, French or even Portuguese.

Pulaar literature remains at the margins of the majoritarian editing industry, relying instead on networks of activism. The motivations of authors and readers may be associated not with factors, such as the 'beauty' of the writing or the expectation of financial profit, that move the mainstream book market, but with the high valorisation of penmanship and reading as such, deeply rooted in traditional culture. At the same time, the intertextual relations of the contemporary texts with the legacy of Pulaar epics and the broader world of West African *griots* (Mandinga and Fulani storytellers) make them hard to understand for readers unfamiliar with this tradition. These texts require a literary taste that radically diverges from what might be seen as the standardised expectation of global readers (shaped by such forces as Western-centric postcolonial writing and globalisation of the novel as the main literary genre). A Pulaar text may be rooted in oral tradition and styled as a parody of celebrated West African epics, requiring a reader to recognise the references to appreciate the comedic effect. Through this requirement of a *cultured* reading—yet a reading that is radically decentred, not only in relation to Eurocentric paradigms but also to globalised literary standards, shaped by major literary traditions—Pulaar writing brings about aesthetic pluralism.

The Fulani pastoralists, evicted from their environment by the climate change affecting the Sahel since the 1960s, illustrate the transversal identities that characterise a globalised world. Their peculiar literature, just like their often unwelcome presence as economic migrants, may be considered unpalatable from the hegemonic, Eurocentric perspective. However, the artistry of writers in Pulaar grows out of a significant, coherent, multisecular legacy that lasted and developed at the margins of colonisation. Transcolonial consolidation of this patrimony broadens the horizons of aesthetic pluralism and contributes to aesthetic diversity, against the perception of World Literature as an aesthetically featureless 'white noise.'

The idiomatic West African legacy of topics and imagery is adapted to contemporary conditions and problems, such as the circumstances of migration. Certainly, migration loosens the ties of the traditional society. Yet literature, be it written or oral (transmitted by modern electronic means), helps to tighten the bonds once again. The niche repertoire of forms and imagery characterising the Fulani expression paradoxically

serves this purpose of rebuilding the community. In doing so, it may proliferate in the modest micro-scale of the nomadic and diasporic communities, at the margins of major roads of circulation of World Literature that imply translation, vast presence on the global book market, recognition through a system of international literary prizes and—last but not least—abundant academic reception and criticism.

Further, micro-scale movements, carried by diasporas or finding transindigenous resonance in distant locations, can go as global as many a sample of mainstream literary production. Critical appreciation of such phenomena is crucial for the construction of aesthetic pluralism. Just as they defy judgement in global literary criticism, they generate the dynamism of 'worlding', the constant movement that 'overflows' any static definition of literariness and taste, as well as readers' and critics' horizons of expectations.

CONCLUSION

This article has argued for the necessity of a redefined, transcolonial notion of aesthetic judgement. Fostering novel criteria of what is valid and worth preserving, transcolonial judgement must correspond to the notion of radical aesthetic pluralism. A transcolonial notion of 'the literary,' abdicating post-hegemonic aspirations of universal translatability, clarity and shared criteria, relies instead on transindigenous solidarity to consolidate divergent legacies. Such bodies of texts as Pulaar literature may or may not go global; the aim is not to make them globally available. The desired outcome of the criticism I have tried to sketch in this paper is rather to foster such a vision of global aesthetic pluralism that would not only acknowledge the existence or value of minor and ultraminor forms of expression, but understand World Literature as a tapestry woven with such fine threads. It is not any particular example of minor literature that is to be appreciated, but the endless variety and proliferation of the forms of literary creativity.

Radical aesthetic pluralism acknowledges the absence of shared coordinates of judgement, accepting and actively protecting the proliferation of varied types of literature at the margins of major global trends, schools of thought, criticism and academic practice. What I have called *cultured* reading—rooted in deep time perspective, informed, yet deliberately culture-specific—may be reconstructed inside the framework of radical pluralism. Such reading may be aligned with the exigence of a radical pluralisation of horizons, faithfully tracing the intricacies of disruptive traditions. Their coexistence beyond symbolic hegemony is rather an ethical postulate than a description of an objective reality. Power differentials, nonetheless, are counterbalanced by the advocacy of equal rights. The academic practice of contemplating obscurity, rather than exploiting translatability and clarity, can play a major role in this ethical programme of granting aesthetic abundance to all human beings. The vision of World Literature that emerges from such a process of criticism and exploration has the potential to achieve an unprecedented level of complexity, far beyond the boldest dreams (or nightmares) of the early makers of the 'universal canon.' Those established histories, so persuasively narrated in Damrosch's *What Is World Literature?*—describing the thrill of the colonial discoverers of the clay tablet libraries in Nineveh or the missionaries learning about the excellence of Aztec poetry and striving to Christianise it—usually spoke of destruction or undue appropriation. The new notion of horizontal solidarity may serve better the cause of preservation and consolidation of divergent legacies.

Ewa A. Łukaszyk is a former professor of the leading universities in Poland (Jagiellonian University and the University of Warsaw). Originally specialising in Lusophone literatures, she evolved toward global literary studies and the notion of transcoloniality. Currently, she continues her research on Lusophone writing financed by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Portugal and advances toward a new teaching challenge at the University of Ostrava (Czech Republic).

1. To give an example, Francesca Orsini has recently analysed the quest for universal values through literature in the Indian cultural context of the early decades of the twentieth century, analysing debates included in such periodicals as Ramanand Chatterjee's *Modern Review*, translations, publishers' series, and anthologies shaping an Indian understanding of what World Literature might be and what is India in broader literary context. See Francesca Orsini, "World Literature, Indian Views", *The Locations of (World Literature)*, eds Francesca Orsini and Laetitia Zecchini (Leiden: Brill, 2024): 76-101. In her contribution to the same volume, Zecchini showed how the Bombay poetic generation in the 1960s claimed equality and reciprocity with other literatures, rather than being "thwarted" by the Western cultural hegemony. See Laetitia Zecchini, "Indian Literature and World Literature Remade. From the PEN All-India Center to Arvind Krishna Mehrotra", *The Locations of World Literature*, 102-126.
2. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).
3. David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).
4. Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*. Translated by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975).
5. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012).
6. See Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953).
7. Even the latest publications striving to globalise literary theory seem to be quite limited in their Western-centric scope, giving the impression that, although literature is diverse and widespread in its manifestations, the only available theory is still the predominantly Western construct, with such chapters as postcolonial studies, psychoanalysis, or phenomenology. Those theoretical frameworks are supposed to transcend national boundaries and contribute to a shared intellectual discourse. See Jeffrey R. Di Leo, ed., *Theory as World Literature* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2025).
8. Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*, 25.
9. Pheng Cheah, *What Is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016): 161.
10. Aamir R. Mufti, *Forget English!: Orientalisms and World Literatures* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016): 5.
11. See Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London: Verso Books, 2013).
12. Daniel Heath Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018), xvii.
13. Chadwick Allen, *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).
14. The adjective "transcolonial" began to be used in the late 1990s to describe colonial transfers or solidarities between colonised elites in regions with strong pre-colonial ties, such as Southeast Asia or the Maghreb. It can also refer to interactions or exchanges between different colonies, whether within the same empire or across different colonial empires. Nonetheless, the recent elaboration of the notion of transcoloniality goes in a different direction.

15. See Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
16. Joseph C. Agbakoba and Marita Rainsborough, eds. *Beyond Decolonial African Philosophy: Africanity, Afrotopia, and Transcolonial Perspectives* (London – New York: Routledge, 2024).
17. Ubuntu is an African philosophical concept that emphasises communalism, interconnectedness, and shared humanity. The term comes from the Nguni Bantu languages of Southern Africa (e.g., Zulu and Xhosa), and it is often translated as: "I am because we are" or: "A person is a person through other persons". At its core, Ubuntu promotes values such as compassion, reciprocity, dignity, respect, and harmony in social relationships. It is influential in African ethics, political theory, theology, and education—and has gained international attention, particularly through figures like Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu, who invoked Ubuntu in post-apartheid South African reconciliation efforts.
18. Ewa A. Łukaszyk, "(Post)colonial chronopolitics and mapping the depth of local time(s) in global literary studies: an itinerary to Guinea-Bissau," *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* 7.2 (2021): 69-83.
19. The expression "the global babble" has been coined by Janet Abu-Lughod and frequently employed ever since in the debate on World Literature as a standardised literary form, often created with globalised market, translation, and circulation in mind. See Janet Abu-Lughod, "Going Beyond Global Babble," in *Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. Anthony D. King (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991): 131–138.
20. José Mendes Moreira, *Fulas do Gabú* (Bissau: Centro de Estudos da Guiné Portuguesa, 1948): 264 ff.
21. This misleading idea of Guinea-Bissau as an "empty space" originally appeared in Manuel Ferreira, *No Reino de Caliban: Antologia Panorâmica da Poesia Africana de Expressão Portuguesa* (Lisboa: Plátano, 1975): 319.
22. See f.ex. Pires Laranjeira, *Literatura Calibanesca* (Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 1985), 10, where the author defends that "simply by being written in European languages, African literature stems from the aftermath of colonialism. In other words: without colonialism, without the discoveries and overseas expansion, it would not have been possible".
23. Mélanie Bourlet, "Cosmopolitanism, Literary Nationalisms, and Linguistic Activism. A Multi-local Perspective on Pulaar," in *The Locations of (World) Literature*, 40.
24. Baylaa Kulibali, *Nguurndam tumaranke* (Paris: Binndi e jannde, 1991).
25. Bourlet, "Cosmopolitanism…", 45.