

Allegory, Geography, Gandhi

The book project within which this paper operates addresses the adoption of romance as a narrative form in the early twentieth century to articulate an internationalist political vision. I discuss W. E. B. Du Bois's Dark Princess (1928), Cornelia Sorabji's Love and Life Behind the Purdah (1902), and Rabindranath Tagore's Gora (1910), as well as non-fiction by those authors and fiction by Anand, Forster, Kipling, Steel, Woolf, etc. By internationalism I am referring to a political practice of the early twentieth century which found its instantiation in the long and sometimes bewildering list of congresses happening in this period: the Pan-African Congresses of the 1920s; the Universal Races Congress, London, 1911; the League of Non-Native Peoples, Lausanne, 1916; the Congress of the Peoples of the East, Baku, 1920; the League Against Imperialism, Brussels, 1927; and so forth. These imaginative convergences of colonial peoples are the product of a moment within which empire was very much a global phenomenon, and yet the old imperial powers seemed precarious in their control. Under these circumstances, agitation for regional or communal interests took an international and often unpredictable form. From Esperanto to the Theosophical Society, from the Khilafat Movement to Kakuzo Okakura's Ideals of the East, the early twentieth century witnessed a variety of approaches to how the world might be negotiated beyond racism and colonial oppression.¹ Internationalist in their influences and their approaches, these movements were also remarkably diverse in how they figured the international and how they attempted to translate peoples and places across vast cultural

¹ I intentionally do not include Garveyism under this rubric because of its race-specific national form.

differences. Internationalism, after all, demanded a shared idiom. Internationalism was thus marked by two linked concerns. The first was the necessity of multiple, simultaneous, and mutually intelligible semiotic productions across cultural boundaries, or what is usually called translation. The second, which operated in tandem with the first, was the need to figure the international in compelling terms, which required, in addition, the figuration of cultures and nations to each other in keeping with internationalist goals. These twinned practices constitute what I propose as internationalism as transfiguration: a practice within which existing social realities are figured and disfigured, translated and mistranslated, to produce objects beyond cultural specificity in the pursuit of internationalist goals. Figurability refers to the representation of abstract social realities as narrative actants, whereas translation, both literal and cultural, indicates a set of problems around the transmission of meaning across codes. Transfiguration is the mode of internationalism in the early twentieth century, for this internationalism works not to carry meaning across cultural boundaries, but to produce new global orders of signification. In literature as in politics, internationalism aims not to represent political and social situations as they really are, but as they might be. Consequently, my current research focuses upon Gandhi's fast-and-loose narrative prose of 1928, Satyagraha in South Africa.

With the rise of modern colonialism and imperialism, internationalist structures became the foundation for imperial and anti-imperial projects alike. 1864 marks the moment in which internationalism first finds institutional form with the establishment of the International Working Men's Association, or the First International, in London. Immediately embracing a platform beyond race, religion, or nationality, the First International focused its attention upon colonialism in Europe, and on Ireland in particular. The Second International, established in 1896, focused more emphatically on questions of empire, endorsing the right of self-determination and

denouncing colonial expansion. Debates continued, however, around the appropriate mode of opposition to colonialism, and the appropriate form. Whereas the position identified with Rosa Luxemburg prioritized the international ideal of the working class over any sense of national interest or culture, that articulated by Otto Bauer embraced federalism and minority rights as the appropriate formation for a socialist order.² In practice, this amounted to debates that endorsed either self-determination or cultural autonomy, but not both, and which effectively fissured the Second International along regional lines.

These negotiations around internationalism were influentially articulated by Stalin in an 1913 essay, “Marxism and the National Question.” In positions soon to be adapted by the Soviet Union, Stalin advocated national self-determination but not, crucially, national cultural-autonomy.³ He argued for a global political order based on internationalism, and not on national federalism. Federalism, in Bauer’s theorization, is an attempt to bring together nations on the basis of their separate nation-ness, respecting their national autonomy, a method which Stalin forcefully decries as unworkable because of the constructed, artificial, and fundamentally bourgeois nature of national character. Internationalism, in contrast, is for Stalin the drawing together of the workers of various nations *not* through their specific national characters (a trope which is for Stalin more a myth) but through the universal nature of the condition of being

² The debates of the Second International regarding nationalism were split between, on the one hand, “the central parties, who saw national differences disappearing,” for “the Russian and Polish social democratic parties favored the interest of the transnational idea of the working class,” the position articulated by Rosa Luxemburg. On the other hand, however, “the socialist parties of the national minorities preferred Otto Bauer’s thesis of federalism, guaranteeing full cultural autonomy and minority rights,” and “saw socialism as the means through which the autonomy of national minorities could be restored.” Lenin’s position was one of national self-determination but against any federalism or cultural autonomy. He believed that national states were transient, to be transcended by the internationalist solidarity of the working class which would be produced by “a centralized party to educate the workers into the desire for a unified transnational proletariat.”

Robert J.C. Young, Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001) 120-1.

³ According to Stalin, self-determination is a component of radical democratization and includes the right of secession, and it promotes the full intellectual and political development of the worker. Cultural autonomy, in contrast, encourages artificial attempts to internally unify a nation, which works to ally the proletariat to the interests of the bourgeoisie.

“worker.” Marxist internationalism shifted the debates around the quiddity of the nation to the membership of the nation, understanding any and every nation as always split along class lines.⁴ Consequently, even within the question of self-determination, there were always two possible forms: “the bourgeois national, and the working class, which was at once national and international.” (Young 121) Internationalism here operated on the belief that nationalism was essentially a project of the bourgeoisie to solidify its control over particular markets; in Stalin’s memorable phrase: “The market is the first school in which the bourgeoisie learns its nationalism.” National culture, consequently, was not simply a project of cultural authenticity but a classed project as well, one aimed at aligning the interests of the proletariat with that of the bourgeoisie. This sense of a fissured nation⁵ led to a left stance against anti-colonial nationalism found its strongest articulation in the position of M. N. Roy during the ComIntern (the Third Communist International, 1919-1935), the Indian-born founder of the Communist Party of Mexico.⁶ The authors I consider (Du Bois and Tagore prominent amongst them) respond to the Marxist conundrum, in which the community consists of, at once, the bourgeois national, and the proletariat which is national and international. They do so, however, not through the assertion of

⁴ “Instead of Renan’s question, ‘what is the nation?’, Marx’s, Engels’, and Lenin’s was rather, ‘who is the nation?’ The nation was not identified as a single entity, but always as made up of two national cultures according to its fundamental class division.” Young, Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction 121.

⁵ This sense of a fissured nation is, of course, articulated in non-Marxist fora of the period as well. It appears, for instance, time and again in the work of Rabindranath Tagore, whose novels relentlessly chronicle a national movement led by the feudal landlords and petty bourgeoisie even as it attempts to fold in the bodies and loyalties of the poor and the peasantry. It is also, in a different sense, the nation articulated by the writings of W. E. B. Du Bois. Famous for his theorization of double consciousness, his writings persistently chronicle a national entity divided not only along lines of race but also along lines of respectability. And it is, finally, the national situation as articulated by Cornelia Sorabji, whose writing figures a community split not simply between Indian and British but also between men and women.

⁶ M. N. Roy argued that there was a contradiction because the bourgeois democratic movements were “nationalist in pursuit of their own class interests,” and that “the relative weakness of the bourgeoisie in the colonies” meant that “the masses should be led from the first by a revolutionary party that would eschew nationalism in favour of social revolution and the overthrow of foreign capital.” He also insisted, drawing on Marx’s position on Ireland, that the economic dependency of imperial powers on their colonies meant that revolution in Europe “depends entirely on the course of the revolution in the East.” These debates, and their compromises, are articulated in Lenin’s “Theses on the National and Colonial Questions” and in Roy’s “Supplementary Theses.” Young, Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction 131-2.

the universality of work but instead through the search for a term that would be, at once, national and international. For many of these authors, the solution to this search is the adoption of the romance narrative, with its seemingly universal referents to heterosexuality and sexual difference; the easy translatability of allegory as opposed to realism; the transhistorical ambitions of the mythic register, with its heroes and villains; and the aesthetics of desire delayed, as opposed to those of demands fulfilled.

Internationalism in this modernist frame was the search for a universal term that would hail peoples beyond national particularity: a project of transcendence for an ambitious modern age. It was thus very different, for instance, from Enlightenment universalisms, articulating not a preexisting commonality among all peoples but searching instead to create something that could be shared. In the search for a compass larger than those offered by national imaginaries, enthusiastic internationalists frequently sought refuge in spiritual language, as evidenced for instance by phenomenally successful internationalist movements like Theosophy.⁷ Yet if the Theosophists consolidated the international through a spiritual hierarchy and the Marxists did so through an appeal to proletarianism, the field of literature was preoccupied, before these questions of political representation, with those of aesthetic representation. International conferences and congresses debated questions of trans-regional or global representation through practices of presentation: the assembling of delegates, or even of the masses. The internationalism of literature, in contrast, struggled with the question of internationalist representation precisely through a representative medium: the written text. If the Second and Third Internationals aggregated a variety of people from around the globe and then debated the

⁷ For an overview of Theosophy's valency within Indian internationalism, see Gauri Viswanathan, "'Synthetic Visions': Internationalism and the Poetics of Decolonization," *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*, eds. Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005). For a discussion of Theosophy as a global discourse, see Srinivas Aravamudan, *Guru English* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006).

sort of internationalism there assembled, the literature of internationalism worked first to figure this grand collective, not simply to assemble it. The term “literary internationalism” thus refers at once to the internationalism of literature—the circulation of literary texts and figures across national lines—and the literature of internationalism—the figuration of internationalism as a social or political possibility. Literary internationalism is the ambitious attempt to do both.

By *romance*, I mean, in literary critical terms, a genre which marks its own distance from realism; which tends towards allegory (instead of symbolism) and the register of myth; which organizes its concerns around a temporality of desire and delay, of love and longing, frequently relying upon the narrative structure of the quest – Romance big R. I also mean, in popular parlance, the familiar trope of boy-meets-girl–romance little r—although this is not particularly relevant for Satyagraha in South Africa. Consequently, I will be using allegory here as the term of choice, by which I mean a relationship between signs that is not founded on any intrinsic unity between them.⁸ This discontinuity and seeming artificiality is what distinguishes allegory from symbolism, the latter term operating more strongly within realism and constituting the more valorized representative structure in modern literary practice.⁹ This is, in a sense, to revisit

⁸ In allegory we have “a relationship between signs in which the reference to their respective meanings has become of secondary importance. But... it remains necessary, if there is to be allegory, that the allegorical sign refer to another sign that precedes it. The meaning constituted by the allegorical sign can then consist only in the repetition... of a previous sign with which it can never coincide, since it is of the essence of this sign to be pure anteriority.” 207 The symbol is the product of the organic growth of form; in the world of the symbol, life and form are identical.... Its structure is that of the synecdoche, for the symbol is always a part of the totality that it represents. Consequently, in the symbolic imagination, no disjunction of the constitutive faculties takes place, since the material perception and the symbolical imagination are continuous, as the part is continuous with the whole. In contrast, the allegorical form appears purely mechanical, an abstraction whose original meaning is even more devoid of substance than its “phantom proxy,” the allegorical representative; it is an immaterial shape that represents a sheer phantom devoid of shape and substance. 201

⁹ With increasing suspicion of allegory’s artifice and excessive rationality, “The supremacy of the symbol, conceived as an expression of unity between the representative and the semantic function of language, becomes a commonplace that underlies literary taste, literary criticism, and literary history. ... The symbol is the product of the organic growth of form; in the world of the symbol, life and form are identical.... Its structure is that of the synecdoche, for the symbol is always a part of the totality that it represents. Consequently, in the symbolic imagination, no disjunction of the constitutive faculties takes place, since the material perception and the symbolical imagination are continuous, as the part is continuous with the whole. In contrast, the allegorical form appears purely mechanical, an abstraction whose original meaning is even more devoid of substance than its “phantom proxy,” the

Gayatri Spivak's critique of Foucault and Deleuze, whom she accuses of conflating and rendering synonymous political representation—as in a proxy—with aesthetic representation—as in a portrait, conflating *Vertreten* with *Darstellen* and ignoring, consequently, the crucial question of the relationship(s) between them.¹⁰ The difference, in Spivak's terms, between a portrait and a proxy, between rhetoric as trope and as persuasion, is the space wherein I stake the claim I am making here. These texts, by relying upon allegory and not symbolism, do *not* aim for the place of the subjects of which, the situations of which, they speak. Instead they adapt a certain temporal modality: by choosing the genre of the romance, with its structure of longing, of anticipation, these novels lay claim to the future. They provide a portrait of the present and a proxy for the future: a distorted and inaccurate portrait of an oppressive present, and an ecstatic and fictional proxy for a dreamt-of liberated future. This is perhaps most apparent, in the paper at hand, in a work like Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi*, which provides historical allegory in order to advance “a *future* history” of the nation, reflecting upon present national mobilisations through their very absence or marginalisation. (Green 42)

The ideological nexus with which the book project is most concerned is that between realism and nationalism. Much like critics who rely upon a notion of realism to theorize genres and modes like romance (Jameson *The Political Unconscious*), melodrama (Brooks), or

allegorical representative; it is an immaterial shape that represents a sheer phantom devoid of shape and substance.” Paul de Man, “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, revised ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) 189, 201.

¹⁰ Whereas Marx, particularly in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, exposed the “complicity of *Vertreten* and *Darstellen*” as the “place of practice,” in Foucault and Deleuze, “Two senses of representation are being run together: representation as “speaking for,” as in politics, and representation as “re-presentation,” as in art or philosophy.” But these, “within state formation and the law, on the one hand, and in subject-predication, on the other” are “related but irreducibly discontinuous.” The first is *vertreten*; the latter is *darstellen*; this is the difference” between a proxy and a portrait.” It is also the terms of “a much older debate: between representation or rhetoric as tropology and as persuasion. *Darstellen* belongs to the first constellation, *vertreten*—with stronger suggestions of substitution—to the second. . . . running them together, especially in order to say that beyond both is where oppressed subjects speak, act, and know *for themselves*, leads to an essentialist, utopian politics.” Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 275-77.

modernism (Lukács), I consider realism to be an ideologically consolidated central figure in all modern literary production. Insofar as what we recognize as realist prose operates as a recognizable attempt to replicate our existing social reality, such writing also reflects back upon us the presumptions and modes of thought which structure this social whole. Particularly in the early twentieth-century moment under discussion, realism is “not one style among others, it is the basis of literature; all styles (even those seemingly most opposed to realism) originate in it or are significantly related to it.” (Lukács 769) It is also, moreover, in an overdetermined or perhaps overtheorized relationship to nationalism. The realist novel works to create the homogenous, continuous, interchangeable space to which the nation lays claim in the production of nationalist discourse. The non-realist text, in contrast, refuses the production of such smooth cartographies, whether through allegory, romance, or melodrama. It produces, instead, the uneven space and oscillating temporality of internationalism, which proves as promisingly capacious as it is frustratingly unspecific.

Realism as I am using it here also refers to a specific form, particularly in questions of time, space, and character.¹¹ Characters in the realist novel are generally named as though they were individuals, just as the reader imagines herself an individual. In representing particular subjects rather than types or personae, they are depicted with a high degree of individuating detail: proper names, specific dates, background narratives that situate them as particular. In the development of setting, realism chooses not only specificity but also consistency and regularity. With regards to temporal structure: the realist novel develops a time structure that is attentive to minute changes in day-to-day life, producing the structure of quotidian modern time:

¹¹ I am drawing generally here on Ian P. Watt, The Rise of the Novel; Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding (Berkeley,: University of California Press, 1957).

homogenous, consistent, and empty of moral import.¹² The realism of modern fiction is distinct from but on a continuum with that of the other prose of modern reality, the newspaper.¹³ What distinguishes realism from sheer naturalism is the operation of the *symbol*: the documentation of reality alone, the accumulation of credible details, does not in itself correspond to realism, the style we recognize as a replication of our world.¹⁴ The location of the novel's diegesis is usually specified, and events unfold in this location in an even, consistent, cartographable space, one which is tangible in its specificity and reassuring in its reproducibility.

Realism, however, is only sometimes involved in internationalist dreaming. From Esperanto to civil disobedience, from pan-Africanism to pan-Asianism, internationalist thought and fiction dabbles in melodrama, in myth, and particularly in the romance. The choice of romance in the early twentieth century is an ideologically loaded one. As a vehicle of anachronism and asynchronicity, it is a form famously suitable to the storytelling needs of imperialism.¹⁵ Yet the imperial romance's effectivity lies, at least in part, in its ability to recode the unimaginable community of empire in terms of socially sanctioned forms of desire and

¹² Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1986).

¹³ Benedict Anderson argued that modernity's shift into Walter Benjamin's conception of homogenous, empty time is accompanied by the invention of the "meanwhile," which can be contrasted with what he describes as "the medieval conception of simultaneity-along-time" The novel invents the meanwhile, by having characters moving "at the same clocked, calendrical time" but unaware of each other; finally, Anderson argues, "The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history." Anderson's other imagining organ of the nation is, of course, the newspaper. Benedict Anderson, "Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism," *Theory of the Novel*, ed. Michael McKeon 422-3.

¹⁴ See generally Geörg Lukács, *Realism in Our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle*, World Perspectives (New York,: Harper & Row, 1971).

¹⁵ To commit to coevalness as a precondition of internationalism may be, given the radically unequal and disjunctive spaces of the world, productive of a necessary haunting in itself: a haunting not by mistakes in comprehension or translation, but by those cultural forms and modes that cannot but be less than contemporary with the internationalist project, accessed as that project is only by certain subjects in certain situations. In the fiction under consideration, India or South Africa may not be quite contemporaneous with England or the United States, and it may not be in a time which Westerners want to inhabit, but it is neither waiting nor bracketed, neither denied, delayed, nor abandoned. The quest temporality of romance takes the non-coeval nature of global political disjunction and vastly varying yet interconnected oppressions to resolve them into a single transfigurative present and future. The messianic moments of these fictions' final visions is the triumphant and melodramatic resolution of real political concerns into a shared and spectacular present.

pleasure, to “reorganiz[e] the materiality of colonialism into a narrative of perpetual longing and perpetual loss.” (Suleri 10). These operations are as effective for the internationalist romance as the imperial one, and they are even effective for Gandhi.¹⁶

In 1928, an imprisoned Gandhi begins to write a book that might be “helpful in our present struggle” to liberate India.¹⁷ This book, however, is not about the subcontinent at all, but about South Africa. Beginning with sections on “Geography” and “History,” Gandhi writes, not a “regular detailed history,” for which he has “neither the time nor the inclination,” but “a guide to any regular historian who may arise in the future.” (Gandhi 10) He provides, for instance, the specific dates of various legislative changes, but also claims that the black inhabitants of South Africa are escaped slaves from America—a fantastical assertion for which he provides no evidence. Between his praises of Boer bravery and his condemnation of un-British hypocrisy, Gandhi says: “The reader will note South African parallels for all our experiences in the present struggle to date. He will also see from this history that there is so far no ground whatever for despair in the fight that is going on.” (Gandhi 10)

¹⁶ The temporal disjunction embraced in the romance form, which famously assigns non-Western areas an ahistorical or primitive status, superficially resembles what Johannes Fabian famously termed “the denial of coevalty,” and what John Stuart Mill implied of the “waiting rooms of history.” Yet my comfort with the romance’s temporal disjunction stems from a suspicion that sometimes concepts travel across disciplinary boundaries without the supplementary materials that triggered their elaboration. Synchronicity is not the only modality of effective internationalism; coevalty, while desirable, is not identical to an imagined community’s “meanwhile.”

I am drawing here on Dipesh Chakrabarty’s reading of John Stuart Mill’s essays “On Liberty” and “On Representative Government.” See Chakrabarty, Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference 8. For the denial of coevalness, see Johannes Fabian, Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). For Fabian’s more recent discussion of his foundational work, see Johannes Fabian, “The Other Revisited,” Anthropological Theory 6.2 (2006).

¹⁷ The version of the book which I will discuss, and with which the world is most familiar, is of course itself a translation, from Gandhi’s original Gujarati to English by Valji Desai. Gandhi has personally revised this translation, and he assures the reader that it retains “the spirit of the original in Gujarati.” Desai, however, has acted not only as translator but also as editor: since the “original chapters” were all written from memory, some in Yeravda and some without, Desai “made a diligent study of the file of Indian Opinion and whenever he discovered slips of memory he has not hesitated to make the necessary corrections.” M.K. Gandhi, Satyagraha in South Africa, trans. Valji Govindji Desai (Madras: S. Ganesan, 1928) 7.

Our very understanding of satyagraha, however, proceeds through the construction of parallels: through metaphor, through analogy, and above all through allegory. The satyagrahis are repeatedly described as pilgrims (144, 176, 185), and later, briefly, as soldiers, invaders, and an army (180). Towards the end of the triumphal narrative, as Gandhi writes of the pilgrims, the analogies multiply further: the “voluntarily dead,” the mouse, the lamb, and even the lion.¹⁸ (189) The parable of the lion and the lamb is taken to exemplify the results of satyagraha; the slough of despondency is used to exemplify his emotional transitions during the struggle. (189, 144) The evocation of biblical allegory is clear, and so is the nature of the signification of satyagraha, particularly as desired for India. Gandhi cannot speak about satyagraha, his chosen subject, without speaking about something else.

These analogies, moreover, include a variety of subjects. Afrikaans, for instance, is “a patois derived from the Dutch as the Prakrits are derived from Sanskrit” (17); the relations between Indian settlers in south Africa and Britishers is alleged to be like “worms that settle inside wood and eat it up hollow”; the conflict between “the Boer generals” and “a handful of Satyagrahis” is “like a war between ants and the elephant who could crush thousands of them under each of his feet.” (144) “The Test” endured by Indians in South Africa has been that of the purification of gold.¹⁹ The satyagrahi is like a rope-dancer, though “if possible even more single-minded.”²⁰ Satyagraha itself is finally compared to the Ganga, advancing like a river with

¹⁸ “How long can you harass a peaceful man? How can you kill the voluntarily dead? ... If the mouse did not flee before the cat, the cat would be driven to seek another prey. If all lambs voluntarily lay with the lion, the lion would be compelled to give up feasting upon lambs. Great hungers would give up lion hunting if the lion took to non-resistance.” Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa* 189.

¹⁹ “The jeweler rubs gold on the touchstone. If he is not still satisfied as to its purity, he puts it into the fire and hammers it so that the dross if any is removed and only pure gold remains.” Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa* 194.

²⁰ “The ropedancer, balancing himself upon a rope suspended at a height of twenty feet, must concentrate his attention on the rope, and the least little error in so doing means death for him, no matter on which side he falls. ... a Satyagrahi has to be if possible even more single-minded than the rope-dancer.” Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa* 129.

tributaries spontaneously joining its course.²¹ Even his initial explanation of the Indian condition in South Africa relies upon a comparative frame. Through the institution of “coolie locations,” writes Gandhi, “the Indian became the Panchamas of the Transvaal,” complete with European fears of ritual contamination by them.²² The temporal oscillation of the allegorical text here pulls both regions forwards and backwards. The recent history of segregation in South Africa is an instantiation of ancient caste practices in India, yet the recent history of political struggle in the same area is a precursor of an Indian struggle to come. This complicates, for instance, seemingly commonsense analyses that “Africa functions as ... one of India’s nightmare pasts that it is trying to escape. As the colony was to the metropolis, so Africa is to India: belated, backward, haunting.” (Hofmeyr "The Idea of 'Africa' in Indian Nationalism: Reporting the Diaspora in *the Modern Review* 1907-1929" 61) The relationship between these colonies, rather, is one that must be repeatedly negotiated, oscillating between past, present, and future towards the narration of a single, triumphal, liberation narrative.

The lessons of satyagraha in South Africa begin with the subject of geography: a lesson, that is, on the geography of Africa, which begins with the assertion of pure size: “Africa is one of the biggest continents in the world,” from which “four or five Indias could be carved.” (11) This first paragraph then impresses upon us both the potential parallels and the failed parallels of this particular continental experience. Equatorial Africa, for instance, is so hot that Indians “cannot

²¹ “As the Ganga advances, other streams flow into it, and hence at the mouth it grows so wide that neither bank is to be seen and a person sailing upon the river cannot make out where the river ends and the sea begins. So also as a Satyagraha struggle progresses onward, many another element helps to swell its current, and there is a constant growth in the results to which it leads. ... The Ganga does not leave its course in search of tributaries. Even so does the Satyagrahi not leave his path which is sharp as the sword’s edge. But as the tributaries spontaneously join the Ganga as it advances, so it is with the river that is Satyagraha.” Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa* 129-30.

²² From 1886, “In all towns inhabited by Indians, these [new Indian] locations were selected in dirty places situated far away from the towns where there was no water supply, no lighting arrangement and no sanitary convenience to speak of. Thus the Indian became the Panchamas of the Transvaal. It can be truly said that there is no difference between these location and the untouchables’ quarters in India. Just as the Hindus believe that touching Dhodhs or residence in their neighborhood would lead to pollution, so did the Europeans in the Transvaal believe for all practical purposes that physical contact with Indians or living near them would defile them.” Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa* 29.

have any idea” of it, though he says in the next sentence that “the heat in the extreme south of India gives us some notion of it.” In a similar syntactic move, he asserts that “there are lands of great elevation in South Africa like Tibet or Kashmir, but”—as he quickly qualifies in the next clause of the same sentence—“these do not attain a height of ten to fourteen thousand feet as in Tibet.” Johannesburg, which forms the final topic of this opening paragraph, is “the golden city of South Africa” and an enchanted place for this narratorial incarnation of Gandhi:

Only fifty years ago, the site on which it now stands was desolate and covered with dry grass. But when gold mines were discovered, houses began to be built one after another, as if by magic, and today there are many handsome and substantial buildings. The wealthy people of the place have got trees from the more fertile tracts of South Africa and from Europe, paying as much as a guinea for a tree, and have planted them there. A traveller [sic] ignorant of this previous history would imagine that these trees had been there for all time. (Gandhi 11)

Johannesburg thus is a site of miracles, within which the transformation of not only the built landscape, “as if by magic,” but also of the natural one has created a site which erases history. The hypothetical traveller who closes this opening paragraph views the trees of Johannesburg as though they, and perhaps the “handsome and substantial buildings” amongst them, “had been there for all time.” This miracle of modernisation and settlement, what might perhaps be termed “civilisation,” is one that erases a deeper history of desolation and dry grass, happening moreover as though without human agency. For Gandhi it is not even “gold” but “gold mines” which are discovered, and houses are built in the passive tense, in a material landscape devoid of human actors. The “wealthy people” only make an appearance when it comes to the transplanting of trees. Gandhi then speaks of the populace of the city: “It would be no exaggeration to say that the citizens of Johannesburg do not walk but seem as if they ran. No one has the leisure to look at any one else, and every one is apparently engrossed in thinking how to amass the maximum wealth in the minimum of time!” (Gandhi 12) He does so, however, from

the perspective of the impression they would make upon “a visitor from Pretoria.” For the imagined student of this text, the aspiring satyagrahi in India, distinctions of Pretoria and Johannesburg are arguably immaterial. For the text itself, however, in its narration of South African satyagraha, these details of geographical variety seem to be crucial.

Restricting himself not to the description of “all the parts of South Africa” but only “those which are connected with our subject-matter,” Gandhi proceeds in the second paragraph of this chapter to deliver a particular geographical scene, one which touches upon the most familiar urban centres and mining centers of South Africa in the early twentieth century. “Africa,” he asserts before proceeding to this description, “is under the Portuguese, the rest under the British.” The climate of Durban, he explains, “is somewhat like that of Bombay, although rather colder”; the diamonds of the Transvaal, he mentions, are manifold times larger than the Kohinoor or the Russian crown jewels. Gandhi’s fascination with the intervention of settlers upon the natural environment, as in the marvels of the trees of Johannesburg, is further reflected amidst his praise for the agriculture of South Africa, which he claims is its main industry. This agriculture, moreover, has been informed by Indian settlement. Just as the wealthy people of Johannesburg brought trees “from the more fertile tracts of South Africa and from Europe,” so the Indian settlers brought trees with them, too. As Gandhi asserts, “It is impossible that there should be no mangoes in places inhabited by Indians. Indians planted mango trees in South Africa and consequently mangoes also are available in considerable quantities. Some varieties of these can certainly compete with the best mangoes of Bombay.” (Gandhi 12)

Gandhi completes his geography lesson with ample praise for South Africa—“Not only has Nature showered her other gifts upon this country, but she has not been stingy in beautifying it with a fine landscape” (12)—and the beauty of Cape Town and Table Mountain in particular,

which, “Not being too high, it does not inspire awe. People are not compelled to worship it from afar, but build their houses upon it and live there. Young and old, men and women, fearlessly move about the whole mountain, which resounds every day with the voices of thousands.”

(Gandhi 13) Similarly, when it comes to water bodies, what is inadequacy in a comparative frame becomes an occasion for South African resourcefulness. Because “South Africa cannot boast of such mighty rivers as the Ganges or the Indus,” water is managed thoroughly and expediently through government-supported agricultural expenditure.²³

The capaciousness of schematic geographies to which allegory is inclined enables the accommodation of a variety of international readerships. In this particular structure, Gandhi inserts Indian analogues for every South African instantiation, yet these can be just as easily replaced so that South Africa, parable of satyagraha, now stands in point-to-point relation to another geographical arena. Satyagraha thus operates as global, deterritorialized principle, precisely because the text comes to operate as “an expansible stage into which new ‘textual communities’ are incorporated,” a scene which can accommodate ever different, perhaps previously unimagined, “constituencies” in its “capacious spaces.” (Hofmeyr The Portable Bunyan 233) Gandhi’s political philosophy is indeed deterritorialized, but not simply, as others have argued, because of its increasing articulation in relation to individual self-control, “outside the strictures of religious identification or geographical bounded-ness.” (Gupta 1, 3) Rather, Gandhian philosophy even in Satyagraha operates in relation to a spatial logic of delay, its

²³Gandhi also asserts that he has not “seen a single emaciated cow or bull” in all of South Africa, which contrasts sharply with Sol Plaatje’s treatise in Native Life in South Africa, wherein the emaciation of native-owned cattle becomes the leitmotif that marks the impoverishment induced by the Land Act of 1913. Gandhi, “find[ing] cows and oxen in India, which claims to protect the cow, as emaciated as the people themselves,” feels “ashamed, and [his] heart has often bled” Gandhi, Satyagraha in South Africa 12. The emaciated cows and oxen of Plaatje, however, are symptomatic of a larger social malaise. Questions of cattle ownership, moreover, were crucial to histories of Indian settlement and integration in South Africa, marking Indians as impossible to assimilate (as far as Africans were concerned) and enabling them to use the entirety of their plots for cultivation See Heather Hughes, “the Coolies Will Elbow Us out of the Country’: African Reactions to Indian Immigration in the Colony of Natal, South Africa,” Labour History Review 72.2 (2007).

utopian impetus placing every other space in a chain of signification that leads to the swarajya to come.²⁴

Gandhi's next lesson for us, and the title of his next chapter, is "History," and it is one which partially erases the significance of the geography lesson which comes before it, for the very first sentence explains, "The geographical divisions briefly noticed in the first chapter are not at all ancient." According to Gandhi, "It has not been possible definitely ascertain who were the inhabitants of South Africa in remote times. When the Europeans settled in South Africa, they found the Negroes there. These Negroes are supposed to have been the descendants of some of the slaves in America who managed to escape from their cruel bondage and migrated to Africa." Gandhi thus both undermines the autochthonous claim to South Africa even as he then reluctantly and provisionally acknowledges it: "These Negroes must be regarded as the original inhabitants of South Africa. But South Africa is such a vast country that it can easily support twenty or thirty times its present population of Negroes." Elaborating upon the vast distances between Cape Town and Durban by rail and by sea, and the enormous area covered by the four colonies of South Africa, and providing the exactitude of numbers—1800 miles, 1,000 miles, and 473,000 square miles, respectively—in each instance, Gandhi then provides the Negro and European populations of South Africa in 1914 (five million and 1.25 million, respectively). (Gandhi 14) The message of all this statistical abundance is clear. In South Africa, not only is the autochthonous claim unsustainable, but, in any case, there is more than enough room for everyone.

²⁴ Pamila Gupta, for instance, points to Gandhi's choice of Hind, a "pre-colonial Arabic name" which suggests "less a determinate nation state but rather a vast indeterminate region across the Indus River" (2-3), for his 1909 Hind Swaraj. This geographical expansiveness, however, indicates not Swaraj as a "universal principle" but as a "multilayered negotiation of place and context." (1) Pamila Gupta, "Gandhi and the Goa Question," Public Culture forthcoming (2011).

The second paragraph begins, “Among the Negroes, the tallest and the most handsome are the Zulus,” and it then continues into an extended exegesis of the attractiveness of the Zulu race. This is also the occasion for the castigation of “our ideal of beauty,” which fixates upon “a fair complexion, and a pointed nose.” (Gandhi 14) The long enumeration of Zulu physical excellence, elaborating various parts of the body and physical attributes separately, oscillates deliriously between the Victorian anatomy manual and the romantic praise poem. Gandhi then elucidates an account of Negroes in which the simple native is one whose primitivism, is both indicated and then reclaimed as a meritorious intimacy with the natural world. This commences a series of manoeuvres that asserts similarity between Indians and Negroes only to immediately distance the terms once again. He describes, for instance, their accommodation, and mentions:

Like ourselves, the Negroes plaster the walls and the floor with earth and animal dung. It is said the Negroes cannot make anything square in shape. They have trained their eyes to see and make only round things. We never find nature drawing straight lines or rectilinear figures, and these innocent children of nature derive all their knowledge from their experience of her. (Gandhi 15)

Kinship here can exist only through its attenuation. The primitive African pre-exists the Indian precisely by coexisting with it, and, through this false juxtaposition, proves the moral virtue of both cultural positions. The innocent nudity of the Negroes, for instance, is explained through the morality of the mythological Shukadeva of the Bhagavata, placing the contemporary purity of the Negroes, who “have no time to be staring at one another,” within the context of an account which, although Gandhi asserts he does not think “there is anything supernatural” in it, occurs within an India that is prehistorical and mythological. The absence of Shukadevas in contemporary India, moreover, only indicates “our own degradation.” Within the decline narrative of Hindu historical thinking, this makes perfect sense: Africa may figure an Indian past, but this is not always a past which one seeks to escape. Finally, Gandhi asserts: “It is only vanity

which makes us look upon the Negroes as savages. They are not the barbarians we imagine them to be.” (Gandhi 15)

Satyagraha in South Africa operates through the instructive possibilities of the parable, not only at the level of the primary narrative but through the insertion in various places of other, smaller, parables for the reader’s edification. This is a story with heroes (Ahmed Muhammad Kachhalia, for instance, is described as “the hero... of the present volume” 85) and villains; with tragic deaths and shameful betrayals; with goals deferred and longed for and then finally, fantastically achieved. The entire text, moreover, operates as an exercise in proper reading. After an extended discussion of the “colour bar” for instance, in chapter X, Gandhi explains that he has “deliberately discussed this question with much minuteness” so that the reader “may acquire the habit of appreciating and respecting varieties of standpoint.” He explains further: “I do not write this book merely for the writing of it. Nor is it my object to place one phase of the history of South Africa before the public.” The objective, rather, is to make known the origins and practice of Satyagraha, so that it might be emulated by “the nation.”²⁵ (Gandhi 62)

This educational practice is further inculcated through parables such as that of Chapter XVIII, “The First Satyagrahi Prisoner,” a Germiston man named Pandit Rama Sundara. Rama Sundara “had a brave look and was endowed with some gift of the gab,” plus he knew a few Sanskrit verses and bits of the Tulasi Ramayana, so he “enjoyed some reputation among the people.” Once arrested, writes Gandhi, he “became in one moment famous all over South Africa.” Yet despite having an easy month’s imprisonment, “Rama Sundara turned out to be a false coin,” leaving the movement and the Transvaal. Gandhi then discovered that he was an

²⁵ “My object in writing the present volume is that the nation might know how Satyagraha, for which I live, for which I desire to live and for which I believe I am equally prepared to die, originated and how it was practiced on a large scale; and knowing this, it may understand and carry it out to the extent that it is willing and able to do so.” Gandhi, Satyagraha in South Africa 62.

indentured laborer who had not finished his term of indenture, which he says “was certainly wrong.” (Gandhi 89-90) Gandhi concludes, “I have thus detailed the whole history of Rama Sundara not in order to expose his faults, but to point a moral.” The moral is that even in a “clean movement” certain “undesirable elements” may enter, but “if the leaders are fearless and true, the entry of undesirable persons into the movement without their knowing them to be so does not ultimately harm the cause. . . . there was not one Rama Sundara but several and yet I observed that the movement reaped pure advantage from all of them.” (Gandhi 90)

The other major parable of this text, however, is more positive: that of the “coolie” Parbusingh. Assigned “the most dangerous and most responsible work” in Ladysmith, Parbusingh spent the Anglo-Boer war sitting in a tree and ringing a bell every time he saw the flash of a canon (a ‘pom-pom’). This “story of his bravery” in defending Ladysmith became known in Natal, and “Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India” sent “a Kashmir robe” to be publicly presented to him by the government of Natal. “This incident,” writes Gandhi, “has a twofold lesson for us. First, we should not despise any man, however humble or insignificant-looking he may be. Secondly, no matter how timid a man is, he is capable of the loftiest heroism when put to the test.” (Gandhi 55) Satyagraha thus serves as a guidebook for the reading both of context and of character. We must learn, not only how to implement satyagraha, but also how to discern a Parbusingh from a Rama Sundara. As Tom Keenan observed, “Responsibility begins in the bad example,” for in learning to read the bad example as precisely a bad example we also learn an ethical activity of reading that entails identifying and disidentifying (or, alternatively, imitating) according to the morality in play. (Keenan 45) Speaking at once to past events, future possibilities of behavior, and our own “hesitation in or over the text—its figures and their deployment” as we comprehend both Rama Sundara’s initial promise and his later betrayal, the

temporal structure of even these small parables is the oscillatory rhythm that brings Gandhi's satyagraha pedagogy across the Indian Ocean and back again.²⁶ (Keenan 46)

Allegory, of which the fable is the exemplar, is heavily used in nineteenth century South Africa as part of mission pedagogy, emerging from there to haunt the (secular) narratives of early twentieth century South African literature. Allegory made possible certain kinds of "dialogues" for the mission scene of instruction "because the meaning of allegorical narratives, which moralise on history, can only be grasped in relation to other worlds and histories beyond the text." Consequently, by positing "frames of signification between the biblical world of their characters and the experiences of Africans in modern South Africa,"

The use of allegory makes possible allusions to history and social contradictions without unduly burdening the dramas with political questions. If the temporal aspect is denied, not just resisted, by a metaphysical emphasis, so too is space which is granted only a contingent significance. ... The road that matters is the one that leads from God to repentance and not the one that loses the individual in the labyrinth of history and public places. Not surprisingly therefore, the spaces in which the dramas unfold are very tenuously defined.... The social textures that the places acquire in the narratives come via the moral weight that audiences ascribe to them using the melodramatic polarities of good and evil. The most insistent claim is that the social environment is insignificant in the shaping of character. History is important only to the extent that it frames the spaces that serve as the backdrop for the disclosure of character... (Peterson 62)

Allegory thus enables the insertion of both the specificities of place—South Africa, South Asia—and the simultaneous disavowal of the significance of place, transforming each setting into a scene for the unfolding of universal values and moral characters. As Isabel Hofmeyr has argued, allegorical narratives are often the most transnational precisely because of their ability to be taken apart and reassembled according to local exigency, operating as "an 'exportable' form

²⁶"The fable is offered for example, but for the kind of example that asks to happen in an act of something like imitation or identification. ... In its repeated coordination of the rhetorical (example) with the narrative, and hence of trope with temporality, and its destination in the ethical and semantic values generated by such textual complications, the phrase suggests a certain hesitation in or over the text—its figures and their deployment—which might at least delay the final establishment of those values." Thomas Keenan, *Fables of Responsibility: Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997) 46.

that can travel” from continent to continent. (Hofmeyr The Portable Bunyan 193) “The vehicle of the allegory may carry an “original” meaning.... However, this meaning may be lost and the text or passage then becomes de-allegorized. The vehicle nonetheless continues unencumbered by its old meaning and finds a new life.” (Hofmeyr The Portable Bunyan 193) Whether in Satyagraha in South Africa or in other early twentieth century writing about South Africa, the narration of geography through an allegorical frame makes possible certain visions of political possibility. It elucidates, in particular, internationalist accounts of political possibility, by allowing the unfolding of a global narrative of political progression against a particular South African scene, relying in part upon the powers of allegory to place different regions of the world in relations of signification to one another. This is most obvious perhaps in Satyagraha in South Africa, but it is also at play in a famous national text like Sol T. Plaatje’s Mhudi.

The very first line of Mhudi, for instance, begins with a temporal marker—“Two centuries ago”—and then two spatial markers—the Central Transvaal and the Kalahari Desert—which delimited the habitation and existence of the Bechuana tribes. The second sentence of this historical novel indicate that “Their entire world lay in the geography covered by the story in these pages” (1), a statement followed by even more regionally specific descriptions. The novel may take on the register of the epic²⁷ and of the mythical, yet its geographical investments are strikingly particularistic. The capital Kunana, we are told, “near the present boundary between Cape Colony and Western Transvaal,” is the centre of their “humdrum yet interesting life.” (2) And yet, despite this endless provision of local detail, of points which locate us as readers amongst the maps with which we might be familiar, we are then told of an emphatically local existence:

²⁷ See Tim Couzens, "Sol T. Plaatje and the First South African Epic," English in Africa 14.1 (1987).

These peasants were content to live their monotonous lives, and thought nought of their oversea kinsmen who were making history on the plantations and harbours of Virginia and Mississippi at that time; nor did they know or care about the relations of the Hottentots and the Boers at Cape Town nearer home. The topography of the Cape Peninsula would have had no interest for them; and had anyone mentioned the beauty spots of the cape and the glory of the silver-trees on their own subcontinent, they would have felt disappointed on hearing that they bore no edible fruit.

To them the limit of the world was Monomotapa (Portuguese East Africa) – a whiteman’s country – which they had no ambition to see. (Plaatje 2-3)

Too often assimilated to a narrative of national firsts, Mhudi here instead marks its relation to a much larger global geography.²⁸ Plaatje in these pages is “making history,” by writing the first novel in English by a black South African, and by creating a historical narrative that challenges existing accounts of South African history. He is, moreover, making this history in England, the site where much of Mhudi was written, and as he does so he is thinking of “oversea kinsmen” in Virginia and Mississippi. To read Mhudi therefore as a national allegory is to misread, I would argue, the impetus to write in such complex geospatial terms, amongst such complicated global positions. What the novel is doing, I would argue, consequently, is not simply negotiating a relationship to the primary scene of its unfolding—South African territorial conflicts in general, and Bechuanaland in particular—but also the relationship between that scene and other places, elsewhere. This is not simply, as so many postcolonial critics have so influentially argued, because every nation is somehow in relation to the others against which it asserts its originality. Much of the writing on allegory within South African literary studies has been overshadowed by Fredric Jameson’s influential if controversial theorization of national allegory and third world

²⁸“Mhudi has not just come from the margins to be central in South African literature, it has become foundational to the very concept of the South African nation. . . . with arguments for the inclusion of mhudi in the literary canon increasingly becoming arguments for the way in which Mhudi sets up defining features of that canon. . . . And so the text moves from being an appeal for inclusion in the state, to being an oppositional document against the state, to becoming firmly situated within the political orthodoxy of that state.” Michael C. Green, “Generic Instability and the National Project: History, Nation, and Form in Sol T. Plaatje’s Mhudi,” Research in African Literatures 37.4 (2006): 41.

literature.²⁹ Consequently, a book about historical allegory in early Zulu theatre initially suggests that the choice of allegory is intrinsically related to the nationalist tendencies of that literary tradition's formulation and emergence³⁰; a more recent article on "post-transition" South African literature discusses allegory in relation to national political conditions.³¹ Chris Thurman, for instance, points out the "discernable sub-tradition of allegorical writing in south African literature," including under this heading Schreiner's *Story of an African Farm*, Campbell's *The Flaming Terrapin*, Plaatje's *Mhudi*, Plomer's *Turbott Wolfe*, H.I.E. Dhlomo's plays, and J.J.R. Jolobe's *Thuthula*, all from 1883 to 1936. (92) This allegorical tendency disappears in apartheid-era fiction, replaced by "(non-allegorical) realism or naturalism," because of, in Thurman's analysis, its "lack of explicit engagement": "Even though it proved, particularly for some white writers, an effective means of 'beating the censors,' it was not deemed an appropriate vehicle for writers (both black and white) who wished to give voice to a direct, outright, outraged, unambiguous opposition to apartheid." (Thurman 92, 95) These allegorical tendencies, however, surface again in early twenty-first century South African fiction, particularly as a means of understanding South Africa in relation to a larger global geography.³²

I want to argue that the disappearance and reappearance of allegorical tendencies in South African literature is linked, not simply to national political conditions, but to the preoccupation, or lack thereof, with larger geographical relations. Allegory is the mode which sets places in relations of signification to one another, referring by definition "to a meaning that it does not itself constitute." (de Man 189) Allegory, therefore, is not simply a national mode as

²⁹ See Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 15 (1986).

³⁰ Bhekizizwe Peterson, *Monarchs, Missionaries, and African Intellectuals: African Theatre and the Unmaking of Colonial Marginality* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2000).

³¹ Chris Thurman, "Places Elsewhere, Then and Now: Allegory 'before' and 'after' South Africa's Transition?," *English Studies in Africa* 53.1 (2010).

³² In particular, Thurman finds in recent (2008) South African fiction a tendency towards the allegorical creation of vaguely South African locales, which "evinces a desire to identify in South Africa elements of a 'generic' African country." Thurman, "Places Elsewhere, Then and Now: Allegory 'before' and 'after' South Africa's Transition?," 98.

such; it adapts itself to national purposes precisely insofar as it accedes to the nationalist imperative to establish a relationship with other nations, elsewhere. Even Jameson, after all, in his notorious essay, asserts at the outset that “none of these [third world] cultures can be conceived as anthropologically independent or autonomous, rather, they are all in various distinct ways locked in a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism.” (Jameson "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" 68) Allegory is, first and foremost, a relational narrative structure, one predicated upon the discontinuities between items which must be placed in some sort of relation to each other. The ascendance of allegory in the writing of the late British Empire is indicative of colonial connections that could not be translated into the continuous unities of realism and the symbol.

The question of the national in this context, moreover, is inextricable from, if not less significant than, the question of the imperial. In Mhudi, for instance, the narrative of (Boer/white) colonial conquest is played out against that of the expansion of the Zulu empire. What the empire demands, I would argue, is not the “derivative discourse” of colonial nationalism, which attends to the global only to assert the particularity of the local.³³ It requires, instead, the negotiation of a set of relations of geography that are simultaneously relations of power. Within the late British Empire in particular, this is also the negotiation of a contradictory stance which became more and more evident as the twentieth century moved along. By the early twentieth century, “the very foundation and legitimacy of the British Empire... had now come to rest crucially on the definition of the term ‘British subject’” (Mongia 204), a category through which both Plaatje and Gandhi made their initial political claims. Yet the conditional nature of this term, and the racism through which its rights claims were arbitrated, becomes particularly

³³ See Partha Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse? (London: Zed Books, 1986).

evident through the increasing restrictions on migration within the empire. As imperial administrators arbitrated claims for geographical access, whether to Canada or to Natal, by the racially marked subjects of their empire, they struggled “to distinguish among members of a state – that is, among ‘British subjects’ – without calling the entire edifice of the empire into question.” (Mongia 205) The supposed universality of the position of colonial subject was belied in large part by conflicts over migration, thus making questions of universalism and racism inextricable from those of geographical limitations. In this context, “the ‘universal’ category of nationality, already overlaid with culturalist racism,” came to be “mobilized in such a way as to tether people to geographical space. It was thus through a recourse to the idea of states as securing sovereignty through an appeal to the ‘national’ that the principle of the ‘complete freedom for all British subjects to transfer themselves from one part of His Majesty’s Dominions to the other’ was abandoned, and the category of ‘British subject’ was rendered available for division and differentiation based on the rule of colonial difference.” (Mongia 209) Nationality thus emerges as a ruse of reciprocity which comes to obscure the racist order within which it functions, not only within the regulation of migration but also, perhaps, within the arbitration of cultural canons.³⁴

Racialized access to space, of course, is already a pressing debate in South Africa in the early twentieth century. The inscription of South African geography, consequently, precisely through the question of racialized mobility, becomes in several texts an allegory for the question of racialized mobility globally. The tendency to read such texts along national lines, moreover,

³⁴ In Radhika Mongia’s analysis of the passport, for instance, “The passport emerges here as a state document that purports to assign a national identity rather than a racial identity—a mechanism that would conceal race and the racist motivations for controlling mobility in the guise of a reciprocal arrangement among states described as national. Simultaneously and crucially, however, this formation of the passport generates ‘nationality’ as the intersection between the nation and the state. Inscribed on the body of the migrant are the traces of both the state and the nation-race.” Radhika Vikas Mongia, “Race, Nationality, Mobility: A History of the Passport,” *After the Imperial Turn*, ed. Antoinette M. Burton (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003) 210.

can then be aligned with our own inabilities to unlink racial particularity from national difference. Even a highly mythological, romance narrative like U-Jeje, Insila kaShaka begins with the question of geography. The very first line says: “Between the Umvoti and Nonoti Rivers, with the Madundube Hills to the west and the Indian Ocean to the east, Shaka built his royal Dukuza kraal.” (Dube 1) John Langalibalele Dube’s novel chronicles the eponymous protagonist’s migration from Zululand to Tongaland and finally to Swaziland, a difficult and often perilous journey, but one marked by magic, miracles, and of course by a romance. Published in 1930, this migration to the north is paired in the most recent English edition with explicitly political material, Dube’s “Address as Representing the Native Viewpoint,” a passionate reflection on contemporary conditions for the natives of South Africa, delivered in 1928 at the Seventh General Missionary Conference of South Africa in Lovedale. This edition is a Penguin reissue of the 1951 Lovedale translation, and it is as though the novel, with its national firstness—first novel in isiZulu—must still be paired with more explicitly political material to validate their shared authorship. Dube’s novel, with its mythic register, can easily transpose the settings of its romance and intrigues, yet its publication with the address, with its careful prosaic specificity, tethers the novel to a specifically South African space.

My triad of primary texts thus far share neither language, nor authorial identity, nor geographical origin. What unites them, rather, is the time of publication and the scene of preoccupation, and the generic strategies used to figure that scene. The shifting terrain of imperial geography when viewed from 1920s South Africa led to a variety of allegorical responses which attempted to order the colonies in relation to one another. Studying these allegorical narratives in relation to the question of geography not only challenges received wisdom about literary traditions and literary boundaries. It also provides a useful counter

discourse, at the level of popular (or at least aspiring to be popular) discourse, to discussions of imperial geography that were contemporaneously elaborated through administrative means.

I am responding, in part, to the challenges of South African literary history, perhaps epitomized in Malvern van Wyk Smith's influential assertion that what characterizes South African literature is not the anxiety of influence but rather the "anxiety of non-influence": the careful maintenance of boundaries between particular language literatures. (van Wyk Smith 83) Cross-linguistic influences do exist, but not (until Coetzee) in terms of South African authors engaging across language boundaries with one another. Sol Plaatje, for instance, substantively engages the English literary tradition in his seTswana writings, but he does so through Shakespeare, and not through the writings of South Africans in English. English writing in South Africa, similarly, includes extensive accounts of Afrikaners and Africans, but such representations have no relationship to what those groups have written about themselves. Within critical work, however, the anxiety of non-influence is replaced by the "illusion of influence," as optimistic scholarship works to assert relationships amongst texts and authors from different racial and linguistic traditions. (78) These claims, however, cannot be substantiated beyond the repeated mentioning of thematic echoes.

For van Wyk Smith, influence can only be asserted through the substantiation of "genuine intertextuality." My argument, however, reorganizes literary boundaries, not through influence or intertextuality, but by reading literature as a figurative activity. Reading literature as a figurative activity—one which makes abstract social conditions imaginable—puts texts in relation, not simply to particular contexts of production, but to particular crises of figuration. I am thinking in particular of Fredric Jameson's discussion of the requirement of *figurability*, through which culture can be thought "not only as an instrument of self-consciousness but even before that as a

symptom and a sign of possible self-consciousness in the first place.” (Jameson "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: *Dog Day Afternoon* as a Political Film" 37) For Jameson, figurability marks “the need for social reality and everyday life to have developed to the point at which its underlying class structure becomes *representable* in tangible form.” (37) Allegory³⁵ then operates as a means of reading cultural texts as forms of “cognitive mapping,” by examining the ways in which a culture is producing and experiencing social consciousness.³⁶ If for Jameson’s Marxian analysis, the question of figurability leads to that of class consciousness, the question of (trans)figurability in the internationalist context marks the beginnings—as well as the limits—of something like an internationalist consciousness (which may or may not be coarticulated with class consciousness). It is, of course, commonsensical and prosaic to suggest that international differences would present what Jameson terms “a crisis of figurability”; what is interesting for my purposes is the ways in which the limitations of any transfiguring vision mark the boundaries of what Jameson has termed “the political unconscious.”³⁷ Thus, whereas

³⁵ Allegory here for Jameson is “taken as a working hypothesis,” which is to say that class must be allegorized before class consciousness can be lived. Allegory is also, importantly, indicative of a temporal splitting: “the allegorical spirit is profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogenous representation of the symbol.” Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” 73.

³⁶ “...social class is not merely a structural fact but also very significantly a function of class consciousness, and the latter, indeed, ends up producing the former just as surely as it is produced by it. ... we cannot speak of an underlying “essence” of things, of a fundamental class structure inherent in a system in which one group of people produces value for another group, unless we allow for the dialectical possibility that even this fundamental “reality,” may be “realer” at some historical junctures than at others, and that the underlying object of our thoughts and representations—history and class structure—is as profoundly historical as our own capacity to grasp it.” Fredric Jameson, “Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: *Dog Day Afternoon* as a Political Film,” Signatures of the Visible (New York and London: Routledge, 1990) 37.

³⁷ Despite the modern, and not post-modern, contexts of the texts I am examining, they still meet, because of their internationalist aspirations, the requirements that Jameson lays out at the end of the same essay for the exercise of cognitive mapping (and hence, by extension, for the use of his concept of figurability). Cognitive mapping, Jameson tells us,

presupposes a radical incompatibility between the possibilities of an older national language or culture... and the transnational, worldwide organization of the economic infrastructure of contemporary capitalism. The result of this contradiction is a situation in which the truth of our social life as a whole... is increasingly irreconcilable with the possibilities of aesthetic expression or articulation available to us; a situation about which it can be asserted that if we can make a work of art from our experience, if we can give experience the form of a story that can be told,

Jameson's figurability and "cognitive mapping" leads to a reading of Sartre's analogon, my concept of internationalism as transfiguration leads to questions of "boundary mapping" instead. I am, consequently, less interested in the consciousness that is figured in a text than in the boundaries across which it performs this trans-figuration. The failures of that figuration mark the *limits* of particular political movements and historical positions, and the struggles of international geography to which each text applies itself.

Each crisis of figuration, moreover, can be studied through the narrative tendencies to which it gives rise. Writing about South Africa in the 1920s may have been responding to a particular problem of figuration—that of imperial and colonial geography—which found its solution in a particular narrative form—that of allegory. The question of imperial geography continues to be a theoretical problem for writers even today, as scholars struggle to write the colonies in relation to one another and not, for instance, always in relation to London. Tony Ballantyne, for example, has argued for an "approach [which] eschews either the metropolitan focus of the British imperial tradition or the national focus of the colonial histories, to conceive of the empire as a series of historically contingent networks that connected disparate locations into circuits of exchange and debate." (Ballantyne 104) Gandhi in some ways begins this process, but perhaps not exactly as we would wish.

Gandhi concludes his treatise in an unspecified present, reflecting on "the painful contrast between the happy ending of the Satyagraha struggle and the present conditions of the Indians in South Africa." (Gandhi 208) He then moves to a general reflection on global political conditions: "Nay, the victory achieved by the Indians in South Africa more or less served as a shield for

then it is no longer true, even as individual experience; and if we can grasp the truth about our world as a totality, then we may find it some purely conceptual expression but we will no longer be able to maintain an imaginative relationship to it.
Jameson, "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: *Dog Day Afternoon* as a Political Film," 54.

Indian emigrants in other parts of the British Empire” (208) This assertion, which begins with the negation of an unspecified counter-claim, pulls us further away from the “present struggle” with which the book began: the Indians in South Africa now serve as protectors of Indians in other arenas. The volume ends, finally, with the seemingly universal moral of the story: “that Satyagraha is a priceless and matchless weapon, and that those who wield it are strangers to disappointment or defeat.” (Gandhi 209) The “strangers” of this narrative, however, are inscribed within it: from Boers to Pathans, the continual use of typological characterisation asks us to identify and disidentify as we work our way through the story. It is not written, of course, for the reader familiar with South Africa, yet it does not promise to familiarize the reader with South Africa, either. It is, above all, an “exemplary allegory of decision,” teaching us the single and purportedly universal principle of Satyagraha by asking us to compare the multiple and disparate sites of its usage.³⁸ (Keenan 2)

In thinking through the relations between South Africa and South Asia, and between his political practice in both imperial arenas, Gandhi turns to an allegorization of South Africa which dooms his “internationalist” practice to one of infinite deferral. Through the very structure of Satyagraha in South Africa, Gandhi produces South Africa, and perhaps Africa and its Africans more generally, as the final signifier in a chain of post/colonial meanings. This is not simply to say that (African) natives for Gandhi formed the boundary point of the civilizational divides to which he was in many ways embedded. Certainly, in the early 20th century, as long as Indian political agitation wanted to claim empire as a system of equal rights for civilized men, the disavowal of Africa and Africans—and/or the embracing of a particular relationship to them—

³⁸ “Devoted again and again to installing or restoring subjectivity as the sine qua non of responsible action and the claim to rights, the fable, which wants to offer lessons, only opens up the most abyssal aporias instead. To teach singularity it offers comparison, to underline independence it resorts to necessity.” Keenan, Fables of Responsibility : Aberrations and Predicaments in Ethics and Politics 2.

served a political purpose in Indian nationalism: “As a broad synonym for the ‘native,’ ‘Africa’ came to function as one boundary in the process of imagining India within Empire.”(Hofmeyr "The Idea of 'Africa' in Indian Nationalism: Reporting the Diaspora in *the Modern Review* 1907-1929" 62) What I want to say here, however, is that Gandhi’s early imaginary is global without being internationalist (in the sense of a world vision beyond racial particularity) precisely because it is allegorical. Unlike the (attempted) symbolism of his later spatial-ideological practice, within which each Indian village can serve as synecdoche for all of India, the allegorical form of his early career dooms the South African scene to serve, not as a political contemporary, but as both past and future. If Gandhi comes to embrace a timelessness, even a commitment to archaism, in his championing of the Indian village as the new anti-colonial utopia, it is because his early passage to India was precisely through allegory: through endless, relational deferral.

This paper is still a work in progress, and I am painfully aware of my limited background in (South) African studies. I am, accordingly, grateful for any corrections you can give me. I would be particularly appreciative of suggestions that place my concerns within the ambit of scholarship in southern African history, literary and otherwise. The book project is very much within literary studies, and I am predisposed (or perhaps condemned) to substantial engagement with literary theory. I am, however, interested in making it as relevant as possible to scholars beyond literary studies, and I really appreciate any suggestions for greater interdisciplinarity.

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