theories and methodologies

Inter-imperiality and Literary Studies in the Longer *Durée*

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WHAT WOULD IT MEAN FOR LITERARY AND CULTURAL SCHOLARS TO INCORPORATE THE NEW HISTORICAL SCHOLARSHIP ON EARLY WORLD systems and states? In particular, what might we who study literature in the context of empire, capitalism, modernity, and globalization since 1500 make of the most recent historical and archival work on non-European parts of the world before 1500?

For as even a brief perusal of the *Journal of World History* or *Journal of Global History* reveals, this scholarship reframes many of our long-standing narratives, either implicitly or explicitly.[1] The data increasingly establish, among other things, that many systems we call modern emerged in a period typically designated medieval and that they did so not in the European West but in the global South and East, among Asian, Islamic, and African states, and to some extent in the pre-Columbian states of South America. These systems include: exchange of ideas in state forums; the import of commodities into well-planned metropoles for urban populations; finance capital and labor regimes; structures of core and periphery; imperial knowledge-building projects serving colonization and state building; and cultural interpellation of conquered communities through art forms and media campaigns. While dismantling binaries of premodern and modern, the scholarship on pre-1500 Afro-Eurasia and America thus brings into view the longer historical accretion of states, systems, and capitalist economies.[2] This essay makes the case that this scholarship can enrich postcolonial literary-cultural studies while also widening its political and historical coordinates.

Certainly scholars of earlier periods have been incorporating this research, including several contributors to this cluster.[3] Our medievalist contributors, for instance, are among those who have studied Mediterranean, African, and Asian knowledge institutions and traditions that later shaped European intellectual and literary history. Other contributors engage with the history of the Afro-Eurasian states that partly enabled the Protestant Revolution, the Dutch War of Independence, and the Peace of Westphalia. These scholars have been

LAURA DOYLE is one of the organizers of this collection of essays.

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PMLA 130.2 (2015), published by the Modern Language Association of America

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2015.130.2.336 Published online by Cambridge University Press

de-Eurocentrizing events typically considered pivotal in the rise of so-called modernity.[4]

Yet very few literary scholars have taken account of these longer, wider "connected histories" (to use the historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam's phrase), even though this transhemispheric framework promises to deepen our understanding of politics and literature. Whether we focus on early or contemporary periods, wider attention to the global genesis of modernization opens up new backstories about the sedimented political conditions of culture. Critical vocabularies of expropriation, creolization, and commodification, for instance, can now help us to name the longer history of these processes. At the same time, because these transhemispheric histories bring into view unsuspected entanglements, they also call for new concepts, as well as revisions of familiar approaches. Both outcomes promise to sharpen our methods for the study of culture.[5]

Outlining one such revision, here I describe what I call an inter-imperial model of analysis, which I develop at greater length elsewhere.[6] This approach builds on the insights of postcolonial studies that have focused on one empire or on transperipheral relations among the colonies of European empires. It likewise takes cues from recent work in Atlantic, Pacific, Indian Ocean, and Mediterranean studies, which sometimes track interacting empires. Incorporating these analyses into a *longue durée* transhemispheric framework, the inter-imperial approach focuses on the geopolitical field created by multiple empires across hemispheres and periods; and it studies the maneuvers, labors, and resistances of those who live within this sedimented geopolitical field. Thus, in considering any event, nation-state, political movement, or text, the method explores how each of these registers the embedded legacies of successive empires *and* the pressures created by contemporaneous empires.

The dynamism of these connected histories has led me to develop an integrated dialectical analysis, one that would capture how culture, economy, and state are fundamentally co-constituted in the inter-imperial field. At the macrolevel, this analysis traces dialectical coformations among these three dimensions (culture, economy, and state) as they accrue over the longer history of globalization. At local levels, it explores the ways that persons and communities (elite or not) occupy an inter-imperial positionality.

At the outset, it's important to recall that dialectical processes involve more than merely oppositional relations of self versus other, force versus counterforce, or thesis-antithesis-synthesis, although they are often oversimplified in this way. In fact, the tradition of dialectical thought consistently addresses plural and volatile relations, whether we think of Hegel and Marx, early Chinese Daoist philosophers such as Laozi and Zhuangzi, or pre-Socratic Greek philosophers like Anaxamander and Heraclitus.[7] As I've discussed ("Dialectics" and "Toward a Philosophy"), for all these thinkers *dialectics* names a manifold, interconnected field of transformative engagements among beings and things of all kinds, structured and structuring, which for humans—as highlighted by Marx—involves political-cultural institutions. Although not always oppositional, these relations are difficult, demanding, and volatile because they reach across difference; they entail contact among states or persons with different pasts, perceptions, and positions within the sociopolitical field. As a result, these engagements also involve change and adaptation, willing or unwilling. That is, as each actor or entity adjusts to the force or presence of the others, all parties undergo transformation, often in the form of what Mary Louise Pratt has named transculturation and Caribbean theorists have called creolization (Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant; Glissant). Over time, with each encounter, the engaged communities increasingly transform each other's organizing schemas, whether through wholesale, coercive replacements of languages and

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2015.130.2.336 Published online by Cambridge University Press

laws or through microborrowings of practices that lodge themselves piecemeal (linguistic, aesthetic, legal, economic, etc.). These are the dialectical processes that Hegel described as interpenetration and sublation.

Highlighting these dialectical, coforming processes, then, the inter-imperial approach examines the interweaving of macropolitical fields and intersubjective or intimate actions. It aims to integrate a critical political ontology with a dialectical theory of geopolitical economy in the *longue durée*. I begin here by sketching the longer transhemispheric histories and developing the theory of inter-imperiality; I then discuss inter-imperially formed knowledge and translation projects; and, finally, I turn to some literary implications.

I want to emphasize that an inter-imperial analysis, like any method of analysis, can combine or interact with other approaches (such as diaspora studies, queer studies, or labor studies) and can complement understandings of local dynamics in villages, city-states, or shantytowns. I take it as given that we need multiple models, perhaps especially as we widen our historical and critical paradigms.

Inter-imperiality and Longer-*Durée* Dialectics

We might begin with one kind of coforming relation crucial to an inter-imperial geopolitical field and often deemed distinctively modern: the relation between states and merchant economies. Contrary to long-standing assumptions, the recent evidence reveals that "rational" forms of systemic, capital-accruing collaboration among states and merchants were central to pre-1500 political economies, and some scholars detect such relations in ancient periods (Mann; Frank and Gills; Gills and Thompson).

Certainly in "medieval" Afro-Eurasia,[8] as Abu-Lughod and others have documented, states and merchants worked in concert (if also in competition) to build and profit from the systems of transport, finance, and literate education we call modern. Abu-Lughod concludes that key state-capitalist elements were consolidated between 1000 and 1350 CE, and she shows that the Abbasid Islamic Empire, in particular, put in place "the legal and institutional prerequisites for financing and administering 'capitalist' production and exchange," such as banks, lending contracts, and port rules (224).[9] Similarly, several Chinese dynasties (the Sung [960–1279 CE], Mongol [1271–1368 CE], and Qing [1644–1911 CE]) encouraged trade and benefited from close ties with merchant families, although others (e.g., the Ming [1368–1644 CE]), severely curtailed trade. Amira Bennison also reminds us that merchants sometimes managed their in-between positions effectively enough to radically reshape a state, as did the Persian Barmakid family. After the Islamic Umayyads conquered the Persian Sasanian Empire in the seventh century, the Barmakid merchant family assimilated into the Islamic state and eventually aligned itself with the Abbasids to overthrow the Umayyads, resulting in what Solomon Goitein understands as a bourgeois revolution that served the interests of both the merchants and the new, expanding Abbasid Empire.

A range of other scholarship confirms the presence of interlocking relations between merchants and states across medieval Afro-Eurasia. Archival documents establish that merchants followed regulatory codes that governed where they could stay, the kind of trade they could pursue, unloading procedures, bills of sale or lending, and taxes for the imperial host. As Philippe Beaujard explains, merchants may have tolerated such regulations "because they require[d] a stable world to develop their operations and/or a military force to defend their access to vital resources" and so "could hardly do without the state" (459). They undoubtedly also profited at times, since they "furnished merchandise as well as services to elites"—for instance, in the form of tax collection (457–58). In turn, states

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likely supplemented and calibrated their relations with each other through such traveling agents, who often lived together in designated port neighborhoods. Thus, we might amend Fernand Braudel's claim that trade in the medieval Mediterranean "ignored the frontiers of empires" (22) and consider the ways in which trade was as much inter-imperial as extra-imperial, often fostered with an eye to capital-accruing, empire-building projects.

Indeed, these state-merchant relations in an inter-imperial field seem to have driven investment in infrastructure building of all kinds. These would include the interconnecting structures of roads and ports and the systems of agricultural production that eventually reached across hemispheres from Asia and Africa to the Americas. As Hugh Kennedy, Maya Shatzmiller, and others have discussed, in large powerful states taxes and tribute were put to use not only in palace building but also in shipbuilding, city building, and other infrastructural projects. As I discuss below, individual empires also imitated, borrowed, stole, and extended each other's inventions and systems. Such coformations have been highlighted in Ann Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter Perdue's essay collection *Imperial Formations* and in Janet Burbank and Fred Cooper's *Empires in World History*. But there is still more theorizing and re-narrating to do.

For these histories prompt us to reconsider, in dialectical terms, the ways that capitalism's spread was linked to these early infrastructural projects. Edmund Burke III specifies nine "technological complexes" consolidated by Islamic states from the eighth through fourteenth centuries, including a writing/information complex, a water-management complex, and a mathematical/cosmological complex, the adoption of which expanded as Islamic empires extended their territory (165). A historical, dialectical analysis leads us to notice the intersecting, layered histories in which these complexes were inter-imperially produced. After the Umayyad conquering of the Persian Sasanian Empire and then the Abbasid overthrow of the Umayyads, the Abbasid Caliphate capitalized on earlier imperial water-management systems in two ways. They resuscitated and extended the "major macro-level hydraulic projects" developed in ancient Mesopotamian empires (e.g., five major transverse canals that diverted and connected rivers). And they also made use of the Persian filtration and *qanat* system (a gravity-flow tunnel used for irrigating arid lands), which in ancient periods had been installed across one thousand miles of the Iranian plateau, from present-day Iraq to Afghanistan, and was upgraded by the Sasanian Empire in the centuries before Islamic Umayyads defeated it (169–73).

An important turn occurred in this history of hydraulic projects when elements of these technologies were borrowed in Venice and in the Low Countries, for use in Dutch dykes and Rhineland dams (Burke 175). This engineering legacy helped to power the medieval Flemish markets and textile trade that scholars have considered central to the success of capitalism in western Europe. At the same time, knowledge of the *qanat* system arrived in Andalusian Spain via the Islamic Umayyads (who relocated there after the Abbasid overthrow). This technological knowledge was then carried by the Spanish to the Americas, where it helped them expand sustainable agriculture, with help also from engineering clues and imperial infrastructures from the Inca and Aztec empires. In the long run this inter-imperial transfer of technologies—like the silver-mining practices of Europeans that built on those of pre-Columbian American empires—gave Portugal and Spain the leverage, in a dialectical return of appropriated or sublated elements, to challenge Islamic and other states of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. In this light David Christian notes that what we call Western modernity is "the product of an economic and

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technological synergy that was generated over several millenniums in different parts of Eurasia" (25–26). As Pratt points out in her essay here, we should also include pre-Columbian America in this synergy.

Yet politically this synergy does not merely indicate the "underlying unity of Afro-Eurasian history" that Christian observes (26). Seen through a dialectical, inter-imperial lens, this history provides a longer transhemispheric perspective on the political economy of capital accumulation. It clarifies the ways that this accumulation involves both multiple interacting states and the interacting, capitalizing merchants who are in varying degrees aligned with those states. That is, even as states have opposed or sabotaged each other, and merchants have likewise both served and sabotaged states, they have all increasingly adopted or adjusted to each other's systems, creating mutually serving if contested infrastructures. The data reveal that these state-merchant dialectics were fed by imperial expansion and began much earlier than standard histories allow, driving capitalist globalization over two millennia.

Taking this longer view, we can see that these processes have issued in both homogenization and destabilization. For, even as homogenizing material systems have made imperial and capitalist ambitions for power more viable, these consolidations have also spawned unrest and strengthened forms of resistance. That is, on one hand, technologies and infrastructures have performed what Michael Mann has aptly called track-laying work: they have installed inequality in the material world by way of the uneven distribution of systems of plumbing, electricity, streets, and ports. As Pierre Bourdieu and political geographers have further theorized, this material unevenness insures sociopolitical unevenness over time and across generations, for it systemically inhibits access to modernization for some communities while enabling it for others. Yet, on the other hand (as I discuss below), inter-imperially generated technologies have sometimes made dissenting and anti-imperial collective action more viable, especially when uncredentialed or revolutionary political actors take hold of powerful military, transport, or communication technologies to maneuver among empires.

Translating Empires, Globalizing Knowledge

The full inscape of this dialectically generated field of material-political relations comes into sharper focus when we consider developments that are at once cultural, economic, and institutional. As Lydia Liu notes in her essay here, we might well begin with the role of papermaking and printing technologies, first developed in China between the first and seventh centuries CE. These technologies not only led to the first paper money—and to treatises about it—but also facilitated the literacy-centered state building and imperial expansion of China, helping it represent and project itself over increasingly vast territories, as Mark Edward Lewis demonstrates in *Writing and Authority in Early China*. Paper likewise supported the launching of a large-scale civil service corps with state examinations, which further enabled the wide interpellation of populations and the powerfully "imagined community" of this expanding empire.

Given paper's state-building power, its manufacture provoked the interest of other expanding states and became a sought-after technology—not unlike nuclear power today. The first rival to emulate it was the Abbasid Empire, which, as it expanded eastward in the eighth century, collided with the westward-expanding Chinese Tang dynasty. Islam, too, eventually became a culture of the book, extending its hegemony further east and south across Afro-Eurasia. It was helped in this direction by its adaptation and sublation of the academic and bureaucratic institutions of the conquered Sasanian state. (And, as Hayrettin Yücesoy reveals in his essay here, this process also pro-

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voked a range of dialectical countermotions in Persian-dominated tributary states.)

By the time Europeans engaged at length with imperial Islamic courts in Spain, the Middle East, and Africa (as when crusading princes were hosted or held at Islamic courts in between pitched battles), these states had developed scholarly institutions as powerful organs of state, which drew northern European scholars south to study in their libraries, which helped to catalyze the turn toward scholasticism. In the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries, when the largest libraries in Christendom held a couple of thousand volumes, Islamic libraries in the Middle East and Africa contained tens or hundreds of thousands; the Cairo library of al-Amin, the vizier of the African Fatimid caliphate, numbered half a million (Bloom 118–22). Many of these books were scientific works that guided the states' engineering projects. It should be no surprise, therefore, if in these centuries Europeans suffered from and were motivated by "imperial envy," as Gerald MacLean argues.

Like the engineering infrastructures, these intellectual and cultural infrastructures were co-constituted by vying states—that is, formed through inter-imperial competition and conquering. As Jonathan Bloom establishes, empires deliberately borrowed or stole from their neighbors' and rivals' library collections for strategic reasons, seeking to understand their science, religion, and arts. To allied empires they sent delegations of scholars who brought and hoped for manuscripts as gifts, and to enemy empires they sent officers with orders to capture manuscript collections as valuable booty, as in wars between Byzantine and Abbasid empires (117–19). Scholars too were booty—kidnapped or conquered and forced to serve new masters, creolizing knowledge while also maneuvering in ways that have likely shaped scholarly codes and legacies.

These early empires also mounted ambitious translation projects to glean knowledge from and about foreign-language cultures. Translation of science and math texts facilitated imperial trade and infrastructure building, while translation of religious, philosophical, and literary texts helped to consolidate control over conquered territories. Translation also made possible a hybrid imperial self-fashioning, as Yücesoy, Degenhardt, and Pratt highlight in this cluster and as Fuchs discusses in *Mimesis and Empire*. As Bloom points out, the "translation of Persian, Greek, and Indian works into Arabic became a regular state activity" in the Abbasid Empire (117)—just as the ambitious state-supported translation of Buddhist manuscripts taken from India had helped Chinese dynasties to consolidate power in central Asia and later to interpellate millions into what became the state religion of Buddhism. Likewise, in seventh-century Japan, translation of Chinese and other Buddhist manuscripts built an island-wide hegemony for Japanese rulers, according to Joan Piggott. In all cases, the translators thus participated, voluntarily or not, in the dialectical, globalizing processes of coadaptation, coproduction, and homogenization.

The cultivation of mathematical knowledge epitomizes the early importance of translation for imperial and world-system-connecting knowledge projects. The decimal system for mathematical computation arrived with the publication of al-Khwarizmi's ninth-century book *Calculation of the Hindu Numerals*, which elaborated on the Hindu-Arabic numerical system to describe computational methods using the zero and the notion of place value. Al-Khwarizmi's work depended on the inter-imperially generated availability of paper, and it reflected the sedimented identities created by layered imperial formations, for al-Khwarizmi was an Abbasid scholar of Persian descent. When his book was translated into Hebrew and Latin, this new computational practice became a trans-hemispheric accounting system. In Burke's words, these events helped to create "a single

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2015.130.2.336 Published online by Cambridge University Press

market from Spain [and Africa] to India and China, with a single language of administration (Arabic) and a single monetary system (the trimetallic system of gold dinar, silver dirham, and copper fils)," thus facilitating the integration of European markets and eventually American markets into an increasingly global world system (183–84). In this way, translated technologies homogenize and intensify inter-imperial systems, creating what we might call a legacy of *lingua techna*.

Yet, again, these systems also destabilize empires and upset geopolitical equilibrium. Widely adopted systems increase the possibility that dissenting actors can use technologies to challenge capitalist owners and powerful states. In earlier centuries, the enslaved, the conscripted, and the colonized seized their masters' ships and weapons to carry out uprisings. More recently, disenfranchised groups have organized protests through cell phones and computers—those technologies initially developed to win inter-imperial wars and coordinate world financial systems. Most importantly in the realm of geopolitics, anticolonial revolutionaries have maneuvered strategically between empires, as I've discussed elsewhere ("Inter-imperiality" 22–24). They have shrewdly courted the support of one empire against another, taking advantage of the sponsoring empire's wish to destabilize its imperial rival. Thus, at the end of the eighteenth century, Irish revolutionaries cultivated an alliance with the French, who supported Irish insurgency against the British, not only lending weapons and funds but also undertaking an invasion of Ireland intended to topple British control there (an effort aborted by stormy seas). Eighteenth-century Haitian revolutionaries likewise played this risky inter-imperial game, with more success, when they tapped British support for their battles against France. Twentieth-century Indian revolutionaries won concessions and independence from Britain partly by threatening to build alliances with the powerful Japanese Empire.

In other words, anticolonial movements have manipulated their fraught inter-imperial positions into a strategy of geopolitical leveraging, perilously yet sometimes successfully. Appropriation of the tools of writing and literacy has also played an important part in this anti-imperial maneuvering. For instance, as Elleke Boehmer has documented, in the twentieth century independence struggles in the colonial territories of Europe were powerfully enabled by the transperipheral circulation of newspapers and journals, which allowed new solidarities and strategy sharing. When we track these ways that anti-imperial actors engaged with unequal infrastructural legacies, how they transformed them despite uneven distribution, we give a proper place to the micromaneuvers of dissenting communities within world politics. An inter-imperial model of analysis aims to capture the global reach and accretion of this dialectical history.

Writing between Empires

What interpretive methods, habits, or collaborations might literary and cultural scholars adopt to develop an inter-imperial approach? I'll suggest just a few. We can begin by exploring a text's full inter-imperial environment. We'd consider the influences of both non-European and European empires, of both successive and surrounding empires, and of the political identities sedimented over long-historical time that continue to act like yeast in the present text and time. We would then trace where texts (oral and written) register or challenge these pressures, exploring inter-imperial positionality as a condition of the text's aesthetic production and as an object of its representations.

To grasp the character of these inter-imperial positions and pressures, we would need habitually to think across medieval-modern periodization as well as east-west and north-south geographies. These efforts would require more dialogue between schol-

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2015.130.2.336 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ars of pre-1500 and post-1500 periods, in a range of disciplines and regions, something we might foster in conferences and campus initiatives.[10] The medieval era might come to be studied as a millennium not merely of clashing religions but, more important, of intensifying technologies, engagements, and conjunctures, catalyzed by vast empires marching ever closer to each other's borders. We might in turn discover new ways in which the literature—entangled institutionally and imaginatively—restlessly dramatized this sense of world transformation. Keeping our eyes on coformations of culture, state, and economy, we would pay closer attention to the academies, libraries, and ambitious translation projects that sent many state-sponsored scholars traveling. Undoubtedly much of importance would emerge if we read pre-1500 travel writing (of the kind collected in *Other Routes: 1500 Years of African and Asian Travel Writing*) in conjunction with the post-1500 Anglo-European travel writings studied by postcolonial and other scholars.

Such explorations promise to correct the standard Eurocentric literary histories, as in the work of scholars who have begun to revisit the rise of the vernacular and the lyric in late medieval European literatures—an event often considered an origin point for "modern" literature. Karla Mallette and Cynthia Robinson have, for instance, begun to link the late medieval entry of vernacular elements into both Arabic and European literatures to the contemporaneous fragmentation of states (as also suggested here by Yücesoy and Anderson). Such transhemispheric studies increasingly position early vernacular European authors as beneficiaries of wider legacies, rather than as pure originators. In this cluster, Fuchs and Degenhardt point in this direction, as do recent studies by John Archer, Nabil Matar, and Gerald MacLean. Eighteenth-century scholars have likewise begun to configure interlingual literary histories. For instance, Wendy Belcher looks at the influence of Ethiopian thought on Samuel Johnson; Muhsin Jassim Ali, Ros Ballaster, and others have shown how *A Thousand and One Nights* fundamentally shaped what we often consider distinctively British literature; and Yu Liu traces key ideas in Shaftesburian and neoclassical aesthetics to the Chinese theorists whom Shaftesbury and others were discovering.

In effect, these transhemispheric remappings "provincialize" Europe and its literatures—not exactly in the way Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests, however, but by casting European literatures of roughly the fourteenth through eighteenth centuries as aspirant literatures of economically peripheral states in an inter-imperial field and world system.

Equally important, these reconfigurations of literary history shed light on some of the understudied depths of more recent and especially postcolonial texts, illuminating the diverse histories streaming into them. An inter-imperial framework helps us to see more clearly that some postcolonial authors "write back" to multiple invaders or empires across long historical time lines, which shapes their weaving of older intertextual relations into newer literary forms—sometimes rekindling long-ago-sublated elements or tropes. Structures of epic, cyclical, or ancient time in postcolonial texts are often read as mythic, nostalgic, or magical: as creative imaginings of "precolonial," "indigenous," or "premodern" time. Yet, with transhemispheric world histories in mind, we might reapproach them as critical meditations on these long, geopolitical histories. Adapting Wai Chee Dimock's notion of deep time, we might read such authors as grappling with deep inter-imperial time.

For on second look, many postcolonial texts narrate the ordeals of living under successive empires as well as vying empires. Some African and Asian postcolonial texts construct an epic scope partly to treat the dual imperial legacies of Islam and Christianity, for example. Early in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*, the narrator decries

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2015.130.2.336 Published online by Cambridge University Press

both legacies—"we are not Europeans, we are not Christians [and] we are not Arabs, we are not Muslims"—and he characterizes Christians and Muslims as "white destroyers" who intrude with "the maddening loudness of their shrieking theologies" to pursue a "predator's" trade in slaves and material wealth (24). In *Midnight's Children* Salman Rushdie offers a more satiric epic history of clashing imperial fantasies, as he hints that British imperial claims to superiority mirror similar pretensions in the Aziz family's proud affiliation with imperial Mughal lineage.

For other postcolonial writers, the invaders are different but the long histories of successive, layered imperialisms and the agonistic dynamics of inter-imperial positionality are comparable. On the first pages of *Ulysses*, James Joyce's Irish Catholic protagonist, Stephen Dedalus, laments his position as a "servant of two masters . . . an English and an Italian"—that is, "the imperial British state . . . and the Holy Roman catholic and apostolic Church" (17; 1.638–44). Throughout, Stephen casts the Roman Church as a vestigial imperial institution that laid ground for and is now complicit with the British Empire (as when he calls papal institutions the "house that Jack built" [320–21; 14.304–05] and soon thereafter conflates it with the "Crystal Palace" that Paxton built for the 1851 Great Exhibition of the British Empire, comically alluded to as "the crystal palace of the Creator" [323; 14.403]). Joyce meanwhile threads his text with allusions to imperial battles, ranging from Greek-Persian wars to medieval Danish invasions of Ireland and England.

Gender politics can also be seen afresh within this longer, inter-imperial framework. In both *Midnight's Children* and *Ulysses*, the imperial legacy is a source of inflated male self-fashioning and destructive competition, catalyzing the violence of these epic tales. Among other possibilities, we might rethink Eve Sedgwick's critique of the homosocial structures of literary texts, reframing these in geopolitical terms and linking them to what one of Joyce's characters in *Ulysses* calls "the brother motive" (173; 9.956). That is, we might notice that these texts feature brothers or intimate male friends who become enemies because of their rival visions of a state's future formation, as with Saleem and Shiva in *Midnight's Children* or Stephen Dedalus and Cranly in *Ulysses*. In this scenario, it is their fraught position between empires, and within multiple imperial histories, that precipitates their deadly rivalry. Women play pivotal roles in these "brother" dramas partly because they are instrumental to the reproduction of states or communities. Thus, in *Ulysses*, as Ireland seeks to become an independent state, Stephen traces his gender troubles to Ireland's inter-imperial history: he ruptures relations with his mother because of her obedience to a corrupt Roman Catholic legacy, and he breaks off friendships with men because of what he sees as their warring, masculinist investments, which reproduce imperial violence. Tellingly, Joyce gives the final word on this world of clashing empires to the Jewish-Irish wife Molly Bloom, while affiliating her family with the historically contested, inter-imperial region of al-Andalus.

In a different tenor, Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* repeatedly highlights women's role in a long history of rivalries, both as objects of invaders' sexual violence and as leaders in the ethical countervision of what the narrator calls "reciprocity." Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The River Between* likewise alerts us immediately to the sexual stakes of inter-positionality: beginning with a description of the two mountain ridges of Kameno and Makuyu, which face each other like "two rivals ready to come to blows for the leadership of the isolated region" (1), the novel comes to its crisis over the question of female circumcision after a young woman's post-circumcision death, which exacerbates religious fault lines among the men and confounds the male protagonist Waiyaki's effort to bring unity. Simi-

https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2015.130.2.336 Published online by Cambridge University Press

larly, Nurrudin Farah's novels often feature Somalian Arabic women caught in the long history of intermingled Muslim and Christian legacies in Ethiopian and Somalian states.

These brief suggestions offer just a glimpse of the possibilities for inter-imperial analysis. Yet I hope this account indicates how the recent, non-Eurocentric historiography can sharpen our postcolonial paradigms, dislodge the lingering Eurocentrism in our literary histories, and do fuller justice to the historical-aesthetic reach of many kinds of text.

Conclusion

In *Asia as Method*, Kuan-Hsing Chen argues that imperial histories are deeply entrenched in our identities and desires, and he suggests that the reflective processes required for what he calls deimperialization are more demanding than we have yet imagined. Certainly the long, wide history of interacting empires confirms his point. We might retool Fredric Jameson's concept to focus on an inter-imperial political unconscious structured by successive, vying empires and *longue durée* accretions.

Yet world history also reveals that deimperializing struggles have been under way for generations, as part of this dialectical history. Events reaching from the ninth-century Zanj slave revolt in the Abbasid Empire to the transperipheral anticolonial movements of the early twentieth century to the Arab Spring all indicate as much. The dissenting currents of dialectical legacies are also evident in the academies we occupy. Although, as we have seen, these institutions have been inter-imperially produced and remain inter-imperially entangled, their history, too, has included seizing the tools of knowledge and communication, which in turn has allowed anti-imperial maneuvering. Perhaps the nightmares of imperial histories have also created an anti-imperial groove in our thinking—call it an infrastructure of critical imagination. Certainly today, more of us in the academy hail from colonized communities (past or present), and we manage to be openly anti-imperial, publically disseminating critical thought across academic disciplines and in thousands of classrooms. Battles remain pitched, as evident in the defunding of universities and of tenured research faculty lines. Yet among the many sorts of intellectual engagement needed, one is attunement to this longer transhemispheric history. If we integrate such dimensions into our teaching and thinking, while reflecting on our own complex genesis from that history, we may enter a new phase of the work of deimperialization.

Notes

1. I cite this scholarship below, but it is important to note, as Shu-mei Shih discusses in this cluster, that not all of these world histories are critically postcolonial.

2. Davis pointedly critiques medieval-modern periodization, and Varisco enumerates the problems with the term *medieval*—e.g., that it is considered the classical period in Islamic literature.

3. For earlier groundbreaking work in connected cultures, see Makdisi; Hodgson; Castro; Russell; Metlitzki; and Menocal, *Arabic Role* and *Shards*. For similar studies on transhemispheric connections in the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries, see Lach; Schwab; Clarke; and, more recently, Liu.

4. See Matar, *Britain* and *Islam*; Foley; Hobson; and Nisancioglu for historical studies; and see Doyle, "Dialectics," for an inter-imperial account of these events.

5. In the last section of the essay, I will refer mainly to literature; but this paradigm widening also opens many new doors for interdisciplinary study of musical, architectural, visual, and performative arts in combination with literary arts.

6. Part of a larger book project on inter-imperiality, my essays "Inter-imperiality" and "Dialectics" focus on political economy and culture, while "Modernist Studies" and "Notes" focus on literature.

7. Both traditions sought to describe an underlying element in which all relationality and all living and dying occurred, the Greeks postulating the "indefinite" in which earth, fire, water, and air interacted and Buddhists naming dao as source and driving force behind everything that exists. Both have implicitly influenced the course of western European dialectical philosophy, from Hegel and Marx to critical theorists today, as shown by

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Clarke; Lach; and Liu. Our ignorance of this transhemispheric intellectual history partly reflects the ways that empires absorb and yet erase the legacies of others.

8. *Afro-Eurasia* is the geographic term often used by world historians to name the interconnected seas and lands from eastern Europe to the Pacific.

9. As Udovitch (80, 78, 170) and Abu-Lughod (220–21) have established, the financial instruments included the *suftâja* (similar to the modern check) and the *commenda*, a form of investment-capital contract, later emulated by Italians, that arranged for promissory transfer of capital from one party to another for purchase of raw materials and production of goods, both parties sharing the profit. For further analysis of Abbasid financial practices, see Shatzmiller.

10. E.g., the World Studies Interdisciplinary Project at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (https://wsipworldstudies.wordpress.com/).

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