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New Paradigm or Another Trope of Resistance? A Response to *The Global South and Literature*

Kai Wiegandt
University of Tübingen

The publication of *The Global South and Literature* is a milestone: the first substantial and collaborative scholarly attempt to chart the relationship between literature and the Global South. What does literature tell us about the Global South? What roles does it play in the Global South? Which new ways of discussing literature does the concept of the Global South open up? What are the advantages of reading literature formerly described as "postcolonial" through the lens of the Global South? Is there a "Southern" literary aesthetics? These are only a few of the questions the volume's twenty-one authors set out to answer.

The most fundamental question – the one that seems in need of being answered before all others – is immediately addressed by the volume's editor and co-author Russell West-Pavlov in his opening piece "Towards the Global South": what does "the Global South" mean? West-Pavlov and his co-authors can draw on accounts that define the Global South in very different ways. In *The Poorer Nations: A Possible History of the Global South* (2012), for example, Vijay Prashad traces the emergence of the idea of the Global South via the attempts of formerly colonized countries to build a united "non-aligned" front against the neo-imperial, capitalist North, starting with the Bandung conference of 1958. The Global South is best interpreted as a mobilization myth, according to Prashad. Jean and John Comaroff in *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America is Evolving toward Africa* (2012), propose that economic, social and cultural developments in Africa have run ahead of Europe and North America, and provide a looking-glass view of what is to come in the North (not much good). This claim is echoed in Achille Mbembe's prediction of a "becoming black" of the world in his recent *Critique of Black Reason* (2017).

Given the protean quality of the concept, West-Pavlov describes the Global South as a "shifter" that can refer to a "geopolitical area, global economic process, a collective actor, a discursive event, and a body of theories, paradigms, and texts" (2). The concept can be defined via geography (with

CONTACT Kai Wiegandt ✉ kai.wiegandt@uni-tuebingen.de

obvious problems: e.g., Australia is located in the southern hemisphere but belongs to the Global North); the colonial past shared by most "Southern" nations; utopian aspirations; economic forces; cultural affinities; a shared consciousness of lived experience; a perspective of looking south from the South, rather than to the North as in the postcolonial paradigm; or via reference to a shared mobilization myth (West-Pavlov 8-9, 19). West-Pavlov and Dilip M. Menon, in his chapter "Thinking about the Global South: Affinity and Knowledge", point out that the concept is productive if its Janus-facedness – looking to the past and the future – is made explicit. A Global South is unthinkable without acknowledging the multiple and ongoing economic, political and cultural effects of colonization and (neo-)imperialism. At the same time, it is a proleptic term that – as its own mobilization myth – actively supports that coming-into-being. It is a utopia for the time after 1990, when history was no longer imaginable as liberation (which had happened almost everywhere), and thus, as West-Pavlov remarks, it poses a challenge for postcolonial studies and its perennial anchoring of the present South in the colonial past. For Menon, embracing the Global South paradigm has to go hand in hand with a shift in epistemology. Theoretical enterprises such as the Subaltern Studies Group were thinking *from* the South but with European terms. Menon argues that thinking *in* the Global South has to re-invent its own intellectual traditions.

These are convincing comments on what the concept of the Global South should entail and what it should help us to do. I wonder, however, whether the Global South, despite its diverse genealogies and meanings, could have been framed by claiming family resemblances between its meanings. This might have allowed for envisioning more coherence without making essentialist claims about what the idea of a Global South must entail. Although the chapters of the volume emphasise different criteria in their use of the concept "Global South", they also suggest resemblances between these criteria: for example, between geography and colonial history, between cultural affinities and shared epistemes, and between utopianism and mobilization myths. By contrast, conceiving of the Global South as a shifter risks rendering it so versatile as to make it virtually meaningless.

One of the strengths of this volume is its outlining of the multiple ways in which regions of the Global South have been connected to each other, in some senses for many centuries, often for much longer than the era of European colonization. In contemporary fiction, looking from the South to the South is revived in works such as Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's novel *The Dragonfly Sea* (2019) (set in an island in the Swahili sea, China and Turkey); historians are also increasingly unearthing a history of South-South entanglements that, in hindsight, was temporarily obscured by the colonial era and its immediate aftermath. The contributions to *The Global South and Literature* show how trade, resistance and education have been motives of South-South exchange, from Mao's Little Red Book to ongoing African-Chinese intermigration and to the

Chinese-Tanzanian railway project. Menon calls for an "archipelagic thinking" "with entangled histories that precede and exceed imperial and national formations" (38). Lived histories as well as political initiatives of a broad scale (such as those charted by Prashad) have a place in this historical thinking that takes into account Russia's People's Friendship University producing many leaders who went on to shape different regions of the world; guerrillas, revolutionaries and anarchists travelling between places as geographically distant from each other as Singapore, Berlin, Mexico, the Philippines, South Africa and Poland; and Hindi ("Bollywood") cinema as a producer of a geography of Southern affect that can glue together places like the aforementioned.

What role does literature play in all this? A survey of contributions to the volume shows that opinions diverge strongly on that topic. The most surprising diagnosis is that literature and "high art", which not many years ago seemed to have become one amongst many ingredients in the cauldron of culture (and with it "literary studies" a minor part of "cultural studies") is by some authors invested with a quasi-religious, messianic force: the force to free the South from Eurocentric epistemes by offering Southern ones. Menon, for example, argues that colonial language became the vehicle of social theory and political discourse in the Global South, whereas the local vernacular became the language of imagination, literature and affect (37). Calling for the Global South as a knowledge project, he draws on art (as shown at the Kochi Biennale 2012 and 2014) to think beyond the language that his own chapter relies on. "What would it mean", he asks, "[…] to truly animate this inheritance and bring Asian, African, and Latin American languages and thinking in conversation with the space of theory, now dominated by a European practice of the last 300 years?" (44). It would mean a decolonization of Southern thinking, long due after the decolonization of Southern territories. But how is this vocabulary to come into being? How, exactly, can literature and art from the South produce it?

In his chapter "Biopolitics and the *Potentia* of Literature", Andrew McCann takes on this question by considering how the oscillation of contemporary biopolitics between territoriality and deterritorialization impacts on the function and potential of literature. With reference to Foucault, Agamben and Mbembe, McCann argues that the instrumentalization of human life operates even in humanitarian or development contexts, rendering much of the Global South population bare life (139). The usual trope, McCann argues, is to claim that postcolonial literature stages resistance to this biopolitics of/in the Global South. With reference to Pheng Cheah, he calls for a questioning of literature because the humanities are arguably based on a notion of the human that is itself conditioned or mediated by biopolitics: the instrumentality of this particular view – serving the labour-force of neoliberalism – has become indistinguishable from human plasticity, as Cheah has argued (McCann 141-142). Cheah invests his hopes in the claim that

literature can be founded on the alterity of inhuman temporality, or the nonhuman other, and can thus suspend or interrupt the world constituted in the passage from colonial to neoliberal governance. McCann acknowledges that investing literature with such a redeeming force is problematic (143-144) but does not offer his own version of literary *potentia*.

More convincing than Cheah's vision is West-Pavlov's claim that literature can be particularly attentive to embedded practices such as those that characterize lives lived in the Global South as an alternative to the grand narrative of modernization. West-Pavlov argues that literature can convey a sense to the reader of the fine-grained quotidian practices which make the Global South an area of inventiveness rather than a repository of pathologies. Such use of literature as a lens on the Global South and the "Global South" as a concept replacing the "postcolonial" paradigm, indeed offers a new footing for discussing both. West-Pavlov names the advantages: firstly, a Global South framework expands the institutional base of postcolonial studies and is more inclusive of scholars from the Global South than the largely Anglo-American affair of postcolonial studies (16); and, secondly, it could help shift the focus of critical attention to little-read authors in the Global South, away from the few much-read authors from the Global South who now live in Northern metropolises. With Neil Lazarus' *Postcolonial Unconscious* (2011) in mind, one can certainly agree with this in general terms, but one would have to insist that "postcolonial literature" appropriately described by that label is very much alive: a literature by authors in the Global South primarily concerned with the effects of colonization in their own regions. West-Pavlov is right to emphasize that a focus on the Global South should and can include publishing venues in and theorists working in the Global South that are otherwise overlooked. This volume – although itself published by Cambridge University Press – is a step in that direction. A third advantage is that a focus on the Global South could move postcolonial studies away from its fixation on discourse and "high theory" to a greater appreciation of materiality and activist-theoreticians and, as an extension of recent postcolonial contributions to the world literature discourse (Apter, Cheah), complicate the notion of world literature (17-18).

Fabio Akcelrud Durão's critical performance in "Critical Theory: Made in Brazil" successfully demonstrates how literature's attention to structures of experience particular to the Global South can enable a critique of Northern theorizations. His analysis of Brazilian novels imitating European romance novels shows how close attention to texts seemingly travelling in the shadow of their European literary ancestors can cast into doubt the self-identity of "the Enlightenment". Comparing José de Alencar's novel *Senhora* (1875) and Machado de Assis' classic *Bras Cubas* (1881), he shows how the conflict between love and money is misplaced in Brazilian novel of the nineteenth century because large parts of Brazilian society lived in slavery and did not earn money. *Senhora*, set in Brazil, shows that money could not play the role of an equalizer between formerly distinct classes in the Brazilian novel, as it did in the

European one. The happy ending of Alencar's novel, with its characters not beholden to authority, could only appear laughable in Brazil, where the "favour" of patriarchs was the sought-after currency, not money.

Durão demonstrates that *Bras Cubas* follows a different road than *Senhora* by breaking half away from the European model. Assis tries to reconcile the patriarchal worldview that was a reality in Brazil with the liberal ideals of equality and freedom typical of European novels. The formal features of the novel match this break: irreverent to realist conventions, switching wildly between places, frequently indulging in digressions, the novel underlines its distance from the nineteenth century European mainstream and asserts an essentially "Brazilian" identity. The protagonist's opportunistic wavering between liberal ideas and colonial patriarchism shows that both can comfortably coexist. This dialectical movement, Durão argues, is typical of Brazilian modernism and Brazilian identity in general. Enlightenment thought in nineteenth century Brazil did not oppose the patriarchal colonial worldview but became part of that worldview. The Brazilian version of the Global South should thus not be considered a deviation from or aberration of the European norm: rather, it casts into doubt the Enlightenment's self-proclaimed independence from patriarchal structures. The relation of South and North underlying this reading is, finally, not a polarity of authenticities but dialectical exchange: alterity is not conceived as an externality to be sought for but as something internal. Literature from the South can show that the North, as it understands itself, is not identical to itself (84-92).

In a similar vein, Vijay Mishra demonstrates how literature of the Global South can act as critique of the Global North. The "literary theory" of his contribution's title "Literary Theory, Salman Rushdie, and the Global South" turns out not to be a theory concerned with literature but developed by it and concerned with the world. The promise of such a theory developed by writers of the Global South, Mishra argues, is that of replacing the postcolonial paradigm of looking at North-South relations. His example is Salman Rushdie, who offers himself to being read as such a literary theoretician for three reasons: he is familiar with the theoretical discourse about the Global South (Mishra studied the archives), quite explicitly addresses questions of the Global South in his recent work, and draws on Northern and Southern literary aesthetics, arguably combining them. Mishra traces Rushdie's thinking through the Global South in three of his novels. *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (1999) combines the Orpheus and Eurydice myth with the Indian myth of Sita swallowed by the earth. Rushdie incorporates Northern myth to conclude that the South still mimics the North. Instead of Southern aesthetics, a persisting dominance of the North emerges. *The Enchantress of Florence* (2008) presents comparative modernities during the Elizabethan age, which was also the age of the Mughal emperor Akbar's court. Ancient ties between those worlds are suggested by the flowering of culture in Europe and India: modernity is, ultimately, created as a joint project of North and South, Christianity and

Islam. *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* (2015) is a science fiction novel that restages the quarrel between the philosophical and religious positions of Averroes ("reason") and Avicenna ("fundamentalism"). Averroes' position wins in the form of liberal rationalism: Rushdie's answer to the war on terror and to the fatwa against himself. In this novel, the South has overtaken the North. Mishra insists that these metamorphoses do not coincide with the old teleological story of modernization and the triumph of rationality: "even as it turns to global archives, both modern and premodern, South literary theory acknowledges reason but is not a slave to it: fantasy is never abandoned as the South target literature challenges the North source literature on its own terms" (263).

Comparing Durão's and Mishra's interpretations of Global South literature to others in the volume, we recognize patterns suggesting what could be called Southern aesthetics. Simon During's "Political Theology, the Global South and Literature" offers readings of E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988), Roberto Bolaño's *By Night in Chile* (2000) and J. M. Coetzee's *The Childhood of Jesus* (2013). During submits that Global South novels are often concerned with political theology – the intertwinement of government and theology – because secularization never gained a foothold in the Global South to the degree that it did in the Global North: in the South, religion could remain a pervasive force shaping culture and state, whereas in the North secularization more or less depleted politics of theology. During argues that Southern literature has reflected a persistent unity of politics and theology that only recently, with the emergence of extremist groups, came to the fore – and arguably re-emerged in the Global North with the War on Terror.

In "Uneasy Returns: The Literary Turn to the South", Pashmina Murthy considers how novels of remigration to the South orient the Global South and create it. Murthy reads Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land* (1992) as a complication of ideas of migration through multi(directional) migration and return throughout the Global South: a construction of the Global South through precolonial travel and trade. Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966), by contrast, stages failing and successful translations from North to South, and constructs the Global South as opposite of the Global North. Okey Ndibe's *Foreign Gods, Inc.* (2014), the grotesque story of an African idol statue stolen and sold in Manhattan, is a story of global commercialization. The idol ironically mimics the mobility of capital: switching to Japan, the novel replaces the binary movement between North and South with an ongoing process of globalization that includes all kinds of direction. Here, the Global South is not constructed in terms of a nation or a fixed place but as uneven global spaces of production and consumption. Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadow* (2009) pictures a continuous westward movement through several generations, giving rise to cosmopolitan identities running the risk of being unrecognizable – and therefore classed as terrorist – by those waging a war on terror. In Murthy's

reading, Shamsie's Global South is a space of radical alterity defined by the powerful. The novel exposes paradoxes of today's cosmopolitanism. Yaa Gyasi's *Home going* (2016), finally, disorients the reader by suggesting an ability to find a home that can – as its plot shows – never be reached. In other words, Murthy shows how these novels construct the Global South in terms of opposition, correlation and the unplaceable.

This synopsis of readings in Global South literature is not representative of *The Global South and Literature* and can only present a partial picture. I have given it to show how these contributions to the volume suggest possible elements of a Southern aesthetics. To name only a few: South-South migration and North-South remigration, a reaching back in time before the era of European colonization, the balancing of rationality on one side and myth, religion and magic on the other. If we agree that such elements constitute a Southern aesthetics, should we read them as strategies of resisting Northern epistemes? Wouldn't this mean a return to the postcolonial paradigm? It is anyone's guess whether the "Global South" will replace the "postcolonial", or whether it will be incorporated by postcolonial discourse as yet another trope of resistance. The answer clearly depends as much on the institutional structures and politics of humanities departments in the Global North and the Global South as on the heuristic potential of the paradigms – if not more so. The answer may well turn out to be different in the North and the South.

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