

## Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History

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Few things seem to us as natural as the multiplicity of vernacular languages that different peoples use for making sense of life through texts, that is, for making literature. And few things seem as unnatural as their abandonment and gradual disappearance in the present. In fact, literary language loss is often viewed as part of a more general reduction of cultural diversity, one considered as dangerous as the reduction of biological diversity to which it is often compared. The homogenization of culture today, of which language loss is one aspect, seems without precedent in human history, at least for the scope, speed, and manner in which changes are taking place.

This commonsense view of the world needs two important qualifications. First, the vernacular ways of being that we see vanishing everywhere were themselves created over time. These are not primeval ways of autochthons, for autochthons (like the Spartoi of Thebes, “the sown people” born from the dragon teeth planted by Cadmus) do not exist outside their own mythical self-representation. Second, by the very fact of their creation, the new vernaculars replaced a range of much older cultural practices. These earlier practices, which seemed to belong to everywhere in general and nowhere in particular, affiliated their users to a larger world rather than a smaller place. They were, in a sense to be argued out in

I am grateful to Benedict Anderson for his meticulous and constructively contentious reading of the essay. Homi Bhabha, Carol A. Breckenridge, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Caitrin Lynch, and Mica Pollock helped me sharpen a number of the arguments and bear no responsibility for those that have remained dull.

*Public Culture* 12(3): 591–625  
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this essay, cosmopolitan practices. These great transformations in the course of the last two millennia—from the old cosmopolitan to the vernacular, and from the vernacular to the new and disquieting cosmopolitan of today—resulted from choices made by people at different times and places, for very complex reasons. Studying the history of such choices may have something important, perhaps even urgent, to tell us about choices available to us in the future.

In earlier work I have studied the period following the old cosmopolitan epoch, which I called the *vernacular millennium*.<sup>1</sup> This began in southern Asia and western Europe with remarkable simultaneity in the early second millennium, and it developed with equally striking parallels over the following five centuries. I say “began” emphatically: vernacular literary cultures were initiated by the conscious decisions of writers to reshape the boundaries of their cultural universe by renouncing the larger world for the smaller place, and they did so in full awareness of the significance of their decision. New, local ways of making culture—with their wholly historical and factitious local identities—and, concomitantly, new ways of ordering society and polity came into being, replacing the older translocalism. These developments in culture and power are historically linked, at the very least by the fact that using a new language for communicating literarily to a community of readers and listeners can consolidate if not create that very community, as both a sociotextual and a political formation.

While the literary-cultural processes of this reshaping are remarkably similar in southern Asia and western Europe, the political logics they followed appear to have differed fundamentally. In Europe, vernacularization accompanied and enabled the production of the nation-state; in India, it accompanied and enabled the production of a political form we may neutrally call the vernacular polity, in order to signal its difference. In both worlds, however, vernacularization helped initiate an early-modern era, each again marked by its specific type of modernity. And it is only now for the first time, when this epoch seems to be drawing to a close as vernacular modes of cultural and political being are everywhere coming under powerful pressures from an altogether new universalizing order of culture-power (call it globalization, or liberalization, or Americanization), that we may begin to conceive of this past history as a whole and make some sense of it for cultural and political theory.

I would like here to elaborate on these earlier arguments by situating the ver-

1. Sheldon Pollock, “India in the Vernacular Millennium: Literary Culture and Polity 1000–1500,” in *Early Modernities*, ed. Shmuel Eisenstadt, Wolfgang Schluchter, and Björn Wittrock, special issue of *Daedalus* 127, no. 3 (1998): 41–74.

naricular millennium within a comparative-historical account of the cosmopolitanisms that preceded it. These, too, comprised forms of identity that reveal themselves as produced and entirely provisional; they are located securely in time and in the choices made by the producers of culture to participate in new frames of reference, routes of circulation, and kinds of community. And each had its own specific political logic. My concerns will be, first, with tracing the parallels between these cosmopolitan formations, as well as the dramatic differences that become perceptible when we place them side by side; and, second, with considering the ways they may have contributed to shaping the vernacular varieties that replaced them (whose histories, for their part, I can only briefly summarize here). Very different cosmopolitan and vernacular practices have existed in the past, and these may have important implications for future practices in the face of what often seems to be the single, desperate choice we are offered: between, on the one hand, a national vernacularity dressed in the frayed period costume of violent revanchism and bent on preserving difference at all costs and, on the other, a clear-cutting, strip-mining multinational cosmopolitanism that is bent, at all costs, on eliminating it.

Let me take a moment to explain how and why I proceed as I do in my historical analysis of cosmopolitan and vernacular ways of being and the kinds of cultural and political belonging to which they have related, as well as my purpose in trying to make sense of this history. First, my intention here is to think about cosmopolitanism and vernacularism as action rather than idea, as something people do rather than something they declare, as practice rather than proposition (least of all, philosophical proposition). This enables us to see that some people in the past have been able to be cosmopolitan or vernacular without directly professing either, perhaps even while finding it impossible rationally to justify either. By contrast, the attempt to vindicate cosmopolitanism or vernacularism—the production of the very discourse on the universal or the particular—seems to entail an objectification and abstraction, and their associated political practices, that have made the cosmopolitan so often take on the character of domination and the vernacular, that of inevitability.

Second, the specific practices I have in mind are those of literary culture, by which I mean most simply how people do things with texts: writing, reciting, reading, copying, printing, and circulating texts. These may be expressive, discursive, or political texts, but I am interested at present, above all, in the first kind. For purposes of our discussion here, *cosmopolitan* and *vernacular* can be taken as modes of literary (and intellectual, and political) communication directed toward two different audiences, whom lay actors know full well to be different.

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The one is unbounded and potentially infinite in extension; the other is practically finite and bounded by other finite audiences, with whom, through the very dynamic of vernacularization, relations of ever-increasing incommunication come into being.<sup>2</sup> We can think of this most readily as a distinction in communicative capacity and concerns between a language that travels far and one that travels little.

Doing things with texts, the practices of literary culture, may seem a long way from the desperate choice mentioned above. And yet the communication of literary culture importantly shapes the social and political sensibilities that make such choices possible. Literature, in particular, constitutes an especially sensitive gauge of sentiments of belonging: creating or consuming literature meant for large worlds or small places is a declaration of affiliation with that world or place. The production and circulation of literature, accordingly, are utterly unlike the production and circulation of things. The universalization of particular technologies or the particularization of universal ones that characterize a dominant form of contemporary globalization carries no hint of belonging; the practices of literary culture, by contrast, are practices of attachment.<sup>3</sup>

As for the “literary” in particular, let me stress that this was no open category in the worlds and places under consideration here, but something reducible and reduced to a theoretical and practical system of differences from all other kinds of texts, a system of conventionality and intentionality. Although people who think about such things now can perceive the literary in all sorts of texts and all sorts of texts in the literary, in these earlier systems not everything could be literature and literature could not be everything. At the beginning of the first millennium, Sanskrit and Latin writers had yet to read Derrida, and so they failed to grasp that there is no way to identify the literary object, that literature has no essence, that the documentary is irreducibly rhetorical. Quite the contrary, Sanskrit literary theorists were true essentialists in their search for what they called the “self” of poetry. If they failed to agree on what it was, they had no doubt it existed. Accordingly, the instability of textual types that to our eyes may be phenomenologically obvious was to theirs ethno-epistemologically

2. On the important idea of incommunication and its history (exemplified in the case of Bangla and Oriya), see Sudipta Kaviraj, “Writing, Speaking, Being: Language and the Historical Formation of Identities in India,” in *Nationalstaat und Sprachkonflikt in Süd- und Südostasien*, ed. Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam and Dietmar Rothermund (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1992), 25–65, especially 26.

3. See Roland Robertson, “The Universalism-Particularism Issue,” in *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992), 102.

impossible—and therefore historically irrelevant to us except as a second-order problem.<sup>4</sup>

Third, I consider the cosmopolitan and the vernacular comparatively and historically, and I axiomatically reject the narrow European analytical and temporal frameworks that are usually thought to contain them. The absence nowadays of any interest in the macrohistorical reconstruction and analysis of these matters is little short of astonishing. No doubt it is another consequence of what Norbert Elias once identified as the social science “retreat into the present”—this despite the fact that social science is premised on a narrative of the pre-present, especially the pre-modern, that is still only partially written.<sup>5</sup>

The practices of literary communication that actualize modes of cosmopolitan and vernacular belonging to be examined here are those of southern Asia and western Europe. And since the analytical framework is comparative and the temporal framework is vast, we need to think in terms of elementary practices and to be drastically schematic and shamelessly reductive. There exists a remarkable parallel in the historical development of literary communication in these two worlds, where a long period of cosmopolitan literary production was followed by a vernacularity whose subsequent millennium-long ascendancy now everywhere shows signs of collapse. This historical symmetry, along with a very wide range of formal congruences, distinguishes the southern Asian and western European cases sharply from others. Contrast, for example, the wide sphere of Chinese literary communication, where the vernacular transformation in places like Vietnam or Korea occurred so late as to appear to be the project of a derivative modernization.<sup>6</sup> That said, profound differences are to be found in the ideological forms and in the modalities of social and political action to which these communicative practices relate and which they underwrote. One world presents—and

4. For Derrida’s unhistorical essentialization of the nonessentialized nature of literature, see his *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Atridge (London: Routledge, 1992), especially 40–49.

5. See Norbert Elias, “The Retreat of Sociologists into the Present,” in *Modern German Sociology*, ed. Volker Meja, Dieter Misgeld, and Nico Stehr (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 150–72. The greater part of what is purveyed as the “pre-modern” in a work like Anthony Giddens’s *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), finds little support, and much contradiction, in the historical record of southern Asia.

6. Sejong’s demotic reforms in Korea in the mid-fifteenth century, and the development of *chu-nom* script in Vietnam around the same time, did not produce anything remotely comparable to what we find in fifteenth-century southern Asia or western Europe. Instead, the innovations in both Korea and Vietnam appear to have been largely instruments designed for the promulgation of neo-Confucianism. Nor does anything of the same cultural or political order pertain to the “vernacular” novel in China, where vernacularization of the sort considered here never occurred.

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here are two sweeping generalizations for which some substantiation will be provided in what follows—what we may identify as a coercive cosmopolitanism and a vernacularism of necessity, where participation in larger or smaller worlds is compelled by the state or demanded by the blood; the other world presents a voluntaristic cosmopolitanism and a vernacularism of accommodation, where very different principles are at work inviting affiliation to these cultural-political orders.

Just as remarkable as the underdevelopment of macrohistorical comparativism is the fact that analyses of cosmopolitanism are themselves rarely cosmopolitan. The widespread ahistoricism no doubt contributes to this, as does the tendency to concentrate on pronouncements rather than practices. Discussion typically takes place on a highly localized conceptual terrain and in a very vernacular idiom constituted by European culture. But cosmopolitan is not necessarily to be equated with a cultural-political form of universal reason, let alone with a universal church or empire, any more than vernacular is to be taken to be synonymous with national. On the contrary, as I have already suggested, it has historically been possible to be the one or the other without asserting the compulsion of the national-cultural through talk of mother-tongue and mother's milk—of language and blood—or offering spurious universalizations of this or that particular rationality or deity or power.

As important as it is not to reify the cosmopolitan or the vernacular by foregrounding doctrines while ignoring actions, we must guard against filling either category in advance with any particular social or political content. My whole point here is to suggest how variable this content has been and may still be. Yet it is no easy thing to think outside the Euro-forms, for they inevitably prestructure for us the content of both the cosmopolitan and the vernacular. The very terminology we use imprisons us, assuming for the moment that we believe etymology is truth and predetermines the thought even of the etymologically ignorant. The term *cosmopolitan* presupposes a great deal, while at the same time it ironically undercuts its own logic: it assumes the universal intelligibility and applicability of a very particular and privileged mode of political identity, citizenship in the *polis* or Greek city-state. The term *vernacular*, for its part, refers to a very particular and unprivileged mode of social identity—the language of the *verna* or house-born slave of Republican Rome—and is thus hobbled by its own particularity, since there is no reason to believe that every vernacular is the idiom of the humiliated demanding vindication.

All this is reasonably well known, but the constraints remain considerable, and some scholars have tried to find ways out. The alternatives are scarcely less

problematic, however. Take the binary “philologies of community” and “philologies of contact.”<sup>7</sup> The troublesome assumptions here are not hard to identify. For one thing, community is posited as existing primevally and prior to all interaction; for another, universalizing forms of culture are implicitly supposed to affect community from the outside (through “contact”). Communities, however, are never uncreated but rather create themselves through a process of interaction—emulation, differentiation, and so on—with non-community, or, rather, with what by that very process becomes non-community. Any claim to indigenesness thus becomes simply evidence of historical ignorance of the source—or suppression of the source—from which the indigenous has been borrowed. Global cultural forms, for their part, are generated from within communities themselves, and thus only in a restricted sense stand outside some of them. Instead of cosmopolitan and vernacular, therefore, or any one of their conceptual derivatives, I would actually prefer to use terms of Indian cultures (Kannada, for example, or Telugu) that make far fewer assumptions—terms, for example, that refer simply to cultural practices of the great “Way” and those of “Place” (*marga* and *deshi*, respectively). But, in fact, as we will see, those cultures’ own understanding of these terms significantly restricts their domain of reference.

Last, one needs to ask clearly and unambiguously why we should even bother to think historically about these matters. For this hardly seems meaningful any longer in a world where last week’s news seems to be history enough, and where historical thinking has anyway lost its innocence to ideology critique, discourse analysis, or—perhaps the worst predator of all—boredom. The problem of why we want historical knowledge has a degree of urgency directly proportionate to our awareness of the fact that the past is always written from location in the present. In this case, however, it seems especially pressing since we are dealing with a question that, after all, we raise because it is a matter not of the past or even of the present but of the future—a matter of choices yet to be made about self and other, freedom and necessity, even war and peace. Given all this, it strikes me as unhelpful to say (as a leading intellectual historian of early modern Europe puts it in a recent analysis of the history of liberty) that our historiographical purpose should be simply to “uncover the often neglected riches of our intellectual heritage and display them once more to view,” holding ourselves “aloof from enthusiasm and indignation alike.”<sup>8</sup> The continual invocation of this sentiment of dis-

7. Ulf Hannerz, “Culture between Center and Periphery: Toward a Macroanthropology,” *Ethnos* 3–4 (1989): 210–11.

8. Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 118.

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passion since Tacitus first gave expression to it makes it no more true or practicable, or anything more than a preemptive strike against critics. Our enthusiasm and indignation shape our argument willy-nilly. One can hardly doubt, in fact, that the neo-Roman theory of positive freedom that the historian has so valuably reconstructed for us is the theory he prefers. And it may reasonably be asked whether such passions do more to undermine historical argument the more they are suppressed.

We must come clean about our purposes, and the more modest these purposes are, the better. There is nothing very problematic or theoretically interesting about examining the past to see how people have acted and trying to understand the acts with bad consequences and the acts with good. We do this even though we know that the historical knowledge derived from such examination carries no guarantee of any kind that better practices must necessarily follow. A history of the cosmopolitan and vernacular might therefore seek—enthusiastically and indignantly—to compare past choices, when there have been choices, in order to inform future ones. Such choices will always be responses to conditions of politics and culture far more complex than any single account can hope to capture, conditions that sometimes seem to exceed the very possibility of intentional and knowledgeable action. But if intentions and knowledge count, good intentions are better than bad, and knowledge is better than ignorance. Shankara, the eighth-century Indian thinker, put it with unarguable simplicity: “Two persons may perform the same act, both the one who understands and the one who does not. But understanding and ignorance are different, and what one performs with understanding becomes far stronger than what one performs in ignorance.”<sup>9</sup>

The pertinence of my long-term and comparative historical analysis of literary practices and the meaningfulness of past cosmopolitan and vernacular choices to future ones will become more intelligible if we reformulate them in a more familiar idiom. This I try to provide in the latter part of this essay by examining how Antonio Gramsci took up these questions in the 1930s. I then briefly consider how several recent attempts to rehabilitate vernacularism from the left may be illuminated by this long-term earlier history. To these, in conclusion, are juxtaposed the views of some postcolonial thinkers who—beneficiaries again of a historical tradition, but one very different from that of Europe—seem to me to suggest possible escape routes from the dilemma confronting us in the disparate

9. K. S. Agase, ed., *Chandogyopanisat with the Commentary of Shankara* (Poona: Anandashrama Press, 1902), 1.1.10 (my translation).



cosmopolitan-vernacular conflicts (the case of Serbia being paradigmatic) that closed out the second millennium.



If we conceive of the practice of cosmopolitanism as literary communication that travels far, indeed, without obstruction from any boundaries at all, and, more important, that thinks of itself as unbounded, unobstructed, unlocated—writing of the great Way, instead of the small Place—the world of writers and readers that Sanskrit produced, on the one hand, and Latin on the other, are remarkably similar.<sup>10</sup> In addition to their universalist spatiality, the two languages are comparable in their temporal development as written codes for what both conceptualized as this-worldly (*laukika*, *saeculare*) communication after centuries of the liturgical, magical, and generally supramundane textuality (and largely oral textuality) to which they had restricted themselves.

A little before the beginning of the first millennium, after centuries of such geographical and discursive restriction, the two languages embarked on an extraordinary process of spatial dissemination and expressive elaboration. Within four or five centuries, Sanskrit would be found in use for literary and political discourse in an area that extended from today's Afghanistan to Java and from Sri Lanka to Nepal. There was nothing unusual about finding a Chinese traveler studying Sanskrit grammar in Sumatra in the seventh century, an intellectual from Sri Lanka writing Sanskrit literary theory in the northern Deccan in the tenth, or Khmer princes composing Sanskrit political poetry for the magnificent pillars of Mebon and Pre Rup in Angkor in the twelfth. Near the end of the cosmopolitan epoch, the poet Bilhana—who had himself traveled in search of patronage through the subcontinent from Kashmir to Gujarat to Banaras and south to Karnataka—could announce that “there is no village or country, no capital city or forest region, no pleasure garden or school where learned and ignorant, young and old, male and female alike do not read my poems and shake with pleasure.”<sup>11</sup> His boast may have exaggerated the social circulation of his work, but he was describing the universe for which Sanskrit poets and intellectuals had been writing for the preceding thousand years.

10. This and the following section draw on evidence and argument from a book I am now completing, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit and Power 300–1500*, where I acknowledge the complexity of these questions in a way that is impossible in a short essay such as this one.

11. Vishwanath Shastri Bharadvaj, ed., *Vikramankadecavarita of Bilhana*, 3 vols. (Varanasi: Sanskrit Sahitya Research Committee of the Banaras Hindu University, 1964), 18.89 (my translation).

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Half a world away, Latin had been disseminated across an equally vast space, one that at the height of the empire extended on the west from Britannia, Hispania, and Mauretania (in north Africa) to Mesopotamia and Palestina in the east. And in places as diverse as Gallia, Lusitania, Tripolitana, Egypt, Cappadocia, and Syria, writers were producing literature destined for circulation throughout this space.<sup>12</sup> Horace could claim readers for his odes in Dacia and on the Black Sea, and Martial could brag that his work traveled as far as Britannia and that in towns on the Rhone in Gallia men young and old, and girls as well, were reading his epigrams.<sup>13</sup> Unlike Sanskrit literary competence and communication, which remained continuous throughout the first millennium, this grand model of Latinity would be disrupted (by the movements of peoples, the destruction of educational institutions, and the general erosion of linguistic competence) in the fourth, seventh, and tenth centuries, and attempts to recreate it largely by state intervention (the Carolingian and Ottonian renewals) would be made again and again. Otherwise, both the fact and the perception of universality were in the two cases remarkably analogous. This universality pertained to substance, too, as well as to space. For what people wrote was derived from similar modes of cultural discipline, care for language, and study of literary canons and masterworks of systematic thought. In a very literal sense, both Sanskrit and Latin were written to be readable across space and through time—as indeed they were.

With this pair of features, however—unbounded spatiotemporal circulation and normativity in literary and intellectual practice that sought to ensure that circulation—the parallels between the two types of cosmopolitanism end. In all other respects, they differed as radically as the historical experiences that produced them. We may begin our brief review of these divergences by restating an earlier point about terminology. It is striking to note that there is no specific Sanskrit term aside from the “Way” itself (which has narrow application to the world of literary style) for referring to what, as a result, I have named the *Sanskrit cosmopolis*.<sup>14</sup> Unlike the spatial category *orbis terrarum* and the literary and cultural

12. In the eastern part of this world, Latin had to contend with another cosmopolitan language, namely Greek, which would have its own complex interactions with the Slavic vernaculars in the later Byzantine empire. See, for example, *Byzantium and the Slavs in Letters and Culture*, ed. Ihor Sevcenke (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute; Naples: Instituto Universitario Orientale, 1991).

13. For Martial, see Paul Veyne, “Humanitas,” in *The Romans*, ed. Andrea Giardina (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 365, and William Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 227. Harris also cites Horace on p. 224.

14. Sheldon Pollock, “The Sanskrit Cosmopolis, A.D. 300–1300: Transculturation, Vernacularization, and the Question of Ideology,” in *The Ideology and Status of Sanskrit in South and Southeast Asia*, ed. J. E. M. Houben (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 197–247.

category *Latinitas*, which both appear at the beginning of Latin's cosmopolitan career (with Cicero) and become increasingly prominent in imperial Rome, there is no self-generated descriptor for either the spatial or the cultural sphere that Sanskrit created and inhabited.<sup>15</sup> *Samskriti*, the classicizing term adopted for translating "culture" in many modern South Asian languages, is itself unattested in Sanskrit in this sense. The fact that Sanskrit never sought to theorize its own universality is consistent with its entire historical character as a cosmopolitan formation, an alternative form of cosmopolitanism in which "here," instead of being equated with "everywhere," is equated with "nowhere in particular."

Latin traveled where it did as the language of a conquest state, first Roman and later (through what Claude Nicolet has called the "nostalgia of ecumenism") in the imperial recreations under Charlemagne and Otto, but also as the language of a missionizing and eventually a conquest church.<sup>16</sup> The state for which Latin spoke was centralized and militarized; it was standardized (in terms of such things as currency and law), and rationalized, with populations enumerated for taxation and territory delimited by frontiers that could be very concrete indeed (Hadrian's wall in northern Britain, now a UNESCO World Heritage tourist site, was designed as a twelve-foot-high, ten-foot-thick, seventy-five-mile-long barrier to "separate the Romans from the barbarians").<sup>17</sup> To impose its will, the Roman state employed coercion, taxation, legal machinery, intimidation, and, on occasion, a policy of Romanization in cultural and political behavior, with selective award of citizenship to incorporate elites from the periphery.

As for the Latin language itself, wherever it traveled it obliterated what it found. Italic literary cultures and, later, those of the western provinces (Gallic, Celtic, Iberian) gave way before the same combination of military victory and administrative cooptation, with profound and lasting transformations of their cultural systems. By the end of the first century B.C., all languages other than Latin had disappeared from the inscriptional record of Italy; Gallic and the languages of Iberia vanished within a couple centuries of conquest; and Celtic

15. On the history of the concept of *Latinitas* (" 'Latinness' . . . and especially the literary style that marked the high literature of Rome and those who sought to perpetuate it"), see W. Martin Bloomer, *Latinity and Literary Society at Rome* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 1–2, where the point is also made that *Latinitas* and *orbis terrarum* are probably calqued on *Hellenismos* and *oikoumene* in the Greek world. We might also compare, without speculating on their origins, such later terms as *Arabiya* and *Farsiyat*.

16. Claude Nicolet, *Space, Geography, and Politics in the Early Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 33.

17. See *De Vita Hadriani* of Aelius Spartianus 11.1: *murumque per octoginta milia passuum primus duxit, qui barbaros Romanosque divideret*. Available as of July 2000 on-line at <http://www.gmu.edu/departments/fld/CLASSICS/sha.hadr.html>.

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scarcely was permitted to enter the record at all, even in areas where we know it long persisted as a medium of oral communication. In North Africa, Punic and Libyan maintained a documentary existence and oral vitality for some centuries, but their long-term trajectory conformed to that of every other language that confronted Latin: toward extinction. The Roman Near East (west of the Euphrates) was, according to Fergus Millar's recent study, the site of even more dramatic linguistic devastation: Graeco-Roman imperial culture allowed little that preexisted to outlast it; in fact, only the Jews and the Palmyrenes retained their pre-Roman script languages.<sup>18</sup>

In other areas of life, such as religious practices, there seems to be evidence of a general indifference to the cultural diversity of conquered peoples, perhaps even an imperial policy of toleration. But in the domains of both the literary and the political, Romanization represented what has been called "a sort of decapitation of the conquered culture."<sup>19</sup> Focusing on such practices of culture and power rather than on professions of moral commitment thus gives us a rather different vision of Roman cosmopolitanism from what we might infer from the writings of, say, the Stoics. These thinkers may have thought themselves to be *kosmou politeis*, citizens of the world (though they never actually said so in Latin), but this seems at least in part owing to the fact that they had been able to transform the *kosmos* into their *polis*, or, rather—as the poet Ovid put it on the eve of Augustus's eastern campaign—to transform the *orbis* into their *urbs*, the world into their own city. (Here, incidentally, we find the historical correlate of the theoretical objection made to a recent account of Stoic cosmopolitanism—offered as a model for *fin-de-millénaire* Americans unsympathetic to the so-called national conversation in which they were being invited to participate—namely, that it is basically "an invitation to those who are different . . . to become like us.")<sup>20</sup> Whoever could not be incorporated into the single Roman city, such as the

18. Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 B.C.–A.D. 337* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

19. Ramsay MacMullen, *Changes in the Roman Empire: Essays in the Ordinary* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), 32 (see also 62).

20. In "The Occidental Tagore," *Boston Review* 19, no. 5 (1994): 22, Lloyd Rudolph's response to Martha Nussbaum's "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism," in the same magazine. Her essay has since been reprinted as *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996). The prominence given to classical cosmopolitanism in contemporary discussions seems (to this lapsed classicist, at any rate) to be much exaggerated. The word *kosmopolites*, for instance, seems to occur only in the much-cited (Greek) utterance attributed to Diogenes in Diogenes Laertius's biography, as well as in the work of Philo, the (Greek) Jewish philosopher of Alexandria. Neither the word itself nor any of its derivatives (nor even *cosmopolis*) occurs in classical Latin. On Ovid's (*ingens*) *orbis in urbe (fuit)*, a common trope, see Nicolet, *Space, Geography, and Politics*, 114 and cf. 33.

Parthians (Rome's eastern enemies), became subject to an imperial political demonology that provoked no counterexpression of cosmopolitan solidarity from the Stoics. In the face of such imperial declarations as the one Augustus made in his last testament ("When foreign peoples could safely be pardoned I have preferred to preserve rather than to exterminate them"—words written to make known to foreign peoples Rome's "powers of collective life and death"), the universalism the Stoics offered was astonishingly timid indeed.<sup>21</sup>

The Sanskrit cosmopolis was also created by action, though not the actions of a conquest state. It was made, instead, by the circulation of traders, literati, religious professionals, and freelance adventurers. Coercion, cooptation, juridical control, and even persuasion are nowhere in evidence. Those who participated in Sanskrit cosmopolitan culture chose to do so, and could choose to do so. This was not, of course, a world of absolute free will. In addition to everyday limits on life chances, traces of archaic ritual restrictions on participation in some dimension of Sanskrit culture (especially its liturgical side) were preserved far into the cosmopolitan period. The ambivalence about demotic participation in the Sanskrit cosmopolitan order is effectively captured in a verse found in a thirteenth-century anthology. It praises the Sanskrit poetry of a simple potter, declaring that "caste is no constraint for those rendered pure by the Goddess of Speech," and in so doing affirms the old restrictions on access to Sanskrit even as it seeks to deny them.<sup>22</sup> Neither was it a cosmopolis entirely without otherness. According to the representation of the physical world that found its stable formulation by the fifth century and was to be transmitted more or less unchanged for a thousand years, the inhabitable sphere was a vast continent "ever beset at its borders by the uncivilized."<sup>23</sup> But here again, boundaries and cultural restrictions had far less salience in action than they may have had in representation. Contrast the very different practices in our two cosmopolitan worlds in the early centuries of the millennium at the point where they nearly met in western Asia. Here Rome sought to contain if not destroy the region's inhabitants—demonized by Horace

21. The judgment on Stoic timidity is Veyne's, "Humanitas," 348–50. He cites and discusses Augustus's *Res gestae* 3.2 on 353–54. On the Parthians, see, most recently, Philip Hardie, "Fifth-Century Athenian and Augustan Images of the Barbarian Other," *Classics Ireland* 4 (1997): 46–56; Hardie calls attention to the long afterlife of the images created here.

22. Embar Krishnamacharya, ed., *Suktimuktavali of Jalhana*, Gaekwad's Oriental Series 82 (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938), 45.69 (my translation). This is a good example of what Freud called *Verneinung*, or the negation whereby repression is simultaneously maintained and denied.

23. Vayupurana 45.82 (my translation); as printed in Willibald Kirfel, *Bharatavarsa (Indien): Textgeschichtliche Darstellung zweier geographischen Purana-Texte nebst Übersetzung* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1931), 36.

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as the *Parthos feroces*, the ferocious Parthians—while at the same time peoples akin to the Parthians, the Shakas and Kushanas, were migrating into the southern Asian subcontinent. The Shakas helped create the great cosmopolitan cultural order of Sanskrit by producing the first royal public inscriptions that made use of the language (and, according to some scholars, by stimulating the invention of new genres of Sanskrit literature itself); the Kushanas patronized new and highly influential forms of Sanskrit Buddhism and established a remarkable trans-regional political order that would link South and Central Asia.

The space of Sanskrit culture and the power that culture articulated were never demarcated in any concrete fashion; the populations that inhabited it were never enumerated; nowhere was a standardization of legal practices sought, beyond a vague conception of moral order (*dharmā*) to which power was universally expected to profess its commitment. Nor was any attempt ever made to transform the world into a metropolitan center; in fact, no recognizable core-periphery conception ever prevailed in the Sanskrit cosmopolis. Every center was infinitely reproducible across cosmopolitan space, such that the golden Mount Meru and the river Ganga could be and were transported everywhere. As a result, people in tenth-century Angkor or Java could see themselves no less than people in tenth-century Karnataka as living not in some overseas extension of India but inside “an Indian world.”<sup>24</sup> The production of this kind of feeling beyond one’s immediate environment, this vast cosmopolitanization of southern Asia, has rightly been described as “one of the most impressive instances of large-scale acculturation in the history of the world.”<sup>25</sup> It comprised the synthesis and circulation of a wide range of cultural and political practices through borrowing, lending, and perhaps even the convergent production of comparable forms across a vast space. This entire culture-power complex was invented on the fly, so to speak, which makes the very idea of “Indianization” or “Sanskritization” a crude sort of teleology, erroneously presupposing as cause what was only produced as effect. Moreover, the processes of identity formation, cultural choice, and political governance involved in the invention of the Sanskrit cosmopolitan order can be very unfamiliar to us. Power, for example, was interested

24. The phrasing is that of Oliver Wolters, “Khmer ‘Hinduism’ in the Seventh Century,” *Early South East Asia: Essays in Archaeology, History and Historical Geography*, ed. R. B. Smith and W. Watson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 438. The uncentered world of Sanskrit has quite archaic origins; on the problem in ritualism, see Charles Malamoud, “Sans lieu ni date: Note sur l’absence de fondation dans l’Inde Védique,” in *Traces de fondation*, ed. Marcel Detienne (Louvain: Peeters, 1990), 183–91.

25. Paul Wheatley, “India beyond the Ganges,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 42 (1982): 28.

in culture but not in a way that necessarily reduced culture to an instrument of legitimation, as Weberian sociology might lead us to suppose a priori. Here and elsewhere, we need to theorize Indian cosmopolitanism from its effects.

One such effect in the domain of language was that, far from proscribing local script vernaculars, Sanskrit mediated their creation everywhere it traveled and often at the very moment it arrived. To be sure, these languages would be confined to the realm of the documentary and excluded from that of the expressive for many centuries—half a millennium in the case of Javanese, Kannada, Telugu, or Marathi; a full millennium in the case of Khmer, Hindi, or Newari. This was, I believe, because the literary function was coterminous with the political function, and the sphere of the political—“extending to the horizons”—was, by definition, the exclusive preserve of a Sanskrit that knew no boundaries but the horizons themselves.<sup>26</sup> But for local language to be a language of record—to inscribe a temple endowment, a mortgage, a deed—was for it to be an instrument of central cultural significance; what we now call French and German were not authorized for such a function until the fourteenth or fifteenth century. An additional, small but telling sign of the difference between our two cosmopolitanisms is the graphic sign itself. Roman script was constitutive of Latin literature: *arma virumque cano* could be written in only a single alphabet. The graphic forms of Sanskrit literature, by contrast, were innumerable: *vagarthau iva samprktau* could be inscribed in Javanese script; in Thai, Sinhala, and Grantha in Tamil country; and in Sharada in Kashmir—a substitutability unique among Benedict Anderson’s “immense communities” of premodernity.<sup>27</sup>

Contrast, moreover, the two foundational cosmopolitan fictions whose opening words have just been quoted—here I make a concession to thinking about declarations, though these remain declarations about practices. At the opening of the *Aeneid*, Virgil “sings of arms and the man,” the flight from Troy to Italy, the origins of the Latin people (*genus Latinum*), the high walls of Rome, and *imperium* without end. In his fourth-century courtly epic, *Raghuvamsha*, Kalidasa bows down to the mother and father of the universe, who are “fused together like sound and sense,” in order that he might more deeply understand sound and sense when he tells the story of a universalistic political power, the dynasty of the

26. What is said of the mythic emperor Raghu by the poet Kalidasa in the fourth century—“His chariot of conquest would rest only at the furthest horizon” (*Raghuvamsha* 3.5)—would be repeated in reference to other, historical kings for centuries to come.

27. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983), 20–25. I am not overlooking the fact that all these scripts ultimately derive from a single Indian prototype. My point is that regional graphic diversity was allowed to develop, in fact, was even sought.

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mythopoetic Raghur (who are only faintly allegorized to the imperial Guptas, unlike Aeneas to Augustus).<sup>28</sup> The two texts are offering us here two profoundly different visions of the “cosmos” that is meaningful for human life: in the one case, the “circle of the lands” (*orbis terrarum*) that have fallen under Roman power, in the other, “all that moves with life” (*jagat*). They also offer two profoundly different conceptions of how literary culture functions purposefully in the cosmos, whether as a verbal instrument for celebrating power or as a celebration of the power of the verbal instrument itself.

We have thus two cosmopolitanisms, not a European comprehensive universalism (as T. S. Eliot, for instance, in his own provincial way thought of Virgil) and a narrow Asian particularism. They were generated by a very similar set of literary practices that also underwrote, in very different ways, a new vision of power. And if the cosmopolitanisms were similar in transcending the local and stimulating feelings of living in a large world, their modalities were radically different: the one coercive, the other voluntaristic.



Thus a certain symmetry allows for reasonable comparison between the Sanskrit cosmopolis and Latinitas in the open-endedness of their spatializations and in the normative practices of literary communication intended to ensure that texts could circulate across a cultural space and time thought of as endless. The vernacular formations that superseded them, for their part, have a range of parallels that are even more astonishing. Like the two models of cosmopolitanism that they replaced, however, they show important and irreducible differences as well. A comparative argument about vernacularization obviously presupposes some shared understanding of the object of analysis. And it is precisely because no such understanding exists that vernacularization, despite its crucial importance, has so long been off the map of historical cultural studies.

As I noted at the start, vernacularization is a new way of doing things with texts, especially written literary texts, in a stay-at-home language. By *written*, I exclude the oral, even if the written may continue to be performed and received orally; by *literary*, I exclude the documentary. Both these latter categories, the literary and the documentary, however porous in contemporary theoretical terms, are fully distinguishable within the subjective universe of the premodern actors involved. By *stay-at-home*, I exclude the well-traveled cosmopolitan idiom, and

28. See Virgil, *The Aeneid of Virgil*, ed. T. E. Page (London: MacMillan, 1962), 1.1–7 and H. D. Velankar, ed., *Raghuvamsha* (Bombay: Nirnaya Sagara Press, 1948), 1.1.



even though stay-at-home languages may sometimes travel far and eventually become cosmopolitan themselves (as in fact happened with Latin), the moment of vernacularization is characterized by a full if sometimes anxiety-ridden awareness of affiliation to a domain of literary communication that is finite. And last, by *new*, I affirm not only that vernacularization begins but also that lay actors know it begins or, rather, know that they are beginning it. Vernacularization cannot be explained by a natural history of cultural change (the result of an erosion of competence in a cosmopolitan idiom, for example), and it does not stand outside history (despite the common view that every putatively inaugural text always presupposes lost predecessors, *ad infinitum*). People invent vernacular literary cultures as such, in the same way as they invent the Italian sonnet, the English epistolary novel, the Kannada *champu*, and the Marathi *abhang*.

Thus conceived, the process of vernacularization represents a profound and wholly active historical transformation in literary-cultural practices, as well as in the practices of political power, that formed both narrative substance and real-world context of so much of the literature in question. It will be helpful here to review very briefly the historical trajectory of vernacularization in western and southern Eurasia, from its restricted beginnings in the last centuries of the first millennium to its completion in most places by the sixteenth century, while at the same time noting the character of the political location in which it was fostered and its relationship toward the cosmopolitan aesthetic that it would replace. In all these features—chronology, polity, the localization of the global—the southern Asian and western European cases show quite remarkable parallels. We will then be in a position to consider the factors that make them different and give one the character of a vernacularization of necessity and the other a vernacularization of accommodation.

The vernacularization of the Sanskrit world began in the last century of the first millennium in the central Deccan. Here, in the course of the ninth to eleventh centuries, Kannada and Telugu were transformed into languages for literature and political expression after four or more centuries of subliterate existence, during which Sanskrit functioned as the sole medium for the production of literary and nondocumentary political texts. The constellation of political and aesthetic features visible here manifests itself in many other regions over the coming five centuries: to a large degree, literary production consisted of texts derived from cosmopolitan genres and of the appropriation of many of their formal features (in point of lexicon, metric, and the like). But a new aesthetic of Place (*deshi*) moderated these borrowings by balancing them with local forms, while at the same time new projects of spatiality—a kind of vernacular chrono-

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tope, in Mikhail Bakhtin's idiom, that plots out the domain of vernacular culture, that puts culture in its place for the first time—began to find expression in literary texts.<sup>29</sup> The primary stimulus for vernacularization in both cases was provided by the courts of the ruling dynasties in Karnataka (the Rashtrakutas and Western Chalukyas) and Andhra (the Eastern Chalukyas), who had begun likewise to turn increasingly to the vernacular as the language of chancery communication.

Around the same time, or in the next few centuries, across southern Asia vernacular cultures burst on the scene of literary history: Sinhala (ninth century), Javanese (tenth), Marathi (thirteenth), Thai (fourteenth), and Oriya (fifteenth), among many others. Again, this occurred largely at the instigation of courtly elites: in Polonnaruwa in Sri Lanka; in the emergent polities of Kadiri, Singhasari, and Majapahit of eastern Java; among the Devagiri Yadavas of Maharashtra (in this case the work was in fact lost); at the Thai courts of Sukhotai and Ayuthaya; and among the Gangas and Gajapatis of Orissa. And everywhere, again, literary idioms and models from cosmopolitan Sanskrit were assimilated for the creation of literatures in regional languages, while reordered notions of political space and aspirations of governance were coded in the new vernacular texts—texts that for the first time began to speak coherently of such places as “the cultivated-land of Kannada,” “the heart of the land of Andhra,” and “Beautiful Lady Lanka.” Even Tamil, the one South Asian regional language with a history of literary production that long antedated the start of the vernacular millennium, and Hindi, which was almost certainly first fashioned into a vehicle for vernacular literature outside the domain of the court by Sufi poets in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, began to develop new modes of expression and courtly characteristics during this period. In the first case, this took place under the imperial Cholas (in the eleventh and twelfth centuries); in the second, it took place under north Indian principalities such as Orcha and Gwalior that fell within the power shadow of the Mughals (in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries).

Individual episodes in the history of vernacularization in western Europe are better known, though it bears repeating that a synthetic account (which theorizes vernacularity, establishes its historical trajectory, and explores its linkage to the political sphere) remains to be written. Western European vernacularization begins in earnest—with the production of texts that enter into a secure tradition of reproduction and circulation—at the court of Alfred in late-ninth-century

29. Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84–258.

England (thus virtually contemporaneously with events in Karnataka). Here Latinate literary culture, especially in its renewed form during the Carolingian imperium, provides the model consciously followed for an intensive translation program under direction of the court intellectuals, who at the same time began to project a far more coherent vision of territoriality and the unity of Angelcynn. It was this Insular vernacular culture that Anglo-Norman elites discovered at the end of the eleventh century, and when, as one recent study puts it, they were thus “confronted . . . for the first time with the idea and the fact of an extensive and glorious vernacular literature” they developed a French analog, the “sudden issue of imaginative cultural engineering.”<sup>30</sup> The creation of a continental French literary culture, for its part, begins soon thereafter with an unprecedented proliferation of new textualizations, above all of the *chanson de geste* and related genres. At precisely the same time (but as far as we know, without direct connection), courts in Occitania created a new genre of literature, the troubadour lyric, that would help stimulate comparable vernacular transformations at courts across the western Mediterranean to Italy and Germany.

It was the corpus of northern French *chanson de geste* that would provide the model for the *Poema de mio Cid* (1207), a work without historical precedent in any Iberian language and which signals the beginning of vernacular literature in Spain. In the same epoch, the court of Castile (largely in imitation of the wonder that had been Cordoba) was dramatically creating a vernacular documentary state of the sort we are soon to find elsewhere in western Europe. This attained its fullest expression at the court of Alfonso X “El Sabio” in the mid-thirteenth century, where one major court project was a new law code in the vernacular, along with a new discourse on the history of the vernacular space (*Estoria de Espanna*).<sup>31</sup> In France, the process attains its most powerful expression at the court of François I in the mid-sixteenth century. Writers of the Pléiade such as Pierre Ronsard saw themselves charged with the task of securing the triumph of the vernacular, and their works need to be understood in relation to the new forms of language governmentality that the French court was then instituting.

There is no need here to provide further detail or mention the other well-known developments from Dante to Luther, but it is worth noting one last example from central Europe, which presents something of a model instance of the

30. David Howlett, *The English Origins of Old French Literature* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996), 165–66.

31. The vernacular story for Iberia is particularly well told in the writings of the late Colin Smith, most recently “The Vernacular,” in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 5, ed. David Abulafia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

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entire process of cultural-political transformation comprised under the idea of vernacularization. (The vernacularization of eastern Europe follows an analogous pattern, though it occurs much later and within the context of a very different cosmopolitanism: Byzantium and Eastern Christianity.) Among Hungarian-speaking peoples, for almost half a millennium the medium of textual production was exclusively Latin. It is only in the sixteenth century, in a turn that may be linked as much to new political energies stimulated by the Ottoman victory of 1526 as to the Reformation, that vernacular intellectuals begin to inscribe Hungarian-language literary texts, almost simultaneously producing an entire apparatus of Hungarian literary culture on the Latin model (dictionaries, grammars, and histories). Here the social location of vernacularization appears, exceptionally, to occur outside the centers of political power, though it may have been precisely the instability of the Hungarian court after 1300 that retarded the turn toward regional-language literary production.

Even this brief review should suffice to invite rethinking of a number of long-held beliefs about vernacularization. Let me briefly look at three. First, we have seen repeatedly that the bearers of vernacularization in both southern Asia and western Europe were the cultural and political elites who were associated with or directly controlled the royal court. Gramsci and Bakhtin, two of the few thinkers to have understood the significance of this transformation while appreciating it as a political and social (as well as cultural) phenomenon, were thus both wrong to believe that the vernaculars in Europe were upraised against a Mandarin Latinity and came to be written down only when “the people” regained importance, or that the vernacular *tout court* represented a popular social force to be distinguished from and set against an “official” Latin.<sup>32</sup> Unquestionably, some altogether different cultural-political process is at work in the cases we have mentioned. To understand this process means to understand, among other things, the new and more limited vision of governance that seems to be projected through new forms of territorialization in early vernacular texts. For it was now that, thanks to the work of literary vernacularization, regions came for the first time to be coherently conceptualized as such (if not always for the first time to be actually named): Tamil akam, Kannada nadu, Lanka, Maharashtra, Yavadvipa, England, France, Hungary.

Also wrong is the historiography that (following Ernest Gellner) makes indus-

32. See Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 188, 168; Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 465–74.

trialization the engine for the vernacular transformation.<sup>33</sup> We may not be able to say with precision what changes in the material world may have contributed to the conditions of possibility for vernacularization, but it is certainly clear that monocausal explanations have to be avoided. A vast expansion of agricultural production across Eurasia; the development of a new, complex, and profitable international trading network that linked Bruges in westernmost Europe to Hangchow in eastern China through intermediary nodes in South Asia such as Cambay and Cochin, and that reached its apogee in the mid-fourteenth century; the movement of nomadic peoples across Eurasia that first made this network possible and that powerfully (if differentially) affected the social and political conditions of southern Asia and western Europe; the expansion of Islam on its eastern and western frontiers (recall that Gibraltar and Sind were both captured by Arab armies in the same year, 711) bringing new modalities of literary culture to India while in Europe disrupting older forms of cultural reproduction—all these world-historical events no doubt helped create an environment in which, for the first time, the choice to think and write locally began to make better sense than writing and thinking globally.<sup>34</sup> Then again, the “lonely hour of the last instance” in which the economic is determinant may never have arrived in this world—why, after all, should the social science logic of capital be generalizable beyond capitalism?—and something altogether different may be at issue in this transformation, something like peer-polity emulation or a new aesthetic value of being “in place.” Although different proximate causes may thus be identified for specific developments in different regions, there seems to have been a widely shared sense that everybody was going native, as earlier they had gone global.

The third point in need of rethinking (closely related to the first) is the standard assumption that counterdominant religious movements—those in India grouped under the inadequate and historically vague term devotionalism (*bhakti*), along with Buddhism in Southeast Asia, and even the Reformation in Europe—drive forward vernacularization. In no instance does vernacularization have demotic spiritual origins. Here Buddhism, a vehicle of widespread vernacular

33. See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), and Pollock, “Vernacular Millennium,” 66–67. Gellner’s thesis has been much discussed—see most recently *The State of the Nation: Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism*, ed. John Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)—but not in terms of its fundamental historiographical problems.

34. For a recent attempt to grasp these different factors as a whole—agricultural expansion, population increase, the impact of pastoral nomads, developments in state formation—in explaining new developments in territoriality in the subcontinent, see David Ludden, *An Agrarian History of South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), chap. 2.

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transformation in parts of Asia, is typical in its social location among the mercantile, political, and cultural elite. And whereas the development of new vernacular literary cultures might sometimes draw on the energies of religious change, as in sixteenth-century Hungary or Sufi northern India, many historical cases show quite clearly that religious movements often reacted against an already existing high vernacular (what I have called the *cosmopolitan vernacular*) that attempted to replicate an imperial culture-power formation at the regional level.<sup>35</sup> In this, the Kannada case is again exemplary. The Militant Shaiva (Virashaiva) movement that arose in Karnataka during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries advocated a relocalized idiom, perhaps even a return to premanuscript and preliterary culture (since the *vacanakaras* or “makers of utterances” eschewed both high-cultural genres and inscription as such), and certainly a political order that did not seek regional empire.

But, again, with the creation of the cosmopolitan vernacular, the new reading communities, and new visions of vernacular political space, comparability between the two worlds of vernacularization ends.

Recently, I have tried to sketch out some of the remarkable divergences in the conceptualization of the vernacularization process in southern Asia and western Europe.<sup>36</sup> These pertain to every aspect of language ideology, including the sources and moral status of language diversity, the correlation between language and community, and, perhaps most important, the linkage between vernacular language and political power. On all counts, the two cases present incommensurate universes. While care for language was as intense in southern Asia as anywhere in the world, no southern Asian writer before the colonial period ever represented this care by means of an affective attachment to language, as Dante was the first to do when in the introduction to his *Convivio* he spoke of “the natural love for one’s own language”: “Not simply love but the most perfect love is what I ought to have, and do have, for [my vernacular].”<sup>37</sup> Prior to Europeanization, no southern Asian writer ever biologized the relationship to the vernacular as one of maternal generation; the notion “mother tongue” itself, as scholars have repeatedly noted, has no conceptual status whatever in pre-European South Asia.

Furthermore, no southern Asian writer ever held the view, common at the start of the vernacular millennium in Europe, that “languages make peoples,” as

35. See Sheldon Pollock, “The Cosmopolitan Vernacular,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 57 (1998): 6–37.

36. Pollock, “Vernacular Millennium,” 62–65.

37. Dante, *Il Convivio*. Vol. 5 of *Opere di Dante*, ed. G. Busnelli and G. Vandelli (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1964), 1.10.4 (*Lo naturale amore della propria loquela*) and 1.13.10 (*non solamente amore, ma perfettissimo amore sia quello ch’io a [mio Volgare] debbo avere ed ho*).

the epigram of a tenth-century Christian poet puts it. In fact—and here is a distinction that makes a most serious difference—there exists no explicit discourse on vernacular language origins at all that ties them with peoples, as there is no discourse on the origins of peoples themselves (dynastic lineages excepted). Origins of languages and peoples, morphing into chronicles and histories of kingdoms-and-peoples, can fairly be called an obsession in Europe during the first half of the vernacular millennium. These include the late-medieval speculations on the Greek sources of the Spanish language, the Celtic-Gallic or Germanic-Frankish sources of French, and the Celtic-British sources of English; the historical origins myths that trace the French to the Trojans (end of the twelfth century), the Scots to the Scythians (1320), and the Hungarians to the Huns (1283); and full-dress historical narratives such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* (1000), the Alfonsine *Estoria* (ca. 1270), and the *Grandes chroniques de France* (late fourteenth century).<sup>38</sup>

In southern Asia, by contrast, if we are to take seriously the term by which people referred to the vernaculars—they are, after all, first and foremost the “languages of Place” (*desha-bhasha*)—then we must conclude it is as much region as anything that makes language. Kannada, for example, is the language of “the land of black soil,” Malaya[la] that of “the sandalwood mountains,” Dakani that of “the south,” Braj that of the place of Krishna’s birth, and Gwalayeri that of “the mountain of cowherds.” They are, accordingly, not facts of biology, like the language of the Franks, for example, or of the Angles, which would eventually underwrite a culture-power region of birth, the *natio*. On the contrary, in many cases they seem to be facts of ecology.<sup>39</sup> (How the culture of Place, *deshi*, which for a millennium stood in contrast to the cosmopolitan Way, *marga*, would be transformed into *Swadeshi*—“our own place,” that is, “national”—in India’s early-twentieth-century engagement with colonialism, is a story for another occasion.)

Nor did any writer in southern Asia ever directly link political power with linguistic particularism like Lorenzo de’ Medici when he counseled fifteenth-

38. The Christian poet is cited by Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change 950–1350* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 198: *gentem lingua facit*. No synthetic account exists of the cultural-political genealogies of early modern Europe. See, for now, *Nation und Literatur im Europa der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Klaus Garber (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1989), 36; and Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe 900–1300*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 250–331.

39. Analogously, the cosmopolitan languages in southern Asia are facts of language processes themselves (*samskṛta*, “refined”; *prakṛta*, “unrefined”; *apabhṛashṭa*, “corrupted”), unlike the ethnonyms of other cosmopolitan languages such as Arabiya, Farsi, English.

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century Florentines to “work for the enhancement of Florentine power by writing in Tuscan,” or Wenceslas II, who a century earlier had been offered the crown of Poland on the grounds that “it is fitting that those who do not differ much in speaking the Slavic language enjoy the rule of a single prince.” No language in southern Asia ever became the target of direct royal regulation; sanctions were never imposed requiring the use of one (like French for legal practices under François I) or prohibiting the use of another (like Polish under the Teutonic knights). Indeed, around the time episodes of vernacular extermination were occurring in Europe, vernacular kings in what is now Karnataka were issuing royal inscriptions in Telugu in the east and Marathi in the west, as well as in Kannada, and in their court they would be entertained with songs in these languages as well as in Avadhi, Bihari, Bengali, Oriya, and Madhyadeshiya—producing, in fact, a virtual cosmopolitanism of the vernaculars.<sup>40</sup>

In short, all the indices of vernacular power that the history of Europe invites us to think of as constitutive of the vernacularization process are absent in the historical experience of southern Asia. If language was of interest to courtly elites in southern Asia—and it was most certainly of the greatest interest—the logic by which they conducted their cultural politics was as unfamiliar as that of their cosmocratic predecessors, for whom Sanskrit’s principal value seems to have resided in its capacity for an aestheticization of the political. Thus, despite striking parallels in the times and structures of cultural change, vernacularization in these two worlds differed as profoundly as their respective forms of cosmopolitanism. In Europe, we find everywhere a necessary correlation between people, polity, and language. In South Asia, by contrast, there appears to have been some linguistic and cultural accommodation to the conditions of a region on the part of those who entered it; and if power typically expressed itself in the language of Place, power did not make that language instrumental to its own self-conception, let alone to the being of the citizen-subject.



Thus, around the beginning of the first millennium, two vast, historically influential supraregional cultures and their associated conceptions of power—*imperium*

40. For the citation from Lorenzo’s commentary on his sonnets, see Douglas M. Painter, “Humanist Insights and the Vernacular in Sixteenth-Century France,” *History of European Ideas* 16 (1993): 68. On language prohibition, extermination, and politics, see Bartlett, *Making of Europe*, 202–3 (where the envoys to Wenceslas II are cited). The cultural practices of Deccani kings are described in Someshvara’s twelfth-century encyclopedia, the *Manasollasa* (Baroda: Gaekwad Oriental Series, 1961), vol. 3, 1–83.



*sine fine* (power without limit) and *diganta rajya* (power to the horizons)—came into existence at either end of Eurasia. They were discursively embodied pre-eminently in a new literature that could be read everywhere because it was composed in a language that traveled everywhere. They shared a wide variety of additional concerns as well: language discipline, normativity, canonicity, rhetoric. By the arrest of change and the erasure of the local that they ensured, all these factors tended to promote the emancipation of literature from space-time—the great angst of the vernacular is its spatiotemporal entropy—precisely as political power was meant to be emancipated. The social processes by which these cultural forms were disseminated and adopted and promoted, however, had nothing whatever in common. They related to power in ways that differed as utterly as the practices of power themselves, which shared little beyond belief in the infinitude of governance. The two formations are rightly regarded as cosmopolitan, both for their conception of the culture-power as unlimited and for the varied notions of belonging to—acting in, writing for, speaking to—a limitless world that, at a certain level of consciousness, they most decidedly comprised. I have characterized the radical difference in the processes by which this consciousness was generated as one between compulsion and choice.

These cosmopolitan orders were dramatically challenged by new forms of culture and power that were brought into being around the beginning of the second millennium and, within a few centuries, were transcended by these new forms almost everywhere. In neither world, it should be stressed, was success ever truly achieved in reconciling the cosmopolitan and the vernacular, albeit both Latin and Sanskrit preserved a residual force into the nineteenth century, providing a code for the display of scholarship or the cultivation of nostalgic antiquarianism by vernacular intellectuals and writers. We do not yet fully understand the precise material conditions for the great vernacular transformation, any more than we understand those for the quasi globalisms that preceded it. But even certitude of the material grounds would seem to have little bearing on our analysis. What we are able to perceive clearly is that vernacular languages or languages of Place at that moment and for the first time came to be used for producing written literary cultures and their concomitant political cultures of the emergent documentary states. They thus helped, in their different ways, to constitute the nation-states of Europe and the vernacular polities of southern Asia; helped to constitute, as well, the early modernity that these new cultural-political formations represented, and which, accordingly, arrived more or less simultaneously and wholly independently in the two regions.

Here, too, however, ideologies of language and instrumentalities of culture

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differed profoundly. In the one case, the relationship between different peoples and their languages was determinate, so much so that peoplehood became a function of language (a conception that, for all the relativity and contingency that we find to undermine it, continues to weaken strong minds).<sup>41</sup> In the other, this relationship seems almost ecological: just as places create water and soil, so they were thought virtually to create languages, which people use like water or soil. In western Europe, language was held to be subservient to power. Indeed, it became explicitly the “attendant of empire” (*compañera del imperio*) at the very moment that power was first projected in a truly global manner, in Iberian colonialism (the famous phrase is Nebrija’s, who used it when dedicating his Castilian grammar to Queen Isabella in 1492). In South Asia, language was a vehicle of aesthetic distinction, style, or something else that reveals no simple purpose to be explained according to the functionalist models of modern social science. These differences I have sought to order by identifying the first as a vernacularity of necessity and the second as a vernacularity of accommodation.

I am very much aware that this brief history of cosmopolitanism and vernacularism and their elementary aspects has ignored vast complexities. An especially important omission, which would have required far too much space to make good here, is discussion of the dialectic between cosmopolitan and vernacular that creates them both. (These cultural forms are not just historically constituted but mutually constitutive, for if the vernacular localizes the cosmopolitan as part of its own self-constitution, it is often unwittingly relocalizing what the cosmopolitan borrowed from it in the first place.)<sup>42</sup> I have had to run the risk of caricature, too, in creating a largely demonic North to juxtapose to a largely angelic South, refreshing departure though that might seem; and a complex process of change has been reduced by and large to a logic of pure idealism. But, granting all these shortcomings, the historical reconstruction offered here does make claim to a certain reality that yet further qualification should not be permitted to flatten. First, the cosmopolitan and the vernacular have been actual and profound culture-power alternatives in Asia no less than in Europe. Second, both were everywhere and always produced by deliberate choices and conscious practices.

41. Charles Taylor, for example, is not alone in his conviction that language is the “essential viable and indispensable pole of identification” and that this identification stands outside history. See Pierre Birnbaum, “From Multiculturalism to Nationalism,” *Political Theory* 24 (1996): 39 (where the Taylor citation is given), and compare Anthony Appiah, “Identity, Authenticity, Survival,” in Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutman (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 156.

42. A modest example is provided in Pollock “The Cosmopolitan Vernacular,” 21–25.

The transformations we have examined in the ways people make culture and organize power cannot be explained by the naturalization of cultural change, where mechanisms triggered by material or technological innovation are thought simply to trigger cultural evolution. By the same token, what some are inclined to characterize as vernacular primordiality is shown to be a chimera; vernacularity has always and everywhere been produced. Third, however comparable may have been the basic conditions of possibility that obtained across the Eurasian world during the fifteen-hundred-year period that helped produce cultural and political change of a very comparable sort, the differences in both the cosmopolitan and vernacular formations in the two spheres are deep and irreducible. All this prompts us to rethink the historical character of local and supralocal attachments, if only insofar as the processes of literary culture considered here—the production and circulation and consumption of expressive texts—are able to embody them.

No less complex than the problem of knowing this past, however, is the question of why we want to know it at all. Can the understanding of such historical experiences as we have reviewed here open up for us a domain of alternative possibilities at a time when the choices of culture-power before us all seem bad and the dilemmas intolerable yet unavoidable? Cosmopolitanism and vernacularism in their contemporary Western forms—American globalization and ethnonationalism—is one such domain of bad options. It is hard not to see their most deformed developments in the confrontation between NATO and Serbia that closed out a century of confrontation. No simple formula will capture the complexity of this confrontation, but it is not too far wrong to see it as pitting a dying vernacularity—or, at least, something that could be retailed as vernacularity to the people of Serbia—grown mistrustful, pathological, and ethnocidal, against a new kind of cosmopolitanism with a mission that some have characterized by the useful if worrisome oxymoron “militaristic humanism.”

India, for its part, is hardly immune now to bad choices. The worst at present is that between a vernacularity mobilized along the most fragile fault lines of region, religion, and caste and the grotesque mutation of the toxins of postcolonial resentment and modernity known as Hindutva, or fundamentalist Hinduism. Hindutva’s political organization, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP; Indian People’s Party), took secure control of the national government in March 1998; its paramilitary wing, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS; National Volunteers Union), and its ideological wing, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP; World Hindu Council), have now unprecedented access to central power. The very names of these groups now speak what had never been spoken before, postulat-

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ing in the one case a single Indian “peoplehood” (*janata*) and in the other Hinduism as an aggressive universalism (*vishwa*). The latter is produced not by an affective attachment to the large world, but by the dislocations of diaspora, as a recent RSS tract in its own confused way makes clear:

For a Hindu, the entire universe is his home. He considers himself as belonging to the whole world. For him, “Swadesho bhuvanatrayam” [The triple world—earth, sky, and heaven—is one’s own Place] is not a mere slogan, but is the very spirit ingrained in his mind. As such, from time immemorial, Hindus are widely spread the world over. Hindus reside in more than 150 countries and have been at-home wherever they have reached. In fact, in a couple of countries like Mauritius, Fiji, Trinidad, etc., they form the majority and by this virtue are occupying high positions in those countries. It is no wonder that when swayamsevaks [RSS cadres], who take pride in being the harbingers of the Sangh ideology, and who for other reasons go abroad, also start Sangh Shakhas [Union branches] in countries they choose to reside in.<sup>43</sup>

Universalism exists for the RSS only in the network of its branch offices, in the magnitude and extent of its paramilitary network. This Hindutva complex of which the RSS is part, the so-called Sangh Parivar (Family of Organizations), as it has recently come to be known, instantiates the very type of “reactionary modernism” familiar from interwar Europe: it is committed at once to a wholesale nuclearization of India’s military capabilities (as demonstrated in the BJP’s May 1998 nuclear test), and to a cultural program of pseudotraditionalism that has cynically coopted and polluted the great cosmopolitan past. Thus the BJP proclaimed 1999 the “Year of Sanskrit,” while the RSS now cultivates the practice at its branch meetings of issuing commands in Sanskrit. All this is carried out in the name of a new *swadeshi*, a new militant vernacularism. “The new watchword is ‘Swadeshi,’” according to the BJP vice president: “The world has been told in unmistakable terms that India cannot be taken for granted.”<sup>44</sup>

I want to begin thinking about the kinds of choices between the cosmopolitan and the vernacular that are now available—mostly bad and bitter and sad choices, it seems—in relation to the historical past we have just surveyed by putting them

43. This is cited from the RSS pamphlet “Widening Horizons,” available as of December 1999 on-line at <http://www.rss.org/rss/library/books/WideningHorizons/ch8.html>. For a recent general critique of Hindutva culture and politics, see *The Concerned Indian’s Guide to Communalism*, ed. K. N. Panikkar (New Delhi: Penguin, 1999).

44. See K. R. Malkani, “BJP History: Its Birth, Growth and Onward March,” available as of December 1999 on-line at <http://www.bjp.org/history.htm>.

into a more familiar idiom with a discussion of two short texts from the early 1930s by Antonio Gramsci that are concerned with the vernacular-national and cosmopolitan-universalist problematics. Gramsci, it bears repeating, is virtually unique in the scholarly record for the innovative and passionate reflection he devoted to the large questions of literary culture and political power over the long history of the West, though it is not clear that he ever succeeded in developing a coherent position about the competing claims of the cosmopolitan and the vernacular as either cultural or political values. For one thing, he seems to have placed the blame for the failure of national consciousness to develop in Italy on a certain “cosmopolitan casteism” and the long-term alienation of the intellectual class from the state, something intimately connected in Gramsci’s mind with the continuing use of Latin and the concomitant failure of a national language—indeed, Dante’s “illustrious vernacular”—to come into being. The very development of his notion of the “national-popular,” however, as a pure strategy for mass mobilization beyond the Communist Party proper suggests his regret at the unhappy kinds of compromises required at that historical juncture, to say nothing of his appreciation of the sheer factitiousness of the national sentiment itself. I doubt I am alone in often sensing here a tension in Gramsci’s thought between, on the one hand, an ideal of cultural cosmopolitanism and political internationalism and, on the other, the very pragmatic pressures of national-popular action.<sup>45</sup> The two small texts to be considered meditate, in their own way, on these problems.

The first of these texts is actually a summary of and comment on an article published in 1929 by Julien Benda (with whose ideal of the intellectual “non-pratique” Gramsci must otherwise have had no sympathy) concerning the relationship between the particular and the universal in literature.<sup>46</sup> Benda notes that

45. On the development of the national-popular, see the helpful essay of David Forgacs, “National-Popular: Genealogy of a Concept,” in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Simon During (London: Routledge, 1993), 177–90. I leave it to others to determine whether Forgacs is correct to state that Gramsci believed that, in general, “the cosmopolitan traditions of the Italian intellectuals had impeded the molecular ideological activity by which [an intellectual and moral] reformation could be brought about” (186).

46. Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, 260–61 (“Julian Benda”). Benda’s article is “Comment un écrivain sert-il l’universel?” *Les nouvelles littéraires*, 2 November 1929, 1. (I make reference to material from the original article inasmuch as it was known to Gramsci, though not explicitly addressed in his note.) This largely restates ideas in Benda’s *La trahison des clercs* (Paris: Grasset, 1927; cf. 97–99, 296–98), which is a still-troublesome text. See, for example, Ernest Gellner, “La trahison de la trahison des clercs,” in *The Political Responsibility of Intellectuals*, ed. Ian Maclean, Alan Montefiore, and Peter Winch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). For the ideal that “le clerc doit se proclamer non-pratique” (except, evidently, when he demands the reform of the *cléricature*), see Benda, *La trahison des clercs*, 231–35.

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serious people—he mentions André Gide—believe a writer able to serve the general interest only to the degree that he or she produces work that is more particular. Gide himself had originally developed this idea within a purely aesthetic paradigm: one cannot promote the universal or any other good without the perfection of “artistic power, however defined,” and the latter is something always derived from and depending on the particular. The particular for many in the 1920s, however, was, precisely, the national: the question Benda and Gramsci accordingly ask is whether being particular itself is necessarily a function of being national, as many conservative intellectuals insisted, such as those who in 1919 asked in a public manifesto, “Is it not by nationalizing itself that a literature takes on a more universal signification, a more humanly general interest? . . . Is it not a profound error to believe that one can work on behalf of European culture through a denationalized literature?”<sup>47</sup>

What interests me in these reflections on the literary particular, beyond the genealogy of the idea and its remarkable implications—that the particular is the real general and that nationalism may “equivocate” as the true universalism—is the response offered by Benda and endorsed by Gramsci. This takes two forms. For one, the national particular is said to be only a “first-degree” variety, rather like the species category “mammal” that characterizes all humans, whereas a “second degree” of particularization, and the more important, is a function of distinguishing oneself from one’s fellow citizens.<sup>48</sup> For another—and this is the far more powerful insight—Benda and Gramsci differentiate between two modalities of particularity: there is a radical difference, as they emphatically put it, between *being* particular and *preaching* particularism. Expressed in the terms that have been used in the present essay, this distinction comprises the understanding that while vernacularity is essential for art and for life, we can distinguish between a vernacularity of necessity and one of accommodation and strive somehow to achieve the latter.<sup>49</sup>

The second text is a brief comment on the past and future of the idea of the

47. The signatories of this hypernationalist document, “Pour un parti de l’intelligence,” included Paul Bourget, Maurice Barrès, Jacques Maritain, and Francis Jammes.

48. Ernest Renan, says Benda, is not a “necessary effect” of the French consciousness, but “an arbitrary, even unforeseeable event,” and his true particularity and value lie in the degree of his difference from the group of which he is part, in the way that any human being’s value is what sets him or her apart from the species (“Comment un écrivain sert-il l’universel?,” 1).

49. Benda himself, as we can see in hindsight, was dead wrong—or grossly premature—to infer (on the grounds that one does not pray for the healthy) that the fervor with which the “nationalization of the *esprit*” was being preached in 1929 signaled its imminent dissolution in a new European consciousness.

Italian nation-state. Gramsci raises the question of the universal while pursuing the same basic problem as in the first text, wondering now whether the forces that produced the unification of Italy must also inevitably produce a militaristic nationalism.<sup>50</sup> His response is actually rather curious. He argues that such nationalism is antihistorical: “It is, in reality, contrary to all the Italian traditions, first Roman and then Catholic,” which he tells us are cosmopolitan. But then, as if sensing how unhistorical or incomplete is the answer he has just given, he asks whether a new type of cosmopolitanism may ever be possible, beyond “nationalism and militaristic imperialism: Not the citizen of the world as *civis romanus* or as Catholic but as a producer of civilization.”<sup>51</sup> In other words: Is it at all possible to be universal without preaching universalism?

The antinomy between the particular and the universal, the vernacular and the cosmopolitan, the national and the international—not all precisely the same phenomenon, to be sure, but now inextricably linked—has lost little of its salience since Gramsci’s day. Quite the contrary, it seems to have shown itself to be ever more urgent and intractable, with new and even more complex versions of vernacularity developing in response to what is perceived as cosmopolitanism in its ugly-American embodiment. To get a sense of where we stand now, it may be helpful to look very briefly at two recent attempts made by very accomplished thinkers, inheritors of one of the historical types of vernacularism and cosmopolitanism whose genesis we have traced, to rehabilitate the national-vernacular under a liberal or progressive guise. In conclusion, we can ask whether any response to this new indigenism may be available in a postcolonialism that may be thought still to bear the impress or stored energy—or whatever may be the right metaphor—of those other, very different types of cosmopolitan and vernacular histories.

In his recent book on multicultural citizenship, Will Kymlicka introduces the idea of what he calls “societal culture.” This, we are told, is “a culture which provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life, encompassing both public and private spheres.” In fact, these turn out to be no different from national cultures and are said to constitute the true basis of freedom. While Kymlicka is aware that the congeries of practices he terms societal cultures “did not always exist” but derive (in accordance with Gellner’s

50. Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, 246–47 (“Interpretations of the Risorgimento [ii]”).

51. Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, 246.

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flawed theory) from the new elevation of the vernacular in the service of the educational homogenization required by industrialization, they somehow escape the historicity of the nineteenth-century moment of their genesis. Vernacular cultures are given and there; they demand unequivocally to be accommodated just as they are, unquestioned in any way about their present, let alone historical, constitution. In fact, they are portrayed as the only “meaningful context of choice for people” and worth preserving at all costs. Violations of the space of vernacular cultures, accordingly—through open borders, for example—would be a disaster since “people’s own national community would be overrun by settlers from other cultures, and . . . they would be unable to ensure their survival as a distinct national culture.” Most people (somehow Kymlicka knows most people) “would rather be free and equal within their own nation . . . than be free and equal citizens of the world, if this means they are less likely to be able to live and work in their own language and culture.”<sup>52</sup> A necessary vernacularism if there ever was one.

Tom Nairn has a less openly culturological defense of vernacular nationalism; he approaches the problem through the domain of the political. Nairn argues that the events of 1989 buried the old internationalism of promoting working-class solidarity to counteract capitalism and nationalism. In its place has come “internationality,” the bland but dangerous homogenization of the world whose very effect (a familiar argument here) is to produce local resistance, often violent resistance. The only way forward now, we are instructed, must be through and not outside nationalism (and of course through capitalism). All that internationalists have left to do is to “decide what sort of nationalists they will become.” In other words, the only way to be universal now is to be national. As for the dangers? Well, asks Nairn, “Are the fragmentation and anarchy really so bad?” These words were written two years into the siege of Sarajevo, five years into the renewed struggle in Kashmir, ten years into the movement for Tamil Eelam—with Rwanda one year away, Chechnya two, Srebrenica three. Of course, these are not identical situations—nor have all twentieth-century horrors, many far worse than these, been wholly subsumable under the extreme vernacular mobilization of nationalism. Yet each of these recent cases seems to me to be poised in its own way on the particularistic brink, the vernacular—or what Nairn calls the

52. Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 76, 80, 93. Despite his Gellnerian model, Kymlicka somehow counts Native American cultures as “genuinely distinct societal cultures,” like those of the Puerto Ricans or Québécois (79–80). A strong critique of Kymlicka is offered in Jeremy Waldron, “Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative,” in *The Rights of Minority Communities*, ed. W. Kymlicka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 93–119.



“Ethnic Abyss,” which seems increasingly resistant to Nairn’s denial that “there is no abyss, in the hysterical-liberal sense.”<sup>53</sup>

Kymlicka and Nairn represent a wide range of thinkers for whom vernacularity stands outside history (except to the degree that history continually demonstrates its necessity) and constitutes an essential component of human existence. They therefore hold the conservation of vernacular culture and the acquisition of vernacular polity—now coterminous with nationalism—to be a categorical imperative in the face of a universalism seen only as compulsory. To such a vision of the present and future we may juxtapose the perspective of those who have inherited (if not always self-awerely) the very different traditions of the South Asian cosmopolitan and vernacular sketched out in the foregoing pages. These are legatees, in addition, of the world’s longest and most fraught engagement with globalization in its harshest forms, colonialism. It is a striking fact that one finds among these intellectuals so rich an inventory of strong formulations about particulars and universals—especially Asian particulars and European universals—and related problematics of European thought. Contrast for a moment the relative indifference to these matters among, say, Chinese intellectuals, with their very different history. This is something one may account for, I think, as a kind of sedimentation of historical experience—without thereby committing oneself to an iron determinism—but its value is harder to assess. Getting beaten up all the time by the schoolyard bully has a way of focusing the mind on violence more than is the case for kids left unhurt. No doubt, such historical experience does not convert automatically into an advantage for thought or practice, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has often taken care to remind me, but it clearly converts into a propensity for thinking. We may not be wrong to suppose, therefore, that these two powerful formative experiences (a long experience with autonomously produced cosmopolitan and vernacular practices, followed by the new and heteronomous cosmopolitanism of colonialism) have inclined some thinkers to search harder—not for a unified theory of transcendence, but for what Chakrabarty has characterized for me as “cracks in the master discourses” and, more important, for practices for overcoming the dichotomous thinking that marks our current impasse.

It is from within the world of these intellectuals—I have in mind the recent work of Partha Chatterjee, but a number of others including the late D. R.

53. Tom Nairn, “Internationalism and the Second Coming,” in *Mapping the Nation*, ed. Gopal Balakrishnan (London: Verso, 1996), 267–80; the texts quoted are on 274–76. Originally published in *Daedalus* 122, no. 3 (1993): 115–40.

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Nagaraj provide good examples—that some of the more compelling suggestions are being offered on ways to address the desperate choices imposed by modernity.<sup>54</sup> Might it not be possible, as some of these thinkers suggest, to transcend the dichotomies of modernizing cosmopolitanism and vernacular traditionalism by understanding that the new must be made precisely through attachment to the past, and by recognizing that only such attachment enables one to grasp what can and must be changed? Take as one example the seemingly irreconcilable alternatives of the universalist discourse of the liberal state—where secularism demands the submergence of religious difference in a homogeneous juridical order—and the historical particularities of a given community's ways of life (it being understood that these are, in fact, historical). Might this irreconcilability not yield to a strategic politics that seeks to institute such a transformation from within communities themselves (whether Muslim, Vaishnav, Maratha, or other), while resisting demands for liberalization or democratization that are official, top-down, and imposed from the outside? In other words, affective attachment to old structures of belonging offered by vernacular particulars must precede any effective transformation through new cosmopolitan universals; care must be in evidence, a desire to preserve, even as the structure is to be changed. Assuredly, many of the discursive components in such arguments are available in other contemporary debates, but the mix here seems to me special. It consists of a response to a specific history of domination and enforced change, along with a critique of the oppression of tradition itself, tempered by a strategic desire to locate resources for a cosmopolitan future in vernacular ways of being themselves. Analogously, the choice between the global and the local, whether in literary culture or in the organization of power, may now find some kind of resolution in the blunt refusal to choose from among the alternatives, a refusal that can be performable in practice however difficult to articulate in theory.<sup>55</sup>

54. See, for example, Partha Chatterjee, *A Possible India: Essays in Political Criticism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); D. R. Nagaraj, *Collected Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), and D. R. Nagaraj, "Introduction," in Ashis Nandy, *Exiled at Home* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998). I forbear citing my Chicago colleagues, whose engagement with these questions is on display in this volume.

55. Chatterjee puts several of these ideas well (see *A Possible India*, especially 261–62 and 280–85). The sensitivity he evinces should not be blithely generalized, however, whether in the sphere of power or culture. Consider how, in a fit of misguided vernacularism, the Communist Party–Marxist government of West Bengal in 1981 prohibited English-medium instruction in elementary education; this law was rescinded in 1998 after heated protests by working-class people who were outraged at the opportunities for advancement being denied to them (a precedent ignored by the government of Tamil Nadu, which instituted a similar law regarding Tamil in autumn 1998). The attempt to preserve vernacularity on the backs of the poor is a familiar liberal strategy; see Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings*, 166.

None of this thinking should be taken as exemplification of “hybridity” in its usual connotations of *mélange* or mongrelization—a banal concept and a dangerous one, implying an amalgamation of unalloyed, pure forms, whether vernacular or cosmopolitan, that have never existed. The practice I have in mind, on the contrary, is a tactical reversal of domination—a resistance-through-appropriation, as it has been described—which, in fact, approximates what I take to be the very process of vernacularization before modernity.<sup>56</sup> This practice derives from a realization born of accumulated historical experience of both pre- and postcoloniality that the future must somehow become one of *And* rather than *Either/Or*. Such a proclamation admittedly has the ring of a slogan, and a certain unpleasantly utopian ring at that. Neither does it mechanically yield policy outcomes capable of helping us directly address today’s most pressing questions of the cosmopolitan and vernacular (such as the minority cultural rights that we must support or the ethnochauvinist politics that we must resist). In fact, I have borrowed this particular formulation from the German sociologist Ulrich Beck, whose argument is not a precipitate of comparable historical experience but derives instead from an abstract model of risk theory, and precisely for this reason seems all the less compelling.<sup>57</sup> Yet the proposal to seek *And* may derive some pragmatic sustenance from an awareness of the varied cosmopolitan and vernacular possibilities that have been available in history. To know that some people in the past have been able to be universal and particular, without making either their particularly ineluctable or their universalism compulsory, is to know that better cosmopolitan and vernacular practices are at least conceivable—and perhaps even, in a way those people themselves never fully achieved, eventually reconcilable.

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56. See Homi Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders,” in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1996), especially 112–15.

57. Ulrich Beck, *The Reinvention of Politics: Rethinking Modernity in the Global Social Order* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1997).

