



Insurgent imaginations: World literature and the periphery

by Auritro Majumder, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021, xiv + 226 pp., £75.00 (hardback), ISBN 978-1-108-47757-4

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To cite this article: Barnita Bagchi (2022) Insurgent imaginations: World literature and the periphery, Journal of Postcolonial Writing, 58:3, 432-433, DOI: [10.1080/17449855.2022.2066802](https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2022.2066802)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2022.2066802>



Published online: 02 May 2022.



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Written from a fine-grained materialist and historicized perspective, Auritro Majumder's *Insurgent Imaginations* sees solidarity informed by humanism at work in a whole range of writers from the Global South, from Rabindranath Tagore to Mao Zedong and Arundhati Roy: for Majumder, insurgent imaginations are at work in these peripheral internationalisms. While South Asian and especially Bengali writers form the main focus of the book, there is throughout an impressive engagement with Latin American cultural theory, especially the work of Brazilian Marxist critic Roberto Schwarz. Scholars such as Supriya Chaudhuri have published in recent years on Rabindranath Tagore's conception of world literature, which he articulated in a lecture in 1907, and Majumder also devotes attention to Tagore's conceptualization, bringing out the subtle dynamic of Tagore's thinking through of *sahitya* – literature that seeks to unite a particular humanness with all of humanity. In Mao's 1942 Yen'an lectures on art and literature, Majumder finds an attempt to conceptualize a dialectic of human self-consciousness articulating itself in popular language and within reconfigured cultural forms. And finally, perhaps the most significant contribution of this book is its analysis of a whole range of essays published in periodicals in Bengali: for example, how writers in *Parichay*, *Daak*, and *Notun Sahitya*, drawing inter alia on the Yen'an Forum as well as Mao's work, read Tagore in the late 1940s and early 1950s as a champion of collective liberation, or *mukti*.

For Majumder, peripheral aesthetics is born of, and in turn is a response to, the world of socialized capital, and the conditions required for peripheral aesthetics to emerge are produced by combined and uneven development – that influential concept found in the thought of Leon Trotsky, especially in the *History of the Russian Revolution* (1932). Works such as *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-literature* by the Warwick Research Collective (2015) have laid important precedents in this broad approach; that book sees modernity as a singular phenomenon within a global capitalist system that also produces literary forms cognate with uneven and combined development. *Insurgent Imaginations* is an important and original contribution to this broad line of thought, analysing material too little known in mainstream studies of world literature today.

The material across chapters is beautifully interwoven. If, in a chapter on the dissident politician and writer M.N. Roy, we hear of encounters between Roy and Afro American left-wing figures such as Claude McKay and Harry Haywood, and of the Communist Party of USA's involvement in the protests round the Scottsboro trial of nine African American teenagers in the early 1930s, this is linked in a later chapter to Utpal Dutt's play *Manusher Adhikaré* (Rights of man) (1968) on the Scottsboro trial. Such connections are characteristic of the book's acute understanding of peripheral internationalism. Or, to take another example, the analysis of Mahasweta Devi's feminist fiction and her experimentation in mixed forms acknowledges the importance, as a precedent, of the transcultural writing of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, Bengali Muslim speculative writer and educator from the early 20th century. In the book's final pages, Majumder concludes:

The lost pathways, and alternative visions, of history offer different lineages of the present than those given by the dominant order. [. . .] The various struggles of the marginalized, in different parts of the world, for emancipation and liberation articulate a collective vision of another world that is possible. (200)

Insurgent Imaginations offers a thought-provoking and persuasive analysis of important literary and internationalist aspects of such collective visions, forged largely from the perspective of the Global South.

Reference

Warwick Research Collective. 2015. *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-literature*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2022.2066802>



Postcolonial literatures in the local literary marketplace: Located reading, by Jenni Ramone, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, 261 pp., £76.00 (hardback), ISBN 978113756933 2

In *Postcolonial Literatures in the Local Literary Marketplace*, Jenni Ramone confronts an intriguing question: why are there so many depictions of reading and interactions with books in postcolonial literatures? She notes, for example, that the novel *French Lover* by Taslima Nasrin contains 54 moments of reading – one instance of detailed enumeration among many others in the monograph. Her study reveals a nexus between instances of reading in postcolonial literatures and the workings of the local literary marketplace. Ramone’s argument focuses less on moments of reading writ large, and more on the dual movement of detecting the presence of the local literary marketplace within the postcolonial text, on the one hand, and reading the text within the context of a local literary marketplace, on the other. Her aim is to elaborate and enumerate “literal and figurative versions of the market and/or marketplace”, and to extricate each version’s symbolic and economic functions (18).

Ramone dips in and out of moments of close textual analysis in order to draw out these links to the local literary marketplace. She analyses over 200 literary texts with the help of 19 research assistants, one of whom (Saudatu Mohamed) conducted interviews with booksellers in Lagos. This attempt at a more sociological research methodology underpins her “hopes to offer a method of ‘close-distant-located reading’ ” (24). Before she dives into four sets of texts and national marketplaces, Ramone defines the “local” as not-global, and though she uses the word “local” as a functional stand-in mostly for national literary marketplaces, she does always indicate their relations with global capitalism and the global literary marketplace, especially in the book’s most germane moments (as in her discussion of the publisher Heinemann). In chapter 1 on India, she considers texts that employ maps, mapping, and book movement to discuss the wider topic of colonial cartography, as well as the trauma of Partition and its effects on literary culture. In chapter 2 on Nigeria, she notes the centrality of the marketplace in local culture and “meaning” as “the site of interaction and exchange” (81). In chapter 3 on black writing in Britain, she traces community and individual consciousness as integral to the history of black bookshops and in representations of acts of reading. Finally, in