



Kent Academic Repository

Novillo-Corvalan, Patricia (2021) *Global South Modernism: Tagore, Victoria Ocampo and the Geopolitics of Horizontal Relations*. *Modernist Cultures*, 16 (2). pp. 164-190. ISSN 1753-8629.

Downloaded from

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/77710/> The University of Kent's Academic Repository KAR

The version of record is available from

<https://doi.org/10.3366/mod.2021.0327>

This document version

Author's Accepted Manuscript

DOI for this version

Licence for this version

UNSPECIFIED

Additional information

Versions of research works

Versions of Record

If this version is the version of record, it is the same as the published version available on the publisher's web site. Cite as the published version.

Author Accepted Manuscripts

If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding. Cite as Surname, Initial. (Year) 'Title of article'. To be published in *Title of Journal*, Volume and issue numbers [peer-reviewed accepted version]. Available at: DOI or URL (Accessed: date).

Enquiries

If you have questions about this document contact ResearchSupport@kent.ac.uk. Please include the URL of the record in KAR. If you believe that your, or a third party's rights have been compromised through this document please see our [Take Down policy](https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies) (available from <https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/kar-the-kent-academic-repository#policies>).

Patricia Novillo-Corvalán

Abstract:

This article explores cultural dialogues between countries located in the (so-called) global South, focusing on India and Argentina through the nexus between the Bengali author, artist, and educationalist Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) and the Argentine writer, publisher, and feminist Victoria Ocampo (1890-1979). The article examines the dialectical tensions that arose out of their encounter in Buenos Aires in 1924 which, while forging productive cultural networks through the globalist paradigms proposed by Ocampo's modernist review *SUR* and Tagore's Bengal-inflected notion of *visva-sahitya* – as well as the latter's significant contribution to the Argentine cultural scene – it also brought to the fore the geopolitics of empire by foregrounding India's and Argentina's fraught colonial relations with imperial Britain.

Keywords: *SUR*, Victoria Ocampo, Rabindranath Tagore, global South, world literature, empire, colonialism.

In early 1924 Tagore was invited by the Peruvian government to attend the national celebrations of the centenary of the Battle of Ayacucho (fought in December 1824) as one of the country's guests of honour. As the first Asian writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913, Tagore epitomized an anti-colonial epistemological paradigm that the authoritarian administration of President Augusto B. Leguía (1919-30) was keen to seize upon to win political support and to promote its own nationalistic agenda during the crucial historical period of the *centenario*. Accompanied by his English secretary Leonard Elmhirst (a young agriculture graduate from Cornwall University and a volunteer at Tagore's Institute for Rural Reconstruction in Sriniketan) Tagore accepted the invitation and set sail from Europe on the transatlantic ship *Andes*, arriving in Buenos Aires on 6 November 1924. Unable to continue his journey to Peru due to poor health, he accepted Victoria Ocampo's invitation to convalesce at a villa named 'Miralrío' (meaning 'river-view') located in the district of San Isidro (a wealthy suburb of Buenos Aires) on the banks of the River Plate that she had especially

arranged for his benefit, a sojourn that in the end lasted two months, meaning that Tagore's official trip to Peru was subsequently called off, as he was deemed too weak to cross the Andes.

During his stay in the Argentine Republic, Tagore wrote a poetry collection entitled *Purabi* (1925; meaning both 'Easterner' and the name of an evening raga in Indian classical music) which he dedicated to the symbolic 'Vijaya' – in Tagore's Indianisation of Ocampo's identity – a name that signifies 'victory' in Sanskrit, as well as being one of the names of the Hindu goddess Durga. *Purabi* comprises twenty poems, the majority of which were written in Villa Miralrío in Tagore's native Bengali, although he simultaneously translated several poems into English at Ocampo's request. The book was undoubtedly shaped by Tagore's experiences in, and idiosyncratic perception of, Argentina, particularly through its exploration of issues of spatiality, hospitality, ecology, and mobility. Additionally, Tagore wrote numerous articles for the prestigious Argentine daily *La Nación* (published in Spanish translation), a total of 18 full-page essays mainly concerned with education and the new pedagogical methods he had previously introduced in the experimental school and university he founded in Santiniketan (West Bengal), which were published between the years 1924-1925.²

At a time when Goethe's notion of *Weltliteratur* has witnessed a resurgence in scholarly studies and influential critics such as David Damrosch, Franco Moretti, and Emily Apter have debated its significance for literary studies – whether embracing, challenging, or altogether rejecting the concept –³ it is vital to widen the scope of this critical debate by prioritising the writings of the global South and the horizontal, non-hegemonic interrelations they can potentially yield. This comparative vision can be achieved by offering global South authors what Gayatri Spivak calls 'the solidarity of borders that are easily crossed [...] as a permanent from-below interruption of a Comparative Literature to come'.⁴ Originally coined in what has been recognised as the first Asian-African conference held in Bandung (Indonesia) in 1955, the geopolitical term global South is of extreme relevance to the recent transnational 'turn' in

modernist studies.⁵ The term remains, however, a highly contested and problematic designation based on a geographical division between countries located north and south of the equator. As such, it reinforces reductive representations that typically depict the north as ‘superior, rich and powerful’ and the south as ‘backward, poor and marginalized’.⁶ Therefore, my use of the term global South is not strictly geographical, but rather ideological and symbolic, advocating the views of critics Siba Grovogu and Walter Mignolo, who utilise it as a ‘designation meant to capture the semblance of cohesion that emerged when former colonial entities engaged in political projects of decolonization’⁷ and as a metaphor ‘where global futures are being forged by delinking from the colonial matrix of power’.⁸ While endorsing the views of these critics, I am simultaneously aware that a methodological framework purely informed by the conceptual category of the global South would present multiple challenges, not least in relation to Ocampo’s ambiguous status as a member of the Argentine oligarchy and the Eurocentrism undergirding her modernist magazine *SUR* (founded in 1931), which conforms to Pierre Bourdieu’s threefold model of capital: social, cultural, and economic.⁹ From this perspective, a clean break from Eurocentrism or the epistemic ‘delinking’ advocated by Mignolo would remain methodologically unviable, although imagining an alternate narrative of *SUR* and India as a south-south, periphery-to-periphery cultural engagement that decentres, rather than altogether erases, Europe, would remain a more valid critical position. Reading global South geopolitical encounters through a relational model, such as the one proposed by Shu-mei Shih, would, I suggest, provide a more adaptable category, a critical intervention that ‘sets in motion historical relationalities between entities brought together for comparison [...] where the workings of power are not concealed but necessarily revealed’.¹⁰ The ethical comparativism underpinning Shih’s orientation seeks to examine world literary relations through a model in which literatures ‘participate in a network of power-inflected relations, with the task of the world literature scholar to excavate and analyze these relations through deep attention to the

texts in question in the context of world history'.¹¹ By paying attention to the power-inflected dynamics of south-south cultural networks, this article reveals the historical tensions that arose out of Tagore's and Ocampo's encounter in Argentina in the year 1924, particularly taking into account India's and Argentina's fraught geopolitical relations with imperial Britain and the way they affected the contradictory hospitality Ocampo tendered to Tagore, an aspect that I explore in the latter part of the article.

In this context, I suggest that the 'Comparative Literature' lecture Tagore delivered in 1907 at the National Council of Education (established in 1906) in Calcutta (now Kolkata) may be reread as a category that participates in the wider world literature debate by destabilising the Eurocentrism embedded in the Goethean term through a Bengal-inflected political angle that can be conceived as a starting point for discussions of how to develop a global South comparativist epistemology. Debjani Ganguly foregrounds the crucial ideological role played by the newly funded National Council of Education as the broader cultural context for the lecture, which was 'set up to resist efforts by the British to legislate for the widespread introduction of English education in three Presidencies of Madras, Bombay, and Bengal, and also to protest against the enforced division of Bengal into East and West by the Viceroy Lord Curzon in 1905'.¹² Therefore, when asked to deliver a talk on comparative literature (*tulanatmak sahitya*), Tagore surprised his audience by unexpectedly renaming the discipline as 'world literature' (*visva-sahitya*) in his native Bengali:

Comparative Literature is the English title you have given to the subject I have been asked to discuss. In Bengali, I shall call it World Literature.¹³

Vinay Dharwadker and Bhavya Tiwari highlight the uniqueness of the Sanskrit-derived word *sahitya* utilised by Tagore, which markedly differs from 'literature', a Latin word etymologically derived from *littera* that is rooted in the idea of writing and the printed word. Instead, *sahitya* represents the idea of 'association, togetherness, unification, or union' and the

ability to establish ‘connections that transcend geographical and artistic boundaries’.¹⁴ Recognising the centrality of geography and Bengal as the ‘cynosure of Indian politics’,¹⁵ Tagore utilised a metaphorically charged language laden with land imagery that can be read as a thinly veiled critique of the partition:

The world is not my ploughland added to yours and to someone else’s – to see the world in this light is to take a rustic view – so also, literature is not my writing added to yours and to someone else’s. We usually regard literature in this rustic light. It is time we pledged that our goal is to view universal humanity in universal literature [and] that we shall recognise a totality in each particular author’s work, and that this totality we shall perceive the interrelations among all human efforts at expression (SW 150).

Tagore contrasts the crucial idea of ‘togetherness’ denoted by *sahitya* with the ‘rustic’ division of the land by Lord Curzon, thus challenging geographical borders imposed by British rule and critiquing the imperial cartographic impulse by suggesting that world literature (and Bengal more broadly) is not falsely constituted by the parceling out of a stretch of land and the arbitrary boundaries of a map. The impact of the partition, moreover, resurfaces later in a 1923 lecture Tagore delivered at the Bengali Literary Convention of North India (founded in 1922), where he deploys analogous land imagery: ‘Bengal as geographically defined gives us no sense of any deep unity: for Bengal is not just a tract of soil, it is also an idea’ (SW 312).

Tagore had previously drawn heavily on *sahitya* in an earlier lecture entitled ‘Bengali National Literature’ (1895), delivered at the Bengal Academy of Literature (founded in 1893), which campaigned for the adoption of Bengali as a language of instruction due to the looming threat posed by the imperial language. While Tagore was by no means against Western education per se and throughout his life remained a passionate advocate of cultural syncretism, East-West cultural encounters, and socio-religious reform (his father, Debendranath Tagore, was one of the founders of the progressive socio-religious movement *Brahmo Samaj* that questioned the caste system and supported women’s rights), he believed that British cultural

imperialism was harmful if it denigrated the Indian mother tongues and their rich and polymorphous heritage. Western education, he felt, encouraged a ‘blind servility’ and a ‘partial erudition’ (SW 185) that reproduces and solidifies the dominant colonial system, both economically and culturally. Such views largely informed his cultural vision and the ethical educational projects he founded in West Bengal, which were generously self-funded with a sizable proportion of his Nobel Prize award, as well as royalties earned from his books and lecturing tours.

In concrete terms, Tagore founded an experimental school at Santiniketan (‘Abode of Peace’) in 1901 ‘based on the model of forest schools in ancient India with greater emphasis on the spiritual development of pupils as opposed to the job-centric education which was in vogue’.¹⁶ The rural school was followed two decades later by an even more ambitious educational project, the international Visva-Bharati College (meaning ‘the communion of the world with India’; university status granted in 1951) which sought to ‘bring together not only the different cultures and languages of India, but scholars and learning from all over the world’.¹⁷ Equally important, an Institute for Rural Reconstruction based at Sriniketan (‘Abode of Prosperity’) was founded in 1921, whose main objective was to ‘organize the villages so that they could supply all their needs on a cooperative basis’.¹⁸ Like Visva-Bharati, the Institute attracted teachers and workers from both home and abroad, thus fulfilling Tagore’s lifelong aim of building East-West cultural bridges by fostering the transnational circulation of culture, people, and ideas. In this way, the complex interplay between the local and the ‘world’, as denoted by *sahitya*, enabled Tagore to fulfil a multifaceted project that sought to bind different cultures together by bringing cross-cultural exchange, reciprocity, and collaboration. ‘*Sahitya*’, commented Tagore, ‘unites the isolated, and installs itself wherever it finds union. An extensive literature can never be born where one person is separated from others, one time from other times, and one village from other villages’ (SW 181).

While (as I suggested above) much scholarship on Tagore and world literature has understandably focused on his expansive, outward-looking educational and cultural projects that emerged as an elaborate response to empire, at the same time it is important to be aware of the inner contradictions and ramifications inherent in his political views. Despite Tagore's early interest in the anti-colonial Swadeshi ('own country') movement that urged the boycott of foreign goods and supported traditional home produce, his personal involvement with the Indian nationalist cause was not, strictly speaking, political but rather educational, notwithstanding his unswerving support of Swadeshi in its early phase in his native Bengal (1900-1905), his fervent composition of patriotic songs in the wake of the partition, and his peaceful participation in public protests. Admittedly, Tagore's refusal to support India's Swadeshi movement and Home Rule (Swaraj) in the 1910s and 1920s created palpable tensions with Mohandas Gandhi, who advocated spinning as a symbol of 'the nation's call for independence and self-reliance [believing that] all Indians had a moral duty to replace foreign cloth with *khadi*'.¹⁹ Retorting that 'to look upon foreign cloth as "impure" was to confuse economics with morality',²⁰ Tagore profoundly disagreed with what he perceived as a short-sighted nationalist ideology and opposed an anticolonial movement which, he complained, had 'degenerated into violence between Hindus and Muslims and bomb attacks against British officials'.²¹ And yet whereas Tagore openly condemned India's national movements – a subject that takes center stage in his multi-voiced novel *Ghare Baire* (1916; *The Home and the World*) –²² he remained a vociferous anti-imperialist, notoriously renouncing his knighthood in protest at the brutality of the Amritsar massacre in April 1919:

The time has come when badges of honour make our shame glaring in the incongruous context of humiliation, and I for my part wish to stand, shorn of all special distinctions, by the side of those of my countrymen who for their so-called insignificance are liable to suffer a degradation not fit for human beings.²³

Therefore, by the time Tagore visited Argentina in 1924 he embodied profound political tensions: on the one hand, he had stridently repudiated the ‘badge of honour’ bestowed on him by the British Empire in 1915 for his services to literature, but, on the other, he vehemently opposed India’s fight to end imperial rule, despite being an early promoter of Swadeshi, as Gandhi reminded him at a meeting in the Tagore ancestral home in Jorasanko (North Kolkata) in September 1921, in a futile attempt to persuade him to join the fight for Swaraj.²⁴ Instead, as the Indian writer Anita Desai points out, a politically disillusioned Tagore ‘occupied himself with constructive work in the villages on his central Bengal estates and educational experiments’.²⁵ At the same time, Tagore viewed the idea of travel, mobility, and the transmission of ideas as representative of his educational and ideological vision, particularly to non-European locations such as the formerly colonised South American republics that would serve to illustrate his belief in cultural interconnectedness.

Although Victoria Ocampo did not specifically write about the category of world literature, her contribution to cultural transnationalism must be understood in relation to the project advanced by the modernist literary magazine *SUR*, which repositioned Argentina – the southernmost country in the world – as an influential centre of modernism, just as Tagore had similarly shifted late-colonial India to the forefront by proposing *visva-sahitya* as an epistemological model for global interconnectedness. An advocate of the rights of women in a patriarchal society and the champion of a model of reading that defied cultural parochialism, Ocampo provided a new modernist framework located in Argentina that played an instrumental role in the formation of transnational literary communities. Originally conceived as a Pan-American, bilingual journal in English and Spanish that would foster North and South American relations – a project proposed by the American writer and political activist Waldo Frank – Ocampo, as the sole financial backer and driving force of the enterprise, decided instead to redefine the direction of the magazine by reconceiving it as an internationalist

platform for a multiplicity of world literature encounters, but whose center was firmly rooted in Latin America. ‘Si mi revista se hace’, she said emphatically, ‘será dirigida y creada para y por America Latina’ (‘If my magazine is born, it will be directed and created for and by Latin America’).²⁶ Exemplified in the striking pictogram of a red arrow, which served as the magazine’s trademark logo throughout its forty-year existence (with the arrow later featuring in different colors), the arrow should be understood, first, as a graphic symbol pointing downwards to South America, particularly to the extreme southern latitude of Argentina and, second, as a symbol whose continuous motion is multidirectional, pointing not only southwards but also northwards and sideways.

Among the crucial influences in determining the direction of *SUR* were Waldo Frank, Virginia Woolf, José Ortega y Gasset, and Tagore. If Woolf instilled in Ocampo a feminist awareness of the difficulties faced by women writers in societies governed by patriarchal institutions and encouraged her to challenge and resist them,²⁷ Ortega y Gasset – as editor of the quintessential European periodical, *Revista de Occidente* (*The Western Review*) – was, rather ironically, instrumental in decentering Europe by placing Argentina in the foreground and proposing the notion of ‘Sur’ as the title of the review,²⁸ while Tagore, as Patricia Owen Steiner notes, ‘prodded Victoria to begin thinking of Argentina as a part of a much larger world and stimulated her to consider ways to bridge the cultural distances that separate nations’.²⁹ To be sure, Tagore’s alternative model of *visva-sahitya* would have provided Ocampo with a pluralistic transnational model that went beyond Europe and that repositioned the colonial ‘periphery’ as the central node that unsettles the geopolitics of empire.

Accusations of *extranjerizante* (foreignising) occupy an ingrained part in the Argentine history of *SUR*, whether the magazine was targeted for the elite cosmopolitanism that Ocampo represented or the cautious conservatism of the *grupo SUR* more broadly, whose members included Jorge Luis Borges, Silvina Ocampo, Adolfo Bioy Casares, Alicia Jurado, and Alberti

Girri, amongst others. Revisionary historiography undertaken by Nora Pasternac has repositioned *SUR* as an ‘essential chapter of Argentina’s cultural history’,³⁰ as well as reexamining the ‘problem’ of its cosmopolitanism through a more nuanced approach, gaining a more refined understanding of the magazine in relation to Ocampo’s feminist politics, her staunch opposition to the rise of authoritarianism in Argentina during the so-called *década infame* and the ensuing Peronist regime, and the fact that, for all its Eurocentrism, *SUR* played a decisive role in launching and disseminating the work of Argentine writers, including Ernesto Sábato, Norah Lange, Eduardo Mallea, Silvina Ocampo, Manuel Mujica Láinez, José Bianco, Enrique Anderson Imbert, Leopoldo Marechal, Adolfo Bioy Casares, and Jorge Luis Borges, to name only a few.³¹ Similarly, Beatriz Sarlo discredits accusations of *extranjerizante* by recalling that during its formative years or ‘etapa criollista’, *SUR*’s cultural agenda prioritised Argentine (and American) themes, thus creating a tension between ‘cosmopolitismo’ and ‘argentinismo’, exemplified, for instance, by Borges’s first published articles in the magazine that illustrated his engagement with Argentine *criollismo*.³² *SUR*’s alleged apoliticism has also been taken to task, particularly by Rosalie Sitman who theorises a marked ‘shift from aesthetics to ethics and, finally, politics’.³³ In the early 1940s, *SUR*’s political allegiance to the Allies meant that Ocampo openly condemned the rise of fascism and authoritarianism in Argentina, a position she revisited numerous times,³⁴ having previously supported ‘the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War, at a time when all “fashionable” Buenos Aires (including self-styled Argentine “nationalists”) were pro-Franco’.³⁵ Ocampo’s feminist agenda has also been foregrounded by critics (such as Sarlo, Ivonne Bordelois, Fabio Grementieri, Elizabeth Marchant, Angella M. Nazarian, and Vicky Unruh).³⁶ A perusal of the essays Ocampo wrote in the first decade of *SUR*, as well as those published in *Revista de Occidente*, serve to illustrate her feminist commitment, from her public ‘Carta a Virginia Woolf’³⁷ to key essays such as ‘La Mujer, sus derechos y sus responsabilidades’ (1936; ‘Woman, Her Rights and Her

Responsibilities’) and ‘La mujer y su expresión’ (1936; ‘Woman and Her Expression’),³⁸ including what Sarlo views as the controversial launching of her literary career with a non-fiction book entitled *De Francesca a Beatrice* (1924) – a subject matter that biographically mirrored Ocampo’s own adulterous liaison with a close relative of her newly wedded (and later estranged) husband – published by Ortega y Gasset’s prestigious *Revista de Occidente* Library Series.³⁹

Within the context of Ocampo’s modernist project, critics from the Indian subcontinent, most notably Krishna Kripalani and Nilangana Bhattacharya, have challenged the assumption that *SUR* operated as a rigid transatlantic bridge between Europe and Argentina, suggesting that Ocampo also forged vital cultural networks with Indian writers, intellectuals, and political activists, thus encouraging us to resituate *SUR* across a more capacious, multilayered global South landscape, one that proposes a spatial rethinking that delinks the magazine (in the sense of the term suggested by Mignolo) from the West by foregrounding its productive cultural traffic with India.⁴⁰ I should stress that my aim here is not to deny *SUR*’s undeniable ties with Europe, but to offer a corrective to static readings in an endeavour to recognise the magazine’s simultaneous efforts to accommodate global South geographies that are usually elided in traditional accounts of the magazine. For example, John King’s 1986 classic study of *SUR* gives scant attention to India and even criticises Ocampo for returning ‘insistently’ to Indian figures such as Tagore and Jawaharlal Nehru throughout her editorial career, stating that: ‘*SUR* readers were forced to relive her attachment to these men, and their quietist creeds’.⁴¹ While King is referring here to what Beatriz Sarlo characterises as Ocampo’s trademark ‘bovarysme with European writers, her infatuations and passionate defenses’,⁴² he is clearly dismissive of Ocampo’s valorisation of India, including a reductively simplistic representation of Tagore and Nehru as ‘quietists’. The comprehensive *SUR: Índice (Index)* that appeared in 1967 and which covers the magazine’s exceptionally long three-decade existence (between 1931-1966),

overwhelmingly attests to the centrality of India, featuring a multiplicity of articles, reviews, open letters, obituaries, and translations that range from political issues such as Indian independence and the ethics of non-violence to the rethinking of Tagore's work from a Latin American-inflected angle.⁴³

Subjects such as education, East-West cross-cultural exchanges, and the natural world remained among Tagore's abiding concerns during his stay in Argentina, which were explicitly articulated in his *La Nación* essays. For example, in 'My School', an essay that appeared on January 1, 1925, Tagore warned Argentine readers of the dangers of rigid pedagogical methods that stifle the creativity of young learners. Tagore condemned institutionalised methods of learning that relied on nationally prescribed (and usually prejudiced) textbooks and where tuition takes place within the space of indoor classrooms. Based on his own educational experiment in Santiniketan he advocated instead an alternative, non-nationalistic, non-regimented method of 'natural learning', where lessons are imparted under the shade of a corpulent tree and where, alongside reading, singing and acting play an important part in what was conceived as a more holistic educational experience.⁴⁴ In the same article, meanwhile, Tagore described the pluralistic and outward-looking educational model championed by Visva-Bharati, which was utilised to illustrate his vision of world literature in the belief that it would help foster peaceful allegiances between countries worldwide. Tagore also described how he implemented his educational methods in San Isidro, particularly his idiosyncratic 'open-air' learning style that used as its setting the gardens of Villa Miralrío, imparting daily morning lessons to a group of students from the University of Buenos Aires in the style of Santiniketan. An autochthonous South American *tupa* tree (*Tipuana tipu*), known for its abundant foliage and generous shade, was chosen as the site for the lessons.⁴⁵

Tagore's critique of Western education models must be read within the context of British neocolonialism in Argentina, especially since, as David Rock points out, 'in the early

1900s, a few members of the ruling liberal oligarchy argued for the introduction of British-style schools to teach the male children of the elite'.⁴⁶ Rock writes that the schools 'hoped to inculcate among young Argentines of high social class the personal virtues – so-called character building – commonly proclaimed as uniquely British'.⁴⁷ What should also be considered, on the other hand, was the rise of a burgeoning 'nationalism syndrome' (in Julio A. Fernández's words)⁴⁸ that was part of an ultra-patriotic and militaristic educational vision pushed forward by liberal-nationalist intellectuals Ricardo Rojas, Octavio Bunge, and José María Ramos Mejía in the first decades of the twentieth century. Juan José Sebreli observes that 'in his capacity as President of the Consejo Nacional de Educación, Ramos Mejía devised an educational system that 'emphasised an exacerbated patriotism whose aim was to indoctrinate the offspring of migrants [...] by creating a patriotic ceremony that resembled a religious and military cult: pledging solemn allegiance to the [Argentine] flag identified the child with the soldier and the school with the barracks'.⁴⁹ A strong anti-nationalist and anti-imperialist – as illustrated by the controversial 'Nationalism' lectures he delivered in Japan in 1916 –⁵⁰ Tagore championed an epistemological model based on a spiritualist pacifism that run counter to what he viewed as the crude materialism and belligerence of the West, meaning that he would have condemned Argentina's glorification of Anglophilic or ultra-nationalistic educational models. This condemnation is vociferously articulated in 'Nationalism in the West':

The Nation, with all its paraphernalia of power and prosperity, its flags and pious hymns, its blasphemous prayers in the churches, and the literary mock thunders of its patriotic bragging, cannot hide the fact that the Nation is the greatest evil for the Nation (*Nationalism*, 29).

Tagore Fever

In the Argentine cultural scene, the arrival of Tagore in Buenos Aires was greeted with unbridled enthusiasm, a vigorous reception that soon turned into ‘Tagore fever’ – a national sentiment aptly captured by the slogan of the newspaper *Crítica*: ‘Tagore, el hombre del día’ (‘Tagore, man of the day’)⁵¹ – as media coverage of his visit permeated the daily press and the little magazines of the period.⁵² The critic Axel Gasquet provides a lucid account of what he theorises as ‘el Orientalismo argentino’, whose first phase, he argues, can be traced back to Rubén Darío’s *modernismo* movement, particularly during the latter’s stay in the Argentine Republic (1893-1896). Darío’s exoticised East, which was filtered through French Orientalism, exercised a profound impact on late-nineteenth-century Argentine writers and intellectuals, most of whom later travelled to the East, including Ángel de Estrada, Ernesto Quesada, Arturo Capdevila, and Álvaro Melián Lafinur.⁵³ The second Argentine Orientalist phase, Gasquet explicates, sprang as an ideological response to war-ravaged Europe after the historical period of the centenary of independence in 1910 that led to a search for new spiritualist and pacifist horizons beyond the West.⁵⁴ As Gail Rogers points out, the mysticist and Orientalist critiques of Europe that provocative figures such as Count Keyserling and George Gurdjieff had offered appealed to many Argentine intellectuals, including Ocampo.⁵⁵

Victoria Ocampo’s interest in India may be positioned within the second phase of the Asia-Argentina paradigm proposed by Gasquet, from her evocative 1914 response to the religious syncretism of the *Gitanjali*⁵⁶ (1910; the verse collection that won Tagore the Nobel Prize in 1913) to the publication of two important essays in *La Nación*. One, entitled ‘Gandhi’, addressed the question of British rule in India by defending Gandhi’s pacifist ethics, and the other, entitled ‘La alegría de leer a Rabindranath Tagore’ (‘The Joy of Reading Rabindranath Tagore’), constituted an introduction to, and a celebration of, Tagore’s art and life. The latter included a lengthy discussion of *Gitanjali*, which she had read in André Gide’s French

translation (1913; *L'Offrande Lyrique*)), as well as brief commentaries on a selection of other works, including the one-act play *Chitra* (1913), *The Home and the World*, and selected poems.⁵⁷ Both journalistic essays – epitomising at the time an act of defiance for a woman to publish in a male-dominated medium – established a strong cultural precedent for Indo-Argentine relations that would be further strengthened by Tagore's subsequent two-month sojourn in Argentina. Ocampo's interest in the Orient is also evident in her little-known play entitled *La laguna de los nenúfares* (1926; *The Water-Lily Lagoon*) that was published by the *Revista de Occidente* publishing house.⁵⁸ Constructed as the bildungsroman of its orphan protagonist, Copo de Nieve (Snow Flake), the play has been read by critic Vicky Unruh as a 'version of the life of the Buddha that [charts] a young man's acquisition of wisdom through its teachers and his outward voyage from an overprotected childhood to a reality populated by love, war, suffering, death and hope'.⁵⁹

Other responses worth mentioning here include the November 1924 issue of the avant-garde little magazine *Proa* (*Prow*), where a youthful Borges – who at the time was composing a historic review and translation of Joyce's *Ulysses* for the upcoming January 1925 issue –⁶⁰ published a note that joyfully saluted the newly arrived Bengali poet. Entitled, 'La llegada de Tagore' ('The Arrival of Tagore') the one-page note reflects Borges's fascination with the city of Buenos Aires, although not with the Europeanised metropolis of elegant Parisian-style avenues and opulent commercial galleries, but with the marginal *barrios* still untouched by modernity located in the outskirts of the city, a subject he had previously explored in his first poetry collection, *Fervor de Buenos Aires* (1923; *In Praise of Buenos Aires*).⁶¹ Implying that the combination of the words 'Tagore' and 'Buenos Aires' amounts to an ostensible oxymoron, the young poet searches for symbolic signs in the streets of the *barrio* that bear witness to the secret 'milagro' ('miracle') of Tagore's presence.⁶² Invoking the verses of *Gitanjali* and *The Gardener* (1913), Borges proposes a spatial juxtaposition that links the 'ponientes' ('sunsets')

in the south of Buenos Aires with images of the river Ganges, ending with a metaphysical reflection that evocatively straddles the different realities of Tagore's Bengal and his native Buenos Aires:

Siento – y eso me basta – lo aventurero y grato de saber que esas dos grandes realidades, la ciudad natal y Tagore, conviven en el tiempo y se mezclan en dulzura como dos grandes ríos.⁶³

I feel - and that's enough for me - the adventurous and pleasing certainty that those two great realities, my native city and Tagore, coexist in time and softly flow together like two great rivers.

Other publications included a celebratory essay written by Eduardo Carrasquilla Mallarino that appeared as the leading article in the popular, mass-marketed weekly magazine *Caras y Caretas* (*Faces and Masks*), thus showing the impact of Tagore's visit in what was a current affairs publication with a large section devoted to gossip.⁶⁴ The avant-garde magazine *Martín Fierro*, however, was less sycophantic, publishing a satirical poem by Héctor Castillo. Ironically titled, 'Plegaria a Tagore' ('Prayer to Tagore'), the poem is teasingly preoccupied with the sordid side of Buenos Aires, particularly with its infamous reputation as the capital of the white slave trade, lamenting that the tainted city is highly unsuitable to host such an honored guest. The poem ends with an imperative command directed at the shameless city, urging the ill-famed capital to 'conceal' itself during Tagore's visit: 'Escóndete Buenos Aires'.⁶⁵

Another key factor that significantly contributed to the 'Tagore-mania' phenomenon in Argentina were the exquisitely rendered translations of a selection of his works by the Spanish Nobel laureate Juan Ramón Jiménez and his wife Zenobia Camprubí de Jiménez. The couple's virtuoso collaborative translations, which included a celebrated version of *Gitanjali* (*Ofrenda Lírica*; 1918), exerted a powerful impact on the poetry of no less than three Latin American Nobel laureates: Gabriela Mistral (prize awarded in 1945), Pablo Neruda (prize awarded in

1953), and Octavio Paz (prize awarded in 1990). Unlike the intense, but short-lived, passion for Tagore in Britain – his work was vigorously championed by W. B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, William Rothenstein, and Thomas Sturge Moore⁶⁶ – Tagore’s impact on Latin American literature was long-lasting, forging horizontal networks that would be further consolidated by Ocampo’s productive cultural efforts. Note, for instance, the Nobel Committee’s post-Tagore decision to award more prizes to non-European writers, with Mistral becoming both the first female and first Latin American writer to receive it. ‘The influence of Tagore’, Octavio Paz writes, ‘especially in the years of its apogee between 1920 and 1930, was neither solely literary nor limited to isolated personalities: for many it was the first revelation of the oriental world, until then open only to a few specialists; for others it was a sign of the historic awakening of India’ (*Flower-Garden* 65). Paz himself, as Julia Kushington declares, played a ‘principal role in the advancement and preservation of Orientalism in Hispanic letters’,⁶⁷ an engagement that was both cultural and political, leading to his role as Mexico’s ambassador to India (1962-1968), a period during which he resided in New Delhi.

Within Mexico, critics such as Stephanie Rivera Berruz, Leah Kalmanson, Andrea J. Pitts, and Adriana Novoa have examined the emergence of Orientalism after the Mexican Revolution, noting that leading intellectuals of the *Ateneo de la Juventud* intellectual group (whose members were José Vasconcelos, Enrique González Martínez, Alfonso Reyes, and Antonio Caso, amongst others) turned away from the ‘influences of Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, and Gabino Barreda, and instead embraced threads of vitalism and aesthetics from figures such as Henri Bergson, Friedrich Nietzsche, Arthur Schopenhauer, and José Enrique Rodó’.⁶⁸ Vasconcelos is a case in point. Through early works such as *Estudios indostánicos* (1920) and a long-standing interest in Tagore and Indian philosophy, he ‘appropriated Asian traditions as alternatives to the hegemonic presence of European thought in the philosophical debates of the day’.⁶⁹ I should clarify that my use of the word ‘Orientalism’ is in line with

Edward Said's understanding of the term as a discourse of power, 'a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient'.⁷⁰ Julia Kushington and Laura J. Torres-Rodríguez have recently debated the relevance of Orientalism to Latin America, arguing that unlike the cultural bias and complicity inherent in Anglophone and Francophone imperial representations of the Orient, Latin America's engagement 'is political in the sense that it is opening a dialogue and exchange with the East for the purpose of learning about the self from the Other, revealing truth through dialogue and ending cultural dominations'.⁷¹ Thus, Vasconcelos's dialogue with the Orient was non-hegemonic and non-imperialistic, even if his access to the Oriental tradition was mediated by European texts.⁷²

The Politics of the Pampas

Upon his arrival in Buenos Aires, Tagore was officially welcomed by the writer and educationalist Ricardo Rojas in his capacity as Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the University of Buenos Aires, as well as by a horde of eager reporters from the main national newspapers. When asked by a *La Nación* journalist what he expected from a country such as Argentina, Tagore unhesitatingly replied:

I am not interested in industrial progress or a modernised Argentina or what the country has borrowed from abroad. What I am genuinely interested in are traditional folk customs. I want to visit an *estancia*, a *rancho*; I want to see the traditional dances and the popular songs.⁷³

When quizzed by the same journalist about his knowledge of Argentine literature, Tagore declared his profound admiration for the Anglo-Argentine writer and naturalist William Henry Hudson, otherwise known in Argentina as 'Guillermo Enrique'.⁷⁴ Born in 1841 in Quilmes (a province of Buenos Aires) to New Englanders and naturalised in 1901 as a British subject, Hudson earned himself a dual identity as both reserved English gentleman and semi-barbarous

gaucho, his reputation fluctuating between two names, languages, and nations.⁷⁵ Jason Wilson observes that Hudson – who received the unreserved praise of modernists such as Conrad, Woolf, Pound, and Ford – was widely known in Britain for his nature work and South American romances, and, like Conrad (another *émigré*) was regarded as a master stylist in the English language.⁷⁶ Through works such as *Far Away and Long Ago: A Childhood in Argentina* (1918), *Idle Days in Patagonia* (1893), and *The Purple Land* (1885), Hudson provided Tagore with a peculiar lens through which to view Argentina, although it constituted an outdated, mid-nineteenth-century representation of the country that depicted a pre-industrial Argentina that had virtually disappeared: a pastoral economy populated by heroic, lawless gauchos riding across the immense, desolate pampas. Whereas Tagore was aware that Hudson's works depicted (and celebrated) a vanished idyll, in her book *Tagore en las barrancas de San Isidro* (1961; *Tagore on the Ravines of San Isidro*) Ocampo observes that Tagore persistently clung to the quintessential Hudsonian image of an anachronistic Argentina:

Es evidente que cuando Tagore buscaba fisionomía propia a este país, no encontraba asidero. La Argentina descrita por Hudson en *Allá lejos y hace mucho tiempo* ya no existía en 1924. Y él sólo conocía nuestra tierra a través del admirable testimonio de aquel inglés, enamorado nuestro (*Tagore en las barrancas* 74).

It is evident that when Tagore looked for something characteristic of the country, he couldn't find anything to hold onto. The Argentina depicted by *Hudson in Far Away and Long Ago*, no longer existed in 1924. And he only knew our country through the admirable testimony of that Englishman, in love with us.

Paradoxically, Ocampo overtly encouraged Tagore's outdated image of Argentina by giving him as a gift, Hudson's complete works – as she reveals in a letter of 14 November 1924 (*Flower-Garden* 103) – as well as by taking him to an art exhibition at the Museo Nacional de Buenos Aires (established in 1896) showcasing the work of Uruguayan artist Pedro Figari, whose art, like Hudson's, 'reincarnated a past [that] had ceased to exist' (*Flower-Garden* 124). However, this does not imply that Tagore professed an anti-modernity position (like Gandhi),

nor that he rejected scientific progress per se. Rather, he acutely disliked Argentina's economic dependence on imperial Britain and was largely uninterested in the accelerated Europeanisation of the metropolis, especially when it implied the swift erosion of local customs and traditions.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, Argentina underwent an extraordinary transformation from a 'backwater of the Spanish Empire into the most successful export economy in Latin America', a golden era during which the country 'consolidated its place as a supplier of foodstuffs and raw materials in the global capitalist market.'⁷⁷ Therefore, Tagore's passage from late-colonial India to neocolonial Argentina means that he shifted from an outpost of the British Empire beset by social and political unrest, to a South American country which, though politically emancipated from Spain, had gradually become an 'informal colony' of the British Empire, a neocolonial status that turned the Argentine Republic into Britain's 'honorary dominion' (in Eric Hobsbawm's phrase).⁷⁸ The term 'neocolonialism' refers, in the words of Jennifer French, to Latin America's 'forcible economic subordination to Great Britain from the immediate post-independence period till [roughly] the 1920s, when the United States became the dominant power in the Americas'.⁷⁹ Writing from an Althusserian perspective, French argues that 'while maintaining the appearance of autonomy, the Latin American republics performed the same economic functions as Britain's official colonies elsewhere'.⁸⁰ Utilising the critical model of dependency theory, Argentine historian Tulio Halperín Dongui refers to British imperialism as the 'first phase of the neocolonial order', while US hegemony marks its 'second phase' or 'maturity' after the Spanish-American conflict of 1898.⁸¹ Halperín shows how the first phase was marked by the 'consolidation of the neoliberal order', presided by the political administration of General Julio Argentino Roca, his genocidal military campaign against the country's aboriginal peoples known as the 'Conquest of the Desert', and a policy of large-scale European immigration that provided cheap labour for an expanding export economy and a racist paradigm that promoted the 'whitening' of the population.⁸²

Incongruously, in an attempt to show Tagore the ‘real’ Argentina, Ocampo asked her friend Miguel Alfredo Martínez de Hoz – an elite member of the Argentine landed-class – to put at their disposal his lavish *estancia* located in Chapadmalal (a locality in Buenos Aires province near the coastal city of Mar del Plata). Dubbed ‘a little England on the pampas’, the Martínez de Hoz country estate (built between 1854-1920) was, paradoxically, not a traditional *criollo estancia* such as the humble farmhouses romanticised in the works of Hudson.⁸³ On the contrary, the Martínez de Hoz *estancia* was a neo-Gothic extravaganza that reflected the eccentric taste of an Argentine *nouveau riche* elite of devoted Anglophiles proud of owning an *estancia* that represented what David Rock defines as ‘an embodiment of cultural mimicry and hybridization’.⁸⁴ British historian H. S. Ferns notes that Argentina’s mega-rich elites, who gravitated around Paris and sent their children to British public schools, transformed the landscape of the Argentine pampas by erecting opulent *estancias* ‘imitative of French *châteaux* and English country mansions’.⁸⁵ Eton and Oxford-educated Martínez de Hoz inherited the Chapadmalal *estancia* from his father in 1888 and, upon his return from Europe in 1889, harbored the ambition of turning the rural property into a sumptuous English-style castle. The castle – a blatant display of social inequality – served as a symbol to project the power of the oligarchy and its close cultural and economic ties with Britain. In 1920 he contracted the renowned Argentine-based English architect Walter Bassett-Smith to build a ‘casco de estancia’ (*estancia* homestead) an extension that consisted of a medieval tower with a combination of terraces that endowed the building with a distinctive gothic architectural style, reinforced by its pointed arches, ivy-clad walls, and intricately carved wooden doors, as well as Tudor wood coffering on its walls, to add to its hybrid style.⁸⁶ Incongruously, however, the Mapuche indigenous name of the *estancia* – Chapadmalal, meaning ‘*corral* (farmyard) surrounded by marches’, due to its unique location between two streams – was the only remaining vestige of the indigenous group that had formerly inhabited the region.

In an encyclopedic volume entitled *Twentieth Century [sic] Impressions of Argentina: Its History, People, Commerce, Industries and Resources*, produced under the auspices of Lloyds Bank Limited and published in London in 1911, a prominent five-page entry is devoted to ‘Chapadmalal and the other estates of Señor Alfredo Martínez de Hoz’.⁸⁷ Issued as a travel book of sorts for the Argentine reader, the publication was part of a collection of reference works that championed British economic penetration and that were grouped under the seemingly innocent heading: ‘Twentieth Century Impressions’, whose editor-in-chief, the British publisher Arnold Wright, was a strong supporter of imperial expansion. Aiming to classify and catalogue the physical geography, agriculture, meat trade, and land settlement of the Argentine Republic, the book mapped out important rural spaces such as Chapadmalal, which is presented as a modernised rural microcosm that encapsulated the idea of Englishness in the River Plate. It is not surprising, then, that the *estancia* is praised as ‘a model of an English homestead’ and its aristocratic *estanciero* as the perfect embodiment of British-Argentine economic relations through Martínez de Hoz’s successful capitalist restructuring of the pampas, thriving livestock business, and adherence to Britain’s neocolonial agenda (*Twentieth Century Impressions* 548). Furthermore, the Lloyds encyclopedia propagated the type of ‘European knowledge-building project’ described by Mary Louis Pratt, where ‘the elites are frequently praised for their hospitality, their aristocratic way of life, and their appreciation of Europeans. Spanish American society in general, however, is relentlessly indicted for backwardness, indolence, and, above all, the ‘failure’ to exploit the resources surrounding it’.⁸⁸ The book’s thinly disguised commercial interest in the Argentine Republic is made evident in the ‘Preface’ that reduces the country in purely economic terms as ‘the first place in meat supplies to Great Britain’ (*Twentieth Century Impressions* ii).

Predictably, Tagore reacted negatively to Argentina’s neocolonial status and to the early twentieth-century importation of European *chateaux* to the pampas. Dismayed by the

luxurious furnishings and hyperbolic English-style décor of the *estancia*, after a few days in Chapadmalal he confided to Ocampo: “Vijaya, this house is full of unmeaning things” (*Tagore en las Barrancas* 73). Though Ocampo herself was a prominent member of the Argentine aristocracy to which the Martínez de Hoz family firmly belonged, this does not mean she was unaware of what the *estancia* represented, admitting that ‘naturalmente huele “British”’ (‘it naturally smells “British”’; *Tagore en las barrancas* 73). To counteract Tagore’s displeasure for the Martínez de Hoz *estancia*, Ocampo decided to invest more time reading literature out loud with the poet, a creative exercise they both enjoyed, finding Baudelaire’s *Les fleurs du mal* (1857), a suitable book that Tagore had not previously read. However, her well-meant histrionic gesture backfired upon reading a stanza from ‘L’invitation au voyage’:

Des meubles luisants,
Polis par les ans,
Décoreraient notre chambre.⁸⁹

The gleaming furniture
Polished by the years
Will decorate our room.

Ocampo notes that at this point Tagore interrupted her reading and declared: ‘Vijaya, I don’t like your furniture poet’ (*Testimonios* 2: 443). Rather than praising Baudelaire, as Ocampo expected, Tagore’s dismissive reaction must be understood within the specific spatial and political contexts in which the book was read, namely, the ‘civilised’ palatial estate incongruously erected within the ‘wild’ Argentine interior. Accordingly, the *estancia* emerges as the locus where Tagore articulates an anti-imperialist critique that exposes the worst excesses of British neocolonialism in southern South America. This claim can be further substantiated by focusing on other relevant aspects of Tagore’s stay in Chapadmalal. For example, Ocampo recalls that during an afternoon walk across the surrounding countryside

they saw ‘una osamenta de animal vacuno. Es cosa común en esas llanuras’ (‘the bones of a bovine animal. A common sight on those plains’).⁹⁰ She adds that Tagore ‘lo miró. Al día siguiente escribió ese poema, “El esqueleto”, que apareció en *SUR*, en el número dedicado a la India’ (‘Tagore looked at it. The following day he wrote the poem “A Skeleton”, which appeared in *SUR*, in the special issue dedicated to India’).⁹¹

Written in Chapadmalal in his native Bengali and simultaneously translated into English at Ocampo’s request, ‘A Skeleton’ (‘Kankal’) follows the *memento mori* lyric tradition to which Baudelaire’s poem ‘Une charogne’ indisputably belongs. The linkage is explicitly revealed in the poems’ titles, both of which depict the inevitability of death, the transience of life, and the *vanitas vanitatum* theme symbolised by the putrefying carcass (Baudelaire) and the bleached skeleton (Tagore). Whereas in Baudelaire’s poem the ‘charogne infâme’ is found within the urban landscape of Paris’s overcrowded streets ‘sur un lit semé de cailloux’ (*Fleurs* 28-9; ‘lying on a bed of gravel’), in Tagore’s poem the skeleton literalises the vexed question of Argentina’s neocolonial experience by focusing on the landscape, the naturally fertile pampas that symbolised Argentina’s agro-export cattle economy and its new role as the leading producer of beef for the consumption of the British Empire:

A beast’s bony frame lies bleaching on the grass
By the meadow path,
The grass that once had given it strength and tender rest.
The dry white bones seem like the hard laughter of Time
which cries to me:
‘Thy end, proud man, is one with the end of the cattle
that graze no more
for when thy life’s wine is spilt to its last drop
the cup is flung away with a final unconcern’ (*Flower-Garden* 164-5).

From the outset, Tagore exposes the influence of Baudelaire by straddling two interrelated messages, a meditation on dying as a cyclical process and continuous biological transformation, on one level, and a metaphysical confrontation with a personified Death/Time, on another. But the similarities end here. Tagore juxtaposes the theme of mortality to the relevance of geographical setting and the political question of neocolonialism that obliquely undergird the poem. This aesthetic movement is marked by the opening vision of the bovine skeleton on the ‘meadow path’ followed by a description of the fertile grasslands and hospitable earth ‘that once had given it strength and tender rest’, as well as a bleak reminder of life’s impermanence by reiterating that ‘the cattle graze no more’. Note the repeated use of the word ‘grass’ that emphasizes the nourishing properties of the pasture that once gave ‘strength’ to the living creature, the lucrative pampas ruthlessly exploited by the rise of a British-driven agrarian capitalist system. Once again, the loaded symbolism of the land – whether politically partitioned or financially exploited by colonialism – undoubtedly remained an abiding preoccupation for Tagore. In this sense, his critique of the British Raj’s economic exploitation of colonial India in ‘Nationalism in India’ is also pertinent to Argentina, a country in the South Atlantic that had become the abattoir of the British empire:

It must be remembered that at the beginning of the British rule in India our industries were suppressed, and since then we have not met with any real help or encouragement to enable us to make a stand against the monster commercial organizations of the world. The nations have decreed that we must remain purely an agricultural people, even forgetting the use of arms for all time to come. Thus India is being turned into so many predigested morsels of food ready to be swallowed at any moment by any nation which has even the most rudimentary set of teeth in its head (*Nationalism*, 126).

Ironically, the Bengali poet who five years earlier resigned a knighthood awarded by King George V had become the reluctant guest of the Argentine economic elite represented by the Martínez de Hoz’s family and their Anglophilic lifestyle. This incident highlights the important fact that far from representing a clean break from Eurocentrism or the epistemic

‘delinking’ advocated by Mignolo, Tagore’s and Ocampo’s meeting brought to the fore the encounter between peripheral modernities unable to extricate themselves from the colonial matrix of power. Thus, a south-south, periphery-to-periphery cultural engagement decentres, rather than altogether erases, Europe. At the same time, by respatialising India and Argentina as paradigms for globality, Tagore and Ocampo show that peripheral locales can, as the Colombian critic Héctor Hoyos puts it, ‘participate in the creation and recreation of narratives of the global’.⁹² Issues of education and cultural transmission were crucial facets that informed this meeting, including Tagore’s culturally engaged period in Argentina through his extensive *La Nación* publications, his role as an educator eager to share his non-nationalistic and non-regimented pedagogical method of ‘natural learning’ with Argentine university students at a time when national politics advocated a patriotic and militaristic model, as well as the modernist networks he forged in Latin America that had a long-lasting impact on several generations of writers, notably exemplified by three Nobel laureates: Mistral, Neruda, and Paz.

Tagore’s two-month sojourn in Argentina productively shaped his literary output, resulting in the publication of *Purabi*, a text in motion that charts his spatial and symbolic trajectory across an unfamiliar Argentine landscape which, while not denying the geopolitical tensions it yielded, remains an important example of modernism and modernity in the global South and a unique case study of Indo-Argentine cultural exchanges. Tagore’s poem ‘The Guest’ (‘Atithi’) from *Purabi* may stand, finally, as a suitable example of the transformative potential of this Indo-Argentine encounter. Addressed to the beloved, the poetic persona gazes transfixed at the night sky from the balcony of Villa Miralrío along the Río de la Plata. Therein, a cosmic ‘message’ is relayed to him, a ‘solemn music’ that transcends the imperial language (English) in which Tagore and Ocampo communicated, to suggest a more enduring, interstellar connection whose ‘harmony’ emanates from the woman to whom the poem is addressed in the first stanza:

When I stood at this window and stared
At the southern sky, a message seemed to slide
Into my soul from the harmony of the stars,
A solemn music that said, 'We know you are ours –
Guest of our light from the day you passed
From darkness into the world, always our guest.'⁹³

Note, for instance, the repetition of the noun 'guest' in the two closing lines, particularly as the word is inflected by the adverb 'always' and the second-person plural 'we' that emphasizes the poet's intimacy with the woman of *Purabi*, as well as the idea of permanence and continuity evoked by the timelessness of the 'southern sky'. Star-gazing goes both ways: the poem's final line is uttered by the female figure, a message that echoes the words previously spoken by the poet, laying a renewed emphasis on the 'eternal' bond uniting them: 'Poet, guest of my love, my guest eternally'.⁹⁴ In short, Tagore's emphasis on the 'southern sky' can stand as a transnational paradigm for horizontal relations, a 'constellation' that overcomes the language of empire and that provides a spatial linkage that can bring together global South countries under a 'southern' geographical imagining.

Notes

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to the British Academy for awarding me a research grant that enabled me to conduct research in India and Argentina.

² For a full-length study of the literary relationship between Tagore and Ocampo, see Ketaki Kushari Dyson, *In Your Blossoming Flower-Garden: Rabindranath Tagore and Victoria Ocampo* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1988). Dyson's comprehensive study includes detailed notes, translations, appendices, and a reproduction of the Tagore-Ocampo correspondence. For a full list of the articles Tagore published in *La Nación* during and after his stay in Argentina, see pp. 467-9. Thereafter cited in parenthesis as *Flower-Garden* followed by page number.

³ See David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Franco Moretti, "Conjectures on World Literature", *New Left Review* 1 (2000), pp. 54-68; Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. by M. B. Debevoise (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatibility* (London: Verso, 2013).

⁴ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 4, 5, 92, 15-16, 92.

⁵ Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz trace this paradigm shift in 'The New Modernist Studies', *PMLA*, 123.3 (2008), pp. 737-48.

⁶ Glyn Williams, Paula Meth and Katie Willis, *Geographies of Developing Areas: The Global South in a Changing World*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 1.

⁷ Siba Grovogu, 'A Revolution Nonetheless: The Global South in International Relations', *The Global South*, 5.1 (2011), pp. 175-90 (p. 176).

⁸ Walter Mignolo, 'The Global South and World Dis/Order', *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 67.2 (2011), pp. 165-88, (p. 185).

⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. by J. Richardson, (New York: Greenwood, 1986), pp. 241-258.

¹⁰ Shu-mei Shih, 'Comparison as Relation' in *Comparison: Theories, Approaches, Uses*, ed. by Rita Felski and Susan Stanford Friedman (Baltimore, Maryland, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), pp. 79-98 (p. 79).

¹¹ Shih, 'Comparison as Relation', p. 84.

¹² Debjani Ganguly, 'The Value of World Making in Global Literary Studies' in *The Values of Literary Studies: Critical Institutions, Scholarly Agendas*, ed. by Rónán McDonald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 204-19 (p. 211).

¹³ Rabindranath Tagore, 'World Literature', trans. by Swapan Chakravorty in *Rabindranath Tagore, Selected Writings on Literature and Language*, ed. by Sisir Kumar Das and Sukanta Chaudhuri (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 138-50 (p. 148). Hereafter cited parenthetically as *SW*.

¹⁴ Vinay Dharwadker, 'Constructions of World Literature in Colonial and Postcolonial India' in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, ed. by Theo D'haen, David Damrosch and Djelal Kadir (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 476-86 (pp. 478-9). Bhavya Tiwari, 'Rabindranath Tagore's Comparative World Literature' in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, pp. 41-8 (p. 45).

¹⁵ Leonard A. Gordon, *Bengal: The Nationalist Movement: 1876-1940* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), p. 85.

¹⁶ Kalyan Kundu, Sakti Bhattacharya and Kalyan Sircar, *Imagining Tagore: Rabindranath and the British Press (1912-1941)* (Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 2000), p. 595.

¹⁷ See William Radice, 'Introduction' in Rabindranath Tagore, *Selected Poems* (London: Penguin, 1985), pp. 17-39 (p. 24).

¹⁸ Uma Das Gupta, 'Tagore's Ideas of Social Action and the Sriniketan Experiment of Rural Reconstruction, 1922-41', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 77.4 (2008), pp. 992-1004 (p. 992).

¹⁹ Jad Adams, *Gandhi: Naked Ambition* (London: Quercus, 2010), p. 167; Bindu Puri, *The Tagore-Gandhi Debate on Matters of Truth and Untruth* (New Delhi: Springer, 2015), p. 13.

²⁰ Puri, *The Tagore-Gandhi Debate*, p. 13.

²¹ Rabindranath Tagore, *Selected Letters of Rabindranath Tagore*, ed. by Krishna Dutta (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 61.

²² For a comprehensive discussion of *The Home and the World*, see Pradip Kumar Datta (ed.), *Rabindranath Tagore's The Home and the World: A Critical Companion* (London: Anthem Press, 2005).

²³ Quoted in Krishna Dutta and Andrew Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Myriad-minded Man* (Delhi: Rupa, 1995), p. 217.

²⁴ See Dutta and Robinson, *Rabindranath Tagore*, pp. 238-9, for a reconstruction of the conversation between Tagore and Gandhi.

- ²⁵ Anita Desai, 'Introduction' in Rabindranath Tagore, *The Home and the World*, translated by Surendranath Tagore (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 9.
- ²⁶ Victoria Ocampo, 'Vida de la revista *SUR*: 35 años de una labor', *SUR*, 303-305 (1966-67), pp. 1-22 (p. 4). Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the Spanish are my own.
- ²⁷ According to Doris Meyer, '[Woolf] and Victoria shared many of the same ideas about women and literature [and] Woolf gave her constant moral support and encouragement'. See Meyer, *Victoria Ocampo: Against the Wind and the Tide* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 124-5.
- ²⁸ Rosalie Sitman, *Victoria Ocampo y SUR: Entre Europa y América* (Buenos Aires: Lumiere, 2003), p. 79.
- ²⁹ Patricia Owen Steiner, *Victoria Ocampo, Feminist, Woman of the World* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), p. 66.
- ³⁰ Nora Pasternac, *SUR, una Revista en la Tormenta: Los años de formación 1931-1944* (Buenos Aires: Paradiso, 2002), p. 236.
- ³¹ Although, as Pasternac reminds us, *SUR* excluded the following writers: Roberto Payró, Benito Lynch, Alfonsina Storni, Horacio Quiroga, and Enrique Larreta (p. 193).
- ³² Beatriz Sarlo, 'La perspectiva americana en los primeros años de *SUR*', *Punto de Vista*, 17 (1983), pp. 10-12. Regarding Borges's *criollista* articles in *SUR*, see 'Nuestras imposibilidades', *SUR*, 1.4 (1931), pp. 131-134 and 'Elementos de preceptiva', *SUR*, 3.7 (1933), pp. 158-61.
- ³³ Sitman, *Victoria Ocampo y SUR*, p. 19.
- ³⁴ See Victoria Ocampo, 'Vida de la Revista *SUR*: 35 años de labor', *Sur*, 303-305 (1966-67), pp. 1-22 (p. 16).
- ³⁵ Mark Falcoff, 'Victoria Ocampo's "SUR"', *The New Criterion*, 7.2 (1988), pp. 27-37 (p. 36).
- ³⁶ Beatriz Sarlo, *Una modernidad periférica: Buenos Aires 1920 y 1930* (Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 1999), pp. 85-93; Ivonne Bordelois and Fabio Grementieri, *Villa Ocampo: Escenario de Cultura* (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2006), pp. 12-13; Elizabeth Marchant, *Critical Acts: Latin American Women and Cultural Criticism* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), pp. 50; Angella M. Nazarian, *Visionary Women* (New York: Assouline, 2015), pp. 66-72; Vicky Unruh, *Performing Women and Modern Literary Culture in Latin America: Intervening Acts* (Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2006), p. 56.
- ³⁷ Victoria Ocampo, 'Carta a Virginia Woolf', *Revista de Occidente*, 46 (1934), pp. 179-77.
- ³⁸ Both essays are included in Victoria Ocampo, *Testimonios*, segunda serie (Buenos Aires: *SUR*, 1941), pp. 264-5; pp. 269-86. Henceforth, *Testimonios 2.*
- ³⁹ José Ortega y Gasset, 'Epílogo' in *Victoria Ocampo, De Francesca a Beatrice* (Buenos Aires: *SUR*, 1963), pp. 91-118 (p. 104).
- ⁴⁰ Krishna Kripalani, 'Victoria Ocampo: A Cultural Bridge Between Three Continents', *Patriot*, March 30 (1979). Accessed in Rabindra Bhavana Museum, Ocampo File 271 (n.2) image 68; Nilanjana Bhattacharya, 'Exploring a South-South Dialogue: Spanish American Reception of Rabindranath Tagore', *Revista de Lenguas Modernas*, 25 (2016), pp. 81-99.
- ⁴¹ John King, John King, *Sur: A Study of the Argentine Literary Journal and its Role in the Development of a Culture, 1931-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 179.
- ⁴² Beatriz Sarlo, *Una modernidad periférica*, p. 89.
- ⁴³ *Índice: 1931-1966*, *SUR*, 303, 304, 305 (1966-1967). See, in particular, the following entries: 'India', p. 130; 'Tagore', p. 295; 'Gandhi', pp. 118-9; 'Nehru', p. 155, as well as the special issues on *Tagore: Centenario*, 270 (1961) and *Gandhi: El legado de la no-violencia*, 336-37 (1975).
- ⁴⁴ Rabindranath Tagore, "Mi escuela," *La Nación*, 1 de enero 1925, p. 13.
- ⁴⁵ Rabindranath Tagore, 'Impresiones sobre la vida espiritual de la Argentina', *La Nación*, 4 de enero 1925, p. 6.
- ⁴⁶ Rock, 'The British in Argentina: From Informal Empire to Postcolonialism', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 27.1 (2008), pp. 49-77 (p. 68).
- ⁴⁷ Rock, 'The British in Argentina', p. 68.
- ⁴⁸ Julio A. Fernández, 'The Nationalism Syndrome in Argentina', *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, 8.4 (1966), pp. 551-564.
- ⁴⁹ Juan José Sebreli, *Crítica de las ideas políticas argentinas*, 2da ed. (Buenos Aires: Sudamericana, 2002), p. 71.
- ⁵⁰ Rabindranath Tagore, *Nationalism* (London: Macmillan, 1918). Hereafter cited in parenthesis.
- ⁵¹ E. Carrasquilla-Mallarino, 'Rabindranath Tagore', *Caras y Caretas*, 1363, 15 de noviembre 1924, pp. 4-7; Unsigned note, 'El hombre del día', *Crítica*, 7 de noviembre 1924, p. 3.
- ⁵² For an excellent overview of the reception of Tagore in the Argentine press, see Germán Ferrari, 'Un poeta Bengalí en la Argentina', *Todo es Historia*, 462 (2006), pp. 7-25.
- ⁵³ Axel Gasquet, 'El Orientalismo Argentino (1900-1940), De la revista *Nosotros* al Grupo *SUR*', *Latin American Studies Centre at Maryland*, 22 (2008), pp. 1-23.
- ⁵⁴ Gasquet, 'El Orientalismo Argentino', p. 4.
- ⁵⁵ Rogers, *Modernism and the New Spain*, p. 138.
- ⁵⁶ Victoria Ocampo, *Victoria Ocampo, Tagore en las barrancas de San Isidro* (Buenos Aires: *Sur*, 1961), pp. 33-7. Hereafter cited in parenthesis as *Tagore en las barrancas*.

- ⁵⁷ Victoria Ocampo, 'Mahatma Gandhi', *La Nación*, 30 marzo 1924, p. 6; 'La alegría de leer a Rabindranath Tagore', *La Nación*, 9 de noviembre 1924, p. 3.
- ⁵⁸ Victoria Ocampo, *La laguna de los nenúfares: Fábula escénica en doce cuadros* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1926).
- ⁵⁹ Unruh, *Performing Women*, p. 62.
- ⁶⁰ Patricia Novillo-Corvalán, *Borges and Joyce: An Infinite Conversation* (Oxford: Legenda, 2011), pp. 15-16.
- ⁶¹ Jorge Luis Borges, 'La llegada de Tagore', *Proa*, 4 (1924), p. 61.
- ⁶² Borges, 'La llegada de Tagore', p. 61.
- ⁶³ Borges, 'La llegada de Tagore', p. 61.
- ⁶⁴ E. Carrasquilla-Mallarino, 'Rabindranath Tagore', *Caras y Caretas*, 1363, 15 de noviembre 1924, pp. 4-7. Unsigned note, 'El hombre del día', *Crítica*, 7 de noviembre 1924, p. 3.
- ⁶⁵ Héctor Castillo, 'Plegaria por Rabindranath Tagore', *Martín Fierro*, 13-14 (1924), p. 3.
- ⁶⁶ For an insightful discussion of the reception of Tagore in the Anglophone world, see Joseph Lennon, 'Writing Across Empire: W. B. Yeats and Rabindranath Tagore' in *Rabindranath Tagore: Universality and Tradition*, ed. by Patrick Colm Hogan and Lalita Pandit (London: Associated University Presses, 2003), pp. 213-29. See also Ezra Pound, 'Rabindranath Tagore', *Fortnightly Review*, March 1913, pp. 571-79.
- ⁶⁷ Julia A. Kushington, *Orientalism in the Hispanic Literary Tradition: In Dialogue with Borges, Paz, and Sarduy* (Albuquerque: University of Mexico Press, 1991), p. 43.
- ⁶⁸ Andrea J. Pitts, 'Occidentalism and Orientalism in the Late Writings of Antonio Caso', in *Comparative Studies in Asian and Latin American Philosophies: Cross-Cultural Theories and Methodologies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), pp. 13-32 (p. 18). See also Stephanie Rivera Berruz and Leah Kalmanson, 'Introduction' in *Comparative Studies in Asian and Latin American Philosophies: Cross-Cultural Theories and Methodologies*, pp. 1-10 and Adriana Novoa, 'The Indian Veil: The Metaphysics of Racial Origins in the Americas' in *Comparative Studies in Asian and Latin American Philosophies: Cross-Cultural Theories and Methodologies*, pp. 33-70.
- ⁶⁹ Rivera Berruz and Kalmanson, 'Introduction', p. 7.
- ⁷⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, [1978] 2003), p. 3.
- ⁷¹ Kushington, *Orientalism in the Hispanic Literary Tradition*, p. 3. Laura J. Torres-Rodríguez, 'Orientalizing Mexico: *Estudios hindostánicos* and the Place of India in José Vasconcelos's *La raza cósmica*', *Revista hispánica moderna*, 68.1 (2015), pp. 77-91.
- ⁷² Archival material preserved at the Rabindra Bhavana Museum in Santiniketan, West Bengal, has revealed that, upon learning that Tagore had been invited by the Peruvian government, Vasconcelos – in his official capacity as Mexican Minister of Education (1920-1924) – wrote to the poet on September 23, 1924 warning him of the repressive political climate of President Leguía's dictatorship. In an extensive letter written from Switzerland, Vasconcelos refers to a recent communication he held with the French writer, historian, and pacifist Romain Rolland about Tagore's imminent trip to South America. Alluding to the increasingly tense 'situación política' ('political situation') in Peru where 'centenares de personas distinguidas enemigas del gobierno se encuentran desterradas en Europa, en Estados Unidos y aún en México' ('hundreds of distinguished people enemies of the government are banished in Europe, the United States, and even in Mexico'), Vasconcelos warned Tagore that Leguía was strategically utilising his lavish centennial celebrations of independence as a smokescreen to divert attention from the acts of censorship and brutal state repression that had taken place under his watch. Vasconcelos, who previously invited the Chilean poet and educationalist Gabriela Mistral to play an active role in Mexico's post-revolutionary educational reforms, also invited Tagore to Mexico, eager to forge productive Indo-Mexican cultural relations. Regrettably, Tagore never visited Mexico, and no reply to Vasconcelos's letter has been found.
- ⁷³ Rabindranath Tagore, 'Nota', *La Nación*, 7 de noviembre 1924, p. 8.
- ⁷⁴ Tagore, 'Nota', p. 8.
- ⁷⁵ Patricia Novillo-Corvalán, *Modernism and Latin America: Transnational Networks of Literary Exchange* (New York: Routledge 2008), pp. 37-9.
- ⁷⁶ Jason Wilson, *Living in the Sound of the Wind* (London: Constable, 2015), pp. 220-45.
- ⁷⁷ Roy Hora, *The Landowners of the Argentine Pampas: A Social and Political History 1860-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), p. 1; Hilda Sabato, *Agrarian Capitalism and the World Market: Buenos Aires in the Pastoral Age, 1840-1890* (Albuquerque: University of Mexico Press, 1990), p. 1.
- ⁷⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: From 1750 to the Present Day*, rev. by Chris Wrigley (New York: New Press, 1999), p. 125.
- ⁷⁹ Jennifer French, *Nature, Neo-colonialism, and the Spanish American Regional Writers* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2005), p. 6.
- ⁸⁰ French, *Nature, Neo-colonialism, and the Spanish American Regional Writers*, p. 6.
- ⁸¹ Tulio Halperín Dongui, *The Contemporary History of Latin America*, ed. and trans. by John Charles Chasteen (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 124.
- ⁸² Halperín Dongui, pp. 136; 138; 137.
- ⁸³ Hudson, *Far Away and Long Ago*, p. 101.

-
- ⁸⁴ Rock, 'The British in Argentina', p. 68.
- ⁸⁵ H. S. Ferns, *Britain and Argentina in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), pp. 423.
- ⁸⁶ Hernán Barbero and Sergio Castiglione (eds.), *Estancias Argentinas* (Madrid: Kliczowski, 2000), pp. 87-8.
- ⁸⁷ Reginald Lloyd (ed.), *Twentieth Century Impressions of Argentina: Its History, People, Commerce, Industry and Resources* (London: Lloyd's Greater Britain Publishing Company, 1911), p. 548. Hereafter cited in parenthesis as *Twentieth Century Impressions*.
- ⁸⁸ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 150.
- ⁸⁹ Charles Baudelaire, *Les fleurs du mal*, ed. by Graham Chesters (London: Duckworth, 2002), 53. Hereafter cited in parenthesis as *Fleurs*. All translations from the French are mine, unless otherwise stated.
- ⁹⁰ Victoria Ocampo, "Apéndice II" in *Rabindranath Tagore, Canto del sol poniente*, trad. de Alberto Girri (Buenos Aires: Comisión Argentina, 1961), pp. 59-61 (p. 59).
- ⁹¹ Ocampo, 'Apéndice', p. 59.
- ⁹² Héctor Hoyos, *Beyond Bolaño: The Global Latin American Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), p. 2.
- ⁹³ Rabindranath Tagore, *Selected Poems*, trans. by William Radice (London: Penguin, 1985), p. 91.
- ⁹⁴ Tagore, *Selected Poems*, p. 91.