Impact case study (REF3)

REF2021

Institution: SOAS University of London

Unit of Assessment: 26 – Modern Languages and Linguistics

Title of case study: Beyond the Anglophone novel: making multilingualism visible in teaching and reading world literature

Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2015-2020

Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:

Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Francesca Orsini	Professor of Hindi and South Asian Literature	2014 - present
Itzea Goikolea Amiano	Postdoctoral researcher	2017 - Mar 2021
Fatima Burney	Postdoctoral researcher	2017 - 2020
Karima Laachir	Senior Lecturer Near and Middle Studies	2014 - 2020
Sara Marzagora	Postdoctoral researcher	2016 - 2019

Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2018-31 December 2020

Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

World literature has become synonymous with the Anglophone novel in both theory and practice. This makes literatures in other genres and languages – and their authors – largely invisible. Research at SOAS had considerable impact on the teaching of world literature both in the UK and internationally by encouraging higher education institutions and teachers to consider non-Anglophone literatures as part of world literature. Through activities and a toolkit on how to make libraries multilingual, the research also made an impact on librarians and library users. A literature festival co-organised with the Museum of London made London-based multilingual writers visible to readers and to other writers and professionals.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

World literature tends to be understood largely as global Anglophone literature, which is evident in literature prizes as well as the market for books and academic jobs. It is problematic because it makes all other literatures appear provincial, minor, invisible, the opposite of world literature **[3.1]**. Teaching reproduces this exclusion: world literature courses typically include only Anglophone (or Francophone) texts, while texts in Asian, African, and Middle Eastern languages are taught as part of "area studies", on separate tracks. The implicit language hierarchy is harmful to literature, but also to identity: individuals and writers in postcolonial countries and in multilingual Europe grow up thinking that English is more valuable than their first language and stop valuing the latter's literature. Acknowledging that lively and important literatures exist beyond English (or French and Spanish) is key to redressing these problems and exclusions. It requires teachers to acknowledge the interrelations between different language traditions ("reading together" **[3.2])** - because writers and readers in multilingual societies often practise more than one - and helping readers to feel that texts in their first language have value, status and beauty.

The 2016-2021 MULOSIGE project funded by the European Research Council (GBP2,182,640), was conducted by Francesca Orsini (PI, Professor of Hindi and South Asian Literature), Karima Laachir (Senior Lecturer, 2014-2019), and Postdoctoral researchers Sara Marzagora (2016-2019), Fatima Burney (2017-2020) and Itzea Goikolea (2017-2021). The project focused on North India, the Horn of Africa, and the Maghreb (North Africa) as regional examples of multilingualism and literatures shaped by colonial and post-colonial divisions. Key questions tackled by the research include: How do we do literary history for multilingual regions? Do novels and poems in different local languages, including colonial languages like English or

French, share ideas, styles, concerns, and expression? What do local forms tell us about world literature? How do local literatures become visible to readers elsewhere, through which media and whose activism? And how does location affect views of the world, and of world literature?

The project's innovative methodology was grounded in archival research across multiple language archives of texts and genres in Hindi, Urdu, English, Arabic, French, Spanish, and Amharic and Oromo. Drawing on Doreen Massey's notion of space as "the multiplicity of stories and trajectories", it focused on "multilingual locals": regions like North India where texts in Persian, Hindi, Urdu, and English tell different stories **[3.1]**, or towns like Tetouan in northern Morocco where intellectuals collaborated on bilingual Spanish-Arabic magazines that ambitiously connected the Arab world with Spain and the Americas **[3.2]**. A focus on individual writers, like the Ethiopian polymath Käbbädä, showed not only how their multilingual education gave them multiple literary tastes, but also how shifts in political orientation changed their choice of genres and their views of the world **[3.3]**. Finally, "reading together" **[3.4]** novels or poems written in different languages but from the same multilingual context, helps connect seemingly disparate traditions and highlights overlapping concerns—as when Hindi, Urdu, and English writers reflect on rural underdevelopment **[3.5]**.

Excitingly, the research found that literary cultures have been consistently multilingual in most parts of the world since the second millennium, with repertoires of genres in each language that often overlapped and circulated along partly shared but often divergent geographies **[3.1]**. These repertoires highlight various understandings of "the world" beyond the European- or US-centred set of so-called 'universal' literary values and tastes **[3.1, 3.2, 3.6]**. Moreover, language hierarchies reinforced by colonialism can be upended, as languages and tastes seep into each other. For example, while the first generation of post-independence Maghrebi writers in French agonized over their use of French, the following generation assertively reclaimed French as a Maghrebi language, acculturating and subverting it, not just to 'write back' to the former colonizers but also to communicate with each other **[3.4]**. The positionality of the writer is crucial, shaping their use of regional traditions, but also of global debates as in Käbbädä's case - modern North African Arabic novelists drew on this 11th century epic of Bedouin nomads to mount different critiques of their respective states and of migration and displacement **[3.6]**. Language and positionality produced different views of the post-colonial Indian village **[3.5]**.

The three major recommendations coming from this research are 1) that texts – fiction and non-fiction – produced in various 'local' languages are necessary to enrich world literature teaching. Additionally, 2) world literature must grapple with multilingualism as a widespread and enduring phenomenon and 'world' literature is defined by location and position. Finally 3) more must be done to showcase oral literature in local and regional languages, which travels far and reaches very large audiences yet is not considered part of "world literature".

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

All outputs have been produced as a result of funding from the ERC and have been published by magazines or publishers with a rigorous peer review process:

3.1. Orsini, F (2015) 'The Multilingual Local in World Literature'. *Comparative Literature,* (67) 4, pp 345-374. https://doi.org/10.1215/00104124-3327481

3.2. Goikolea-Amiano, G (2020) 'Bilingualism and "Significant Geographies" in Moroccan Colonial Journals: Al-Motamid and Ketama, Modern Arabic Poetry and Literary History'. *Interventions*. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2020.1845772

3.3. Marzagora, S (2019) 'Ethiopian intellectual history and the global: Käbbädä Mikael's geographies of belonging (1940s-1950s)'. *Journal of World Literature* 4 (1). pp. 107-128 https://doi.org/10.1163/24056480-00401006

3.4. Laachir, K (2015) 'The aesthetics and politics of 'reading together' Moroccan novels in Arabic and French'. *Journal of North African Studies*, (21) 1, pp 22-36. https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2015.1084098

3.5. Orsini, F (2017) 'Reading Together: Hindi, Urdu, and English Village Novels.' In: Ciocca, R. and Srivastava, N., (eds.), *Indian Literature and the World*. London: Palgrave pp. 61-85. ISBN: 9781137545503. Available on request.

3.6. Laachir, K (2019) "The Literary World of the North African Taghrība: Novelization, Locatedness and World Literature", *Journal of World Literature* 4 (2). pp. 188-214. https://doi.org/10.1163/24056480-00402004

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The MULOSIGE research has 1) diversified and improved the teaching and understanding of world literature in universities in the UK, Europe, North America and Africa, and 2) encouraged dialogue with other disciplines. It has 3) helped libraries to stock books that support their local multilingual readers, and 4) empowered writers, poets, translators, readers and the Museum of London to express themselves as "multilingual locals" in literary terms.

Diversifying and improving the teaching and learning of world literature European, North American and African Universities
In 2016 the team established the MULOSIGE website to highlight interesting texts and genres identified and analysed by the research project for lecturers and students of world literature to introduce such texts into their course reading lists, seminars and essays, and incorporate the accompanying analysis in their teaching or learning. To engage directly with lecturers and students, the project team surveyed university teachers in Europe and the US (n=29) – where the field of world literature is most developed – to identify topics, materials and areas they felt were underrepresented and undertheorized. Besides providing positive feedback on the existing resources, respondents asked for reading lists, syllabi, poems and critical texts in translation, and literary reviews and essays **[5.1]**. Based on their responses, the team redesigned and populated the project website with this content.

A subsequent email survey (n=25) that gathered feedback from faculty between May 2020 and June 2020 demonstrated the positive impact on teaching and learning of World Literature that the website materials have had – in particular, making courses more multilingual and placing greater emphasis on regional texts and genres **[5.3]**. Such impacts were generated at US universities including the Universities of California, Colorado, Hawai'i, Houston, Illinois, Oklahoma, Washington, Rutgers University, New York University and Washington University in St Louis. In Europe, universities included CEIAS (CNRS/EHESS) in Paris, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid and the Universities of Uppsala (Sweden), Granada (Spain), Milan and Bayreuth (Germany); and Birmingham, King's College London and Goldsmiths in the UK. Universities in the key regions of the project include Universite Sultan Moulay Slimane, in Morocco, Ambedkar University in Delhi and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. An assistant Professor from Boulder writes "the critical materials that MULOSIGE has made available for free online have been great resources for my students who are interested in thinking beyond the bounds of the national, and often within literary contexts I am not myself familiar with" **[5.3 p1]**. A professor at the University of Houston writes "I taught a course in Houston in Fall 2019...that compared literary texts from Korea, Somalia, Egypt, Morocco, and several Latin American nations. The method of comparing across wide swathes of the globe in this way is new… becoming more familiar with the project website was invaluable for this class" **[5.3 p4]**. A lecturer at the University of Birmingham wrote "I have incorporated several of these resources into a module on the African literary canon due to be taught in my department next year" **[5.3, p4]**.

Bridging gaps between world literature and other academic disciplines, and new audiences
The MULOSIGE project has also sought to widen the debate on world literature by engaging students and teachers from fields in which world literature has hitherto been dismissed as an Anglophone discipline. The project team organized a conference for lecturers in Ethiopia, based at Addis Ababa University in December 2019. 20 students and teachers from the university and other institutes working in the departments of **music, literature and folklore, linguistics, and foreign studies** took part, and 10 participants supplied feedback **[5.4]**. Nine participants agreed local oral traditions can, and should, be incorporated in world literature, and declared that they

were committed to changing their practice in researching, gathering, consulting and analyzing local oral traditions – or as one participant said "working on voiceless people" **[5.4, p5]**.

Of the 25 higher education interlocutors surveyed by email in 2020, seven are located in or have approached colleagues and students in other disciplinary areas, helping them and others to engage with multilingual and local perspectives and transform their teaching. A Professor at King's College London states "the website contains interesting interventions in politics and literature as well as post colonialism, which are of increasing interest to students in the current political climate" **[5.3 p5]**. A Professor at UC Irvine states "…online materials made available through MULOSIGE have the potential to revolutionize several fields at once…Each resource on the website …breaks old habits of one-world thinking" **[5.3 p5]**.

The website received 33,053 unique visitors from 134 countries and generated 64,968 individual views **[5.2 p1]**. 53 people accessed syllabi **[5.2 p3]**. MULOSIGE has 572 Facebook followers with popular content regularly reaching over 1,000 people **[5.2 p4]**, and 726 Twitter followers with a monthly average of 37,500 impressions **[5.2 p5]**. In a comment on the website, one graduate student taking a North African History class at university in Morocco stated of the website resources "It made my presentation stress the importance of local history by giving me a concrete and contemporary case study to work from." **[5.2 p3]**. A professional translator stated "Hopefully, your review will help increase its readership. As a translator of Moroccan Francophone literature…it's endlessly frustrating to me that so much of what reaches the West…[is] what the West [wants] to hear." **[5.2 p4]**.

Working with librarians to make local libraries more multilingual
To facilitate wider reading of the texts and authors that the project had assembled or had access to via its networks, the project team started a partnership with a North London local library, N4. The pilot proved mutually beneficial. Local libraries in highly diverse cities such as London are often located in multilingual neighbourhoods, but their world literature offering does not always cater to or reflect local people's multilingualism. The team and Library manager conducted a survey among community organizations and local mosque-goers in May 2018. After analyzing the survey results, an Arabic book collection was produced, sourced through a strategic partnership with Arabic language bookshops in London. The collection included children's literature, novels, short stories, poetry, essays and autobiographies from Morocco, Tunisia, Mauritania, Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria. The then Mayor of Islington, Councillor Dave Poyser, attending the collection's launch tweeted: "Assalam Alaikum! Pleased to launch Arabic book collection with @SOAS @MULOSIGE @Islingtonlibs and our reading champion @TriciaClarkeM @MuseumofLondon". Islington Life magazine covered the launch in English and Arabic **[5.5a p2].** N4's library manager stated that "being involved in this festival enriches part of our remit […] There was a mixed audience of age and background [at the performance] which is very representative of the library users in our community" **[5.6a and b]**. The project was profiled by blogs and online news providers including ArabLit in English [5.5a], Arab London in Arabic **[5.5b]** and in Separata Arabe in Spanish, which encouraged Spanish librarians to carry out similar projects **[5.5c]**. Lessons from the pilot were incorporated into a toolkit produced in six languages and targeted at library managers in other global cities seeking to create and curate multilingual collections that reflect the diversity of their local communities. The toolkit has been viewed 208 times in 2020 **[5.2, p2]**, in spite of continued and sporadic global lockdowns and community libraries hit by social distancing measures and economic downturns.

Impact on the creative sector; Museum of London, writers, readers and translators
A literary festival – Multilingual London – was planned with the Museum of London (MoL) to be held there on Saturday 25 April 2020. The festival planned to bring together writers, readers, and literary mediators to enhance the visibility of non-Anglophone writers in London, who are often only viewed as "community writers", but also to influence the public conversation about multilingualism by creating greater ease around languages, particularly among second or third generation migrants. Apart from a poetry session and recitals in gallery spaces and readings and discussions with writers, the festival would also provide multilingual activities in Yoruba, Somali, and Urdu for families and children from supplementary schools and offer a diverse range of

global foods via food 'trucks' outside the main entrance. Planning the festival had an impact on practices within the (MoL): e.g. for the first time, senior managers and directors discussed the need for MoL to have an inclusive approach to event catering, ensuring that halal, kosher and other foods be represented. The festival was expected to attract 400 people.

As a result of the national COVID-19 lockdown, the festival was first postponed **[5.7].** Then it transferred online on 28 November 2020, with two online panel discussions on languages in families and on being a multilingual writer and a poetry recital with London poets reciting in Amharic, Arabic, Hindi, Chinese and English (with translations on the screen). Almost 400 people registered, 50% from outside London/the UK, and the audience was around 90 people at any one time. 96% of participants surveyed stated that taking part in the online festival made them more aware of the language diversity in London, and 84% were ready to read more in more languages **[5.8]**. A participant, panelist, and author or two-critically acclaimed novels would reconsider her practice, stating that taking part "really made me less nervous about my multilingual identity…Urdu and 'Pinglish' isn't a disadvantage, they are a way to help me color the English language with my own individual strokes" **[5.9a]**. A published poet and short story author felt the festival marked "a shift in the poetry community-until recently the privileging of English meant even the use of 'foreign' words in an English poem was frowned upon" **[5.9b]**. Another author, whose first book was nominated as Guardian book of the year in 2011 and paperback edition in 2012 stated: "the acceptance of the organisers…of my non-fluency, my 'smatterings' of Arabic and their willingness to detect and validate the presence of Arabic in the English that I write in, was validating and empowering" **[5.9c]**. A published poet and translator of Amharic works added: "it is actually quite rare for poets to be asked to read their poems in the original language they were written…it just takes too long... But your event took advantage of the Zoom format to run original and translation simultaneously, so we all could listen to the poet…while following the translation on screen… it made me feel that the many hours of work translating…poems had all been worthwhile!" **[5.9f]**. Another writer reflected how "in an environment of ignorance & fear, literary translation is such a significant key to unlock doors of wider understanding and rational co-existence!" Commenting on how the festival had reached people in "Washington DC and Mumbai", the writer went on to express a wish to stay "connected and support ourselves as a community of International writers, living & working in the UK" **[5.9h]**. A multi-prize winning spoken word artist also noted the power of connection to inform her work, saying: "…I felt privileged to be able to hear a variety of approaches to translation and creation of poems. It stretched my knowledge of poetics…and will feed into my own practice" **[5.9i]**.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

5.1 Report - 2018 MULOSIGE website survey results, 2018

5.2 Report - MULOSIGE website and social media statistics, 2020

5.3 Collated emails from educators on MULOSIGE Pedagogic Resources, May-June 2020

5.4 10 Feedback forms from Oral Traditions Conference 17-18 Dec 2019 Addis Ababa

5.5 Media file; **a**) Social and print media on N4 Library collection launch event; **b**) MULOSIGE project to make London libraries more multilingual - ArabLit, June 2019 (https://arablit.org/2019/06/06/mulosige-project-to-make-london-libraries-more-multilingual/); **c**) coverage in Arab London (Arabic) (https://arab-london.com/posts/5816); **d**) MULOSIGE,un proyecto para hacer multilingues las bibliotecas de Londres, Separata Arabe, June 2019 (Spanish) (https://leerelmundoarabe.home.blog/2019/06/06/mulosige-un-proyecto-para-hacer-multilingues-las-bibliotecas-de-londres/)

5.6. **a**) Being Human podcast on MUIOSIGE website - interview with N4 Library Manager, 2018 at timecode: 21:00–21:56 - http://mulosige.soas.ac.uk/being-human-podcast/ and **b**) transcript

5.7 Letter from Community Learning Programme Manager, Museum of London

5.8 Collated responses of Multilingual London Festival Online participant survey, 45 responses

5.9 Emails from **a**) critically acclaimed author, **b**) published poet and short story author **c**) Guardian book of the year nominated author **d**) poet; **e**) critic and published short story writer of six collections **f**) poet and translator **g**) musician poet and writer; **h**) multi-award winning spoken word artist; **i**) writer, TED speaker and Royal Literary Society Fellow and editor