



Edges, Borders, Peripheries: Contested European Imaginaries and Narrative Forms

Neus Rotger & Aina Vidal-Pérez

To cite this article: Neus Rotger & Aina Vidal-Pérez (27 Jul 2024): Edges, Borders, Peripheries: Contested European Imaginaries and Narrative Forms, Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction, DOI: [10.1080/00111619.2024.2375313](https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2024.2375313)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2024.2375313>



© 2024 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.



Published online: 27 Jul 2024.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 44



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Edges, Borders, Peripheries: Contested European Imaginaries and Narrative Forms

Neus Rotger ^a and Aina Vidal-Pérez ^b

^aFaculty of Arts and Humanities, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain; ^bFilologia Catalana i Lingüística General, Universitat de les Illes Balears, Palma de Mallorca, Spain



ABSTRACT

This introductory essay confronts the idea of Europe and Europeanness from the standpoint of global literary studies. It makes the case for a pluralistic conception of world literature through a prospective analysis of the literary European semi-periphery. With the aim of overcoming the conflation between world literature and the global anglophone (as much as that of Europe and the West), we draw on previous research on the European semi-periphery and its “small/minor” literatures with three main goals in mind: to better understand the contentious relationship between less-circulated European narratives and world literature; to explore the contested imaginaries of Europe and Europe’s border zones that these fictions produce; and, lastly, to identify a constellation of thematic, generic, formal, and affective concerns that contribute to reimagining Europe through specific exploratory poetics. Through the examination of this framework, the essay critically interrogates and problematizes the idea of Europe from its margins and explores the ways in which narrative form can contribute to contesting unitary ideas around a multilayered and conflicted European literary field.

Introduction

Over the last two decades, the resurgence of the notions of *world* and *global* literature has served – among many other functions – to question several dominant methods and underlying beliefs in literary studies. This questioning includes the nation-state as the primary unit of analysis, the idea of influence or diffusion from creative centers to imitative peripheries, and even the very practice of comparative literature, given its perhaps inadvertent reinforcement of national literary entities and its tendency to focus on binary and often unidirectional relations within or from Europe. Criticism of the vertical analysis of cultural relations has motivated the creation – or recovery – of alternative concepts that are gaining traction in literary scholarship today. With metaphors like “circulation,” “flow,” “network,” and “mapping,” scholars in various disciplines in the humanities and social sciences have sought to emphasize ideas of movement, connectivity, entanglement, and power relations above those of autonomy and diffusionism, taking a stance against methodological nationalism and fostering a transnational literary history. All these metaphors work in relationship with and, to an extent, contribute to a fluid and sometimes all-too-optimistic conceptualization of the global, but their potential lies in their less static, less hierarchical understanding of literary relations, one that points to a recalibration of cultural production with multiple and moveable nodal points.¹

With the consolidation of world literature in the 2000s along with the emergence of global literary studies as a field of research, we have witnessed a considerable opening of the textual

CONTACT Neus Rotger  nrotgerc@uoc.edu  Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Rambla del Poblenou, 156, Barcelona 08018, Spain

© 2024 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

archive to include non-Western literatures, which in turn have transformed critical perspectives and methods. And yet what would seem to entail greater plurality and diversity has often reinforced the inequalities at play within the literary field, sometimes with the active exploitation of so-called “peripheral” voices in the literary market as well as in academia. Francesca Orsini has recently referred to this as the “great paradox” of the exciting prospect of world literary studies, which, over the last few decades, has coincided with “the virtual minorization of *all* non-Anglophone literatures under the global Anglophone,” including major languages like Italian, French, Arabic, Japanese, or Chinese (2024, 2). Orsini suggests five strategies to counter Anglocentrism and work against the “minorization” and “invisibilization” of non-English languages and works; among these, we may highlight the importance she places on indirect translations, even though they often rely on dominant intermediate languages like English or French, as well as the scholarly practice of “highlighting the presence not just of languages but also of literatures beyond English” (2024, 16) in Anglophone works, as exemplified in the case of Anglo-Pakistani short-story writer Aamer Hussein. Whether we believe that these alternative reading practices help “provincialize” English or strengthen its position even more, they lay bare the undergirding mechanisms of world literature as a field of unresolved tensions.

The present special issue positions itself in the midst of these unresolved tensions with the aim of reflecting on the European semi-periphery, a task that seems to have been relegated to the backdrop in recent world literature debates. In the context of the self-reflexive discussions around “the rise of global anglophone” there is general awareness about how the reconfiguration of the study of literatures in English, especially in English departments in the United States, has often resulted in the “institutional commodification of diversity,” if not in the “inevitable shrinking of the study of literature” (Gunaratne, 565–566). The interrogation of this new disciplinary rubric and its limits, however, has also sparked a more sensitive understanding of the different inflections of the world/global according to the geographies and languages of enunciation while fostering critical attention to the many absences and power imbalances that these approaches produce. Alternative, more critical views around accounts of world literature – what Stefan Helgesson and Pieter Vermeulen have called “critical world literature studies” (2016, 2; see also Shi) – propose shifting the focus precisely toward these absences so as to attend to lesser-known literatures and multilingual constellations.

In line with this self-reflective gesture in *critical* world literature studies, the present special issue seeks to overcome the conflation of world literature and the global anglophone (as much as that of Europe and the West) by engaging with a diverse range of languages and literary cultures. The ambition and scope of the issue, however, does not reach for the world, nor for Europe in its entirety, but focuses on Southern and Eastern Europe as regions that pose productive yet underexplored sites of criticism. Drawing on previous research on the European semi-periphery and its “small/minor” literatures, our aim is to bring together work on a select corpus of consolidated and emergent authors with three main goals in mind: to better understand the contentious relationship between less-circulated European narratives and world literature; to explore the contested imaginaries of Europe and Europe’s border zones that these fictions produce; and, lastly, to identify a constellation of thematic, generic, formal, and affective concerns that contribute to reimagining Europe through specific exploratory poetics. The latter focus on poetics resonates with recent articulations of the “aesthetic agency” of minor literature (Codina Solà and Vermeulen; see also Averis et al.) and complements previous work with a primary emphasis on circulation – be it from the standpoint of a particular national literature (e.g. Portuguese, in Maia et al.; Dutch, in Brems et al.; Romanian, in Goldiș and Baghiu; Swedish, in Edfeldt et al.), from the perspective of a region (e.g. Scandinavia, in Khachatryan and Llosa Sanz), or of “small-nation” and “minor” European literatures like Catalan, Czech, Greek, Maltese, Portuguese, and Slovene (Chitnis et al.; Erlin et al.).² Our conviction is that adopting the perspective of the linguistic margins will help us reconsider the profound asymmetries that lie beyond Europe as much as within it.

Rethinking Europe and Europeanness

In the current remapping of the global literary space, Europe's traditional positioning at the center (of high theory, formal innovation, cultural capital, and literary prestige) is being alternatively imagined as one of the many centers organizing cultural life. Scholars are now urged to shift their focus away from Europe and to start paying attention to non-European literatures in a gesture that contests the unequal discursive powers between the West and the rest. We can situate this critical move beyond (Western) Europe at the turn of the century, with the consolidation of postcolonial studies and cultural theory within Euro-American academia and the disciplinary crisis of comparative literature (Ganguly). This reorientation of the field has prompted researchers to pay attention to previously overlooked relations and alternative cartographies, yet Europe and the European archive remain in tension. First, because we cannot ignore the profound asymmetries that Eurocentric views and a globalized literary market project onto our understanding of transcultural relations across the world; and second, because to refute or flatten the power imbalances taking place within the continent is not an option either.

In recent years, the shift in focus from binary, unidirectional literary relations toward transnational triangulations and more complex systems has produced an interesting body of research that complicates our understanding of the European archive from a decentered perspective. We can see this at work, for example, in Marcia Abréu's 2017 study of the transatlantic circulation of nineteenth-century novels between Brazil, Portugal, France, and England, or in Carles Prado's 2022 research about how China was imagined in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Spain by heavily relying on hegemonic British and French discourses. Other accounts of these multipolar and multidirectional interactions have also been preoccupied with minor-to-minor comparisons, in line with what François Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih have termed "minor transnationalism". Contributions to Asian and Latin American cross-cultural relations are most notably revealing previously unexplored connections among minoritized cultures.³ In this burgeoning interest in South-to-South relations, there is a marked interest in not only recalibrating Europe's cultural hegemony but also in bypassing it altogether.

How, then, should we think about Europe in these new configurations of cross-cultural literary relations? What does its absence in studies of transversal relations tell us about the power asymmetries still at work within the global literary space? And more importantly for our purposes, what does this dislocated, decentralized Europe look like and how should we approach it? In *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty sets out to debunk any claims of the universality of European thought while reminding us of the perils of embedding Europe "in *clichéd and shorthand forms*" that flatten the plurality and diversity of the continent and dissolve what he calls "different Europes" into a homogeneous and closed category (Chakrabarty, 3–4). This tendency to close the idea of Europe into a monolithic unit had previously been noted by other scholars such as Anna Klobucka (see also Lazarus; and D'haen 2012), who conceptualized the European periphery to observe how the "anti-Eurocentric stance of postcolonial politics and theory appear to have colluded towards a subtle yet unmistakable reinforcement of a monolithic and monologic 'European' identity" (Klobucka, 126).

In order to counter this tendency to flatten the European context or to view it as a unitary network of relationships between equals, the present special issue seeks to explore alternative readings of the European space through a corpus of less widely circulated European literatures that critically expose the plural, ambivalent, and even contradictory nature of the continent, as much as the mobility of the North/South and East/West axes that crisscross it. To do so, we focus on decentralized perspectives of Europe, including diasporic and border narratives within the continent, as well as on ideas and representations from non-European traditions. In this regard, we pay special attention to narrative imaginaries that complicate the figure of Europe and help question scholarly discourses that uncritically equate it with the West. This is clear in common slippages by which Western Europe (and/or its major colonial powers) is taken to speak for all of Europe – a gesture that, in turn, evokes other,

subaltern Europes. In novel studies, this slippage is recurrent even in studies that set out to rethink the history of the genre from a transnational perspective. In these, “Europe” tends to stand for Western Europe, if not exclusively standing for what Franco Moretti called the novelistic “core” of France and Britain in his *Atlas of the European Novel*.

Much has been written and discussed since Moretti’s formulation of the “three Europes,” by which, following Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-systems theory, the European literary space is divided into “a precocious, versatile, and very small” core; a very large periphery “with very little freedom, and little creativity;” and a semi-periphery of “transition and combined development” (Moretti, 173). However, the centrality of the Anglophone and Francophone contexts remains almost intact in the current cross-cultural research. Alternative analytical and cartographical frameworks such as “Eurasia,” “Eurafrica,” and “Eurafrasia,” as discussed by scholars like Lucy Gasser, are trying to rethink the European literary space. In her recent remapping of “other Europes,” Gasser brings together and analyzes literary texts from East-Central Europe, South Africa, and India, thus recasting existing spatial and temporal frameworks for global literary history in order to elucidate less-studied connections and alliances from historically marginalized perspectives.

Despite their own challenges, these points of view, together with the more recent reorientation toward the epistemological and political space of what has been called the “Global South,” importantly contribute to reimagining Europe and its transforming literary space (see Santos). Interest in the reorientation of Europe’s spatial imaginaries and mental maps is being tested in the rapidly growing fields of Iberian studies (Domínguez and O’Dwyer; Domínguez and D’haen; Martínez Tejero and Pérez Isasi; Pérez Isasi and Fernandes; Picornell), comparative literature (Martí Monterde and Sullà), Mediterranean studies (Boletsi, Houwen, and Minnaard 2020; D’Auria and Gallo; Vidal-Pérez), and migration and diaspora studies (Agoston-Nikolova; Stan and Sussman), as well as through the perspective of Greek (Calotychos Boletsi and Papanikolaou) and Italian studies (Dainotto 2007), among others. These recent works attest to the need for an integrated approach to the contemporary European literary landscape. Yet, much work needs to be done to advance these perspectives and put them in dialogue.

Mental Maps and Narrative Forms

From a conceptual standpoint as much as from the perspective of the writers who imagine it, Europe is “certainly not a question of geography,” as Slavenka Drakulić has insidiously noted in her *Café Europa* (1996, 12). Not only are the borders of Europe unclear, highly contested, and progressively changing, but the perception of their meaning varies deeply depending on the region, especially as the European Union renews its drive for integration upon the twentieth anniversary of the 2004 Eastern enlargement. Installed, as Massimo Cacciari has argued, in the “suspension” of its own geographical configuration (2015, 139), Europe can hardly be conceived as a unitary political entity, nor should we try to approach its literatures as a reflection or, worse still, a reparation of a fragile but nonetheless cohesive space. The notion of mental maps, borrowed from cognitive psychology and cultural geography, offers a promising lead with which to better understand our imagined constructions of Europe and the competing agendas that they often entail. Mental mapping research (see Holmén and Götz), and, more specifically, the idea that spatial relations and geographical barriers such as mountain ranges, seas, or deserts are inflicted with normative meaning, has served to point out the layers of historically constructed discourses that influence our perception of place. These discourses, like that of Europe as a project linked to ideas of human dignity, freedom, and democracy tend to reflect or reproduce imperial divisions and often collapse or compete with other historically constructed notions such as those of Eastern Europe and the Balkans, as the classic essays by Larry Woolf (1994) and Maria Todorova (2009) have respectively shown.

The constellation of imaginaries that inform our mental mapping of Europe does not solely emerge across the West-non-West or major-minor divides but is negotiated through a myriad of relationships that take place transversally and always in relation to alterity. In line with Enrique Dussel’s argument

about how Europe's identity is negotiated only through a collision with its colonial Other, and following Armando Gnisci's consideration of identity as relation to alterity, in *Europe (In Theory)*, Roberto Dainotto argues that Eurocentrism starts from a relationship of domination of the non-European, that is to say, that modern European identity begins with the internalization of what lies outside of Europe. This dialectical construction of Europeanness not only refers to Europe's colonial Other but also to its own internal subalternities (2007, 51). Our aim is to put together critical narratives that challenge and add nuance to historically assumed ideas of a mythologized Europe. We are convinced that these narratives can contribute to different imaginations of Europe by accounting for the unequal partition of Europeanness both within the continent and across its external colonial legacies, sustaining a collective gaze around the differences that stem from the very notion of the European.

If the World Wars of the twentieth century evinced the crisis of European literature as a concept (Rotger), it was paradoxically after the Second World War, amidst the backdrop of a politically fractured continent, that perspectives from the Eastern bloc began to resonate more distinctly in the ongoing conversation around the idea of Europe. Among the diverse attempts at pushing other territorial perspectives beyond the West, or what Shane Weller sums up as the "other Europes" (2021, 220–246), the idea of Central Europe suggested by Czesław Miłosz and developed by Milan Kundera in the 1980s is certainly one of the most salient of the postwar era. Albert Camus's pointing to the role of the Mediterranean in his "*pensée du midi*" and Orhan Pamuk's positioning of Turkey at the "edge of Europe" are also well-known territorial claims that have questioned the centrality of Western Europe as a given and contributed to rethinking contemporary Europe, not without imposing, in turn, their own sets of divisions and exclusions.

Certainly, the continent's coordinates have undergone major changes during the twentieth century. In *The Novel and Europe: Imagining the Continent in post-1945 Fiction*, Andrew Hammond describes how the loosening of the East-West divide that prevailed during the Cold War sharpened the divisions between the European space into regions such as Scandinavia, Transcarpathia, Transcaucasia, the Mediterranean, the Atlantic seaboard, the Baltic states, the Black Sea countries, the Visegrád nations, the Western Balkans, and the Celtic fringe (13). Although the West-East divide has historically been and still remains a significant focus within discussions about Europe, since 1989 in particular, the rotation of the main axis gave way to a new North-South divide from a continental and global perspective. Within the last decade, scholars have considered examining these shifts more closely, aiming to understand their pivotal role in European history and their influence in terms of the ideas of center and periphery (D'Auria and Gallo, 13) as reinforced by the European Union's admissions-management processes.

These cartographic processes have been decisive to defining national, regional, continental, and global ideas of Europe and its literary responses. If we examine contemporary narratives of the European (semi-)periphery, "modernization" – and the fanciful rhetoric that sustains it – seems to be at the core of most of these regions' critical literary responses. Indeed, the regionalization of Europe shaped by the uneven development ushered in by North-Western progress and neoliberal ideology runs parallel to formal and thematic critiques in these works of fiction. As we shall see in the contributions to this special issue, each of these literary responses to peripheralization are shaped, at the same time, by specific local, national, and regional contexts, such as the post-communist transition to capitalism in Eastern Europe, the Yugoslav Wars, the long-standing roots and impact of the 2008 financial crisis in Southern Europe, the persistence of colonial rationales, the growth of social and institutional racism, and the aftermath of *Brexit*. By focusing on these specificities, our aim is to problematize the very gesture of regionalizing, insofar as it can lead to new forms of subalternity or exoticization, even falling back on a persistent tendency toward generalization and "omnipotent definitions" (Shih, 19) that are often reserved for peripheral spaces.

In the face of a lack of comparative, nonhierarchical, and relational discourse around the diverse literary margins of Europe, this issue seeks the possible benefits of building alliances through shared interests, contestations, and aesthetics without requiring intervention from the

centers of culture and power. Through the analysis of a selection of contemporary novels, travel narratives, and autobiographical fiction, the issue not only showcases the heterogeneity of European literary culture but also demonstrates the extent to which past and current world spatial imaginaries do not properly accommodate the literary European semi-periphery as a space in between the East/West and North/South divides. This partly explains the fact that there is hardly any systematized work on the shared poetical grounds of these less familiar European literatures gathering the wealth and complexity of their role within the world literary space and scholarly debates around the “global.”

One possible explanation for this gap is the very centrality of the novel when it comes to thinking about both the literary forms of world production and the mechanisms of cross-border literary circulation (Rotger, 2). If Moretti recognized the expansion of the novel within the cultural world-systemic dominance of England and France as cultural powers, scholars such as Mariano Siskind have added nuance to Moretti’s approach by emphasizing the Eurocentric, bourgeois dimension of the genre from a global perspective. In his 2010 work, Siskind studies the novel as a device that allows for the spreading of bourgeois reasoning beyond Western Europe’s nation-states in parallel to their colonial project. In this special issue, we seek to explore the uses and trajectories of the novel – as conventionally understood – beyond the main centers of cultural and imperial power whose consolidation went hand in hand with that of the novel as a genre. In a later work, Siskind expresses concern with contributing to the advancement of world literature by challenging the global hegemony of the novel and advocating for a heterogeneous conception of the genre, “with no unified features, prescribing no norms, and therefore open to all kinds of formal and historical traditions” (2012, 354).

In a similar spirit, we propose observing how the non-core narratives of Europe contribute to destabilizing and demystifying dominant taxonomic genre divisions. The Warwick Research Collective (WReC) has furthered Moretti’s attempt to theorize the mechanisms through which the world-literary system encodes the tensions between cores and (semi-)peripheries by studying how literary forms register combined and unequal development derived from capitalist modernity. Interestingly enough, WReC detects an “irrealist aesthetics” spawned from simultaneous material and immaterial forms of production in peripheral social formations – the irrealist being a distinct aesthetic that does not fit within traditional realism (2015, 68–70). Whereas this argument requires an examination of its context-specific applicability, our aim is to observe which aesthetic and generic solutions are being produced in the European margins beyond the dominant forms.

Drawing from this contribution, we explore how, through a thematic, political, and formal critique of capitalist modernization across Europe’s literary peripheries, we may, on the one hand, distinguish subregionalizations according to specific contextual features and, on the other, analyze the aesthetic-formal proposals that shape such subregions. In this regard, we extend WReC’s reflection on the narrative mode of the (semi-)periphery to the novel form in the time of the great global acceleration that has marked recent decades. How is the novel’s dominance as a genre being displaced at the edges of Europe and its former colonies at the present time? Through which concrete narrative features and generic molds? Our cluster of essays pays attention to the modes, subgenres, plots, characters, narrators, and other formal strategies characteristic of the European periphery in the spirit of possibly discovering connections between these literary peripheral regions’ formal contestations of the idea of Europe.

In this vein, we specifically ask how narratives beyond the cultural centers negotiate with established forms such as the novel and its own narrative traditions or forms, that is to say, how narratives from the European margins use the novel as a secondary or even residual genre while bringing forth alternative formal solutions that are either influenced by global trends or by reemerging preexisting forms. In this negotiation, these narratives reflect upon the limits or formal shortcomings of the novel, thus reopening the debate on whether the novel is really the most protean and capable of genres. How do semi-peripheral, non-novelistic forms invoke the representational limits and possible failures of the novel? Are such failures in some sense related to the peripheral condition of these narratives? The reemergence of modes such as autobiographical, satirical, travel, or dystopian narratives is central to

our interests insofar as it speaks to how the literary margins have raised the stakes – sometimes in resistance – to express themselves not only thematically, but also in their modes, forms, and subgenres in a way that is symptomatic of a narrative negotiation in the heat of the global transformations of the last few decades.

Towards a Poetics of the European Margins

The eight contributions in this special issue foreground the shared formal and material aesthetic coordinates exploring narratives of the European semi-periphery from the mid-twentieth century to the present moment. The essays explore different literary traditions and languages ranging from dominant European languages like French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese to smaller, less translated ones such as Bulgarian, Greek, Romanian, Serbo-Croatian, Slovene, and Ukrainian. In regards to the particular case studies under scrutiny, the issue discusses recognized authors (Boris Pahor, Petros Markaris, Lídia Jorge, Orhan Pamuk, and Georgi Gospodinov) together with works by authors who are less or not at all circulated, such as those of Moldovan autofiction novelist Liliana Corobca (Călărași 1975), Bulgarian poet and nonfiction writer Kapka Kassabova (Sofia 1973), and Ukrainian writer and poet Volodymyr Rafeienko (Donetsk 1969). Without aiming for exhaustion, nor seeking to paint a representative map of another Europe, however alternative, we do aim to enrich the discussion by attending to a more diverse set of European languages, thematic and affective concerns, formal features, and narrative genre molds.

Tackling the conceptual challenge of rethinking the novel as a dominant – though limited – genre, the first essay by Natalya Bekhta examines the possibility of conceptualizing Eastern Europe as a world-literary region in its own right. Formerly part of the “Second World,” the region seemed to have disappeared after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, coinciding with the reemergence of world literature debates. Eastern Europe, Bekhta argues, not only experiences internal orientalism vis-à-vis Europe, but also registers the effects of generic homogenization with the novel as the driving force in world-literary theory. Ukrainian fiction genres such as satire can, however, at once resist such homogenetic tendencies and prove to be defining features of Eastern Europe as a literary region, as exemplified by the case of Volodymyr Rafeyenko’s *Mondegreen: Songs about Death and Love* (2019). In line with Bekhta’s (semi-)peripheral world-literary approach, Adriana Stan analyzes fictional and autobiographical Romanian narratives published from 2010 to 2014 that engage with westward economic migration in the context of EU-15. Analyzing Liliana Nechita, Liliana Corobca, Dan Lungu, Ioana Baetica, and Radu Aldulescu’s works, Stan argues that these narratives transfer an experience of economic subalternity and reveal the collapse of a constructivist idea of Europe through narrative compassion and sentimentality. Building on the analysis of economic migration narratives defined by particular narrative features such as enclosure, monoglossia, and sentimentalism, Stan opens up a theoretical debate within world-literature by detecting a shift away from the polyphonic, cosmopolitan paradigm of postcolonial fiction. Against the backdrop of the 2008 financial crisis, Aina Vidal-Pérez and Violeta Ros engage with the possibility of examining Southern Europe as an epistemological, conceptual, political, and literary space through the analysis of four works of fiction from Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Greece by Lídia Jorge, Rafael Chirbes, Marcello Fois, and Petros Markaris, respectively. These authors sustain critical reflections on Southern Europe’s unequal development, deep-rooted historical hierarchies, and ambiguous peripheral positions within both the continent and its neoliberal project. Vidal-Pérez and Ros explore the tragic death of central characters as the key formal feature representing the sense of a collapsed modernity and the temporal infeasibility of reproducing the myth of progress in light of its terminal drive.

Displacement is at the core of contemporary Europe as a system built upon the violence of inclusion and exclusion. The following articles in the issue revolve around the hybrid, juxtaposed ideas of frontier, travel, and border-crossing in Southeast Europe and their formal and stylistic registrations in terms of narrative voice, nonfiction, oral archive, folkloric accounts, or language. Eralda Lameborshi deals with the discursive and material construction of European boundaries through *Border: A Journey*

to the *Edge of Europe* (2017), by Bulgarian writer Kapka Kassabova. *Border* renovates the long tradition of travel writing in eastern and western contexts and reframes the hybrid space of the borderland between Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey by considering oral histories silenced in historical archives. Considering Orhan Pamuk's reflections on Istanbul and the ambiguity of the European geographical borders in travel writing, Lameborshi argues that Kassabova's singular, polyphonic, hybrid travel narrative represents transnational movement and migration through the edges of Europe as liminal contact zones. Through its complex narrative construction, the book challenges the notions of both periphery and East-West binary thought that have been developing ever since the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. In her contribution, Iris Llop examines Lana Bastašić's *Uhvati zeca* (*Catch the Rabbit*) in light of recent debates on the global novel. Published in Serbo-Croatian in 2018, Bastašić's novel entered the European and global market through translations, with the book engaging with the displacement and identity of the Yugoslavian generation raised amid the war. From a local and a global perspective, Llop explores narrative strategies around identity, including multi-strand narration as a device that allows for the tackling of different temporal and spatial scales while crisscrossing issues of collective memory and nostalgia. Llop connects Bastašić's novel to Dubravka Ugrešić's work and to a Southeastern European literary tradition that problematizes Europeanness and transnationalism and resists globally standardized literary forms. Simona Škrabec's essay conducts an in-depth reflection on the memory and literature of small and peripheral nations, considering Boris Pahor's experience as a member of the minority Slovenian community in Trieste. The essay focuses on Pahor's 1967 novel *Pilgrim Among the Shadows* (*Nekropola*) as telling of the boundaries not only around the idea of Europe but also around national classification. The novel narratively deploys the idea of trauma through a double-layered temporal structure, with a first-person narrator that yields the effect of personal testimony. Drawing on Kafka's insights on "small literatures" and Deleuze and Guattari's subsequent concept of "minor literature," Škrabec calls attention to the possible connections between small peripheral literatures and languages that do not go through any cultural center.

The volume closes with two contributions that revolve around the narrative of racial and colonial violence that runs throughout Europe's history and present despite its constructivist imaginary. Corina Stan's essay compares two dystopian novels about European memory, Jean Raspail's *The Camp of the Saints* (1973) and Georgi Gospodinov's *Time Shelter* (2020). Both novels convey a crisis around the idea of Europe, but they profoundly differ in the political imagination of the possible ways out of Europe's current situation: *Time Shelter* is concerned with the proliferation of nationalisms, metaphorized as an epidemic of memory disorders, while *The Camp of the Saints* imagines a migratory apocalypse leading to the end of the West. Through two politically disparate novels, Stan explores dystopia as a narrative mode to problematize the dangers of the ideological uses of both national and racial myths and memory in competing versions of the past. Taking *Afterlives* (2020) by Nobel laureate Abdulrazak Gurnah as a case study, Lucy Gasser deems anglophone narratives of German colonialism unexplored both in the examinations of European colonialism and in the anglophone postcolonial canon. Following the journey of two characters from the colonial East Africa to Germany as a colonial center, the essay explores a shift in becoming – from an external Other to an internal Other, all while tracing a historical itinerary from German colonialism, to the atrocities of the Second World War, to the subsequent Cold War division of Germany. Gasser argues that the novel's engagement with the mechanisms of knowledge-making is deployed in two ways – naming and recording – viewing these two narrative features as contesting colonial epistemologies and restoring silenced colonial archives.

With a deliberate focus on non-major, subordinate European languages and literatures, this special issue's pluralistic approach may contribute to redressing the lack of attention or invisibilization of Europe's "minor" literatures after the academic institutionalization of postcolonial and world literature studies and their emphasis on non-European literatures. We seek to engage in a meaningful comparative practice from the margins. What we hope will transcend from this analysis of different European cartographies is a new focus on internal and external subalternities and power structures – whether linguistic, ethnic, racial, economic, gender, or ecological. These narratives crystallize shared experiences of exile and displacement, lost revolutionary projects, colonial and neocolonial domination, extant racist

rationales, and massive transformations in economic, cultural, and social paradigms and their subsequent crises across a broad spectrum of affects – nostalgia, melancholy, hatred, disenchantment, cynicism, failure, and grief, for example, all of which are themselves worthy of comparative analysis. The inclusion of local, national, and regional story-telling traditions ranging from folklore, legend, satire, oral history, collective myth, and colonial archive, but also the productive recourse to nonfiction, testimonial and travel writing, memoir, and literary rewriting, are major features of the literary narratives centered in this volume. While realism dominates as a narrative mode, speculative incursions into the idea of utopia as a valid form of forging a past, mythologized vision of what Europe was meant to be, while addressing the dystopian aftermaths of such a failed project, prove equally productive in reimagining the continent. Together with these thematic, affective, and generic traits, the problem of language also takes center stage: subversive linguistic representations and literary play with the untranslatability of Sardinian, Kiswahili, Ukrainian, Serbo-Croatian, and Slovenian interrupt the violence of assimilation. Shifting and polyphonic narrative voices, as well as the integration of different temporal and spatial scales of representation, shine through alongside many effective narrative strategies to account for the multilayered history of these European edges and border zones. Here, narrative forms depict the contested imaginaries of a heterogeneous Europe that can only be approached comparatively.

Notes

1. For a discussion on the global from an interdisciplinary perspective, see Rotger, Roig-Sanz, and Puxan-Oliva (2019) as well as Roig-Sanz and Rotger (2022).
2. Erlin et al. define “minor” according to the number of titles aggregated by language in the Virtual International Authority File (VIAF) database. They also consider digital editions of contemporary prize-winning novels written in Bulgarian, Catalan, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Estonian, Finnish, Hungarian, Icelandic, Latvian, Lithuanian, Macedonian, Greek, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Serbian, Slovenian, and Ukrainian. For a discussion of the notions around small/minor literature from a comparative perspective, see Domínguez 2020; Atkin 2020; and Codina Solà 2023.
3. See, for example, Müller, Locane, and Loy (2018), as well as Müller’s De Gruyter series *Latin American Literatures in the World*, which studies the relations between Latin America, Asia, Africa, and other world regions beyond the traditional transatlantic focus.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the Spanish Research Agency under Grant [PID2020-118610 GA-I00].

Notes on contributors

Neus Rotger is an Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC), Barcelona.

Aina Vidal-Pérez is a Postdoctoral Researcher in Comparative Literature at the Universitat de les Illes Balears (UIB), Mallorca.

ORCID

Neus Rotger  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5298-2267>

Aina Vidal-Pérez  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1091-3298>

Works Cited

- Abréu, Marcia. *The Transatlantic Circulation of Novels Between Europe and Brazil, 1789-1914*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.
- Agoston-Nikolova, Elka ed. *Shoreless Bridges. South European Writing in Diaspora*. Rodopi, 2010.
- Atkin, Rhian. "Does Size Matter? Questioning Methods for the Study of 'Small.'" *Translating the Literatures of Small European Nations*, edited by R. Chitnis, J. Stougaard-Nielsen, R. Atkin, and Z. Milutinovic. Liverpool UP, 2020, pp. 247–66.
- Averis, Kate, et al. eds. *Contested Communities: Small, Minority and Minor Literatures in Europe*. vol. 57, NED-New, Modern Humanities Research Association, 2023.
- Boletsis, Maria, et al. eds. *Languages of Resistance, Transformation, and Futurity in Mediterranean Crisis-Scapes: From Crisis to Critique*. Palgrave, 2020.
- Boletsis, Maria, and Dimitris Papanikolaou. "Greece and the Global South: Gestures of Spatial Disobedience." *Journal of Greek Media & Culture*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2022, pp. 129–41. doi:10.1386/jgmc_00054_2.
- Brems, Elke, et al. eds. *Doing Double Dutch: The International Circulation of Literature from the Low Countries*. Leuven UP, 2017.
- Cacciari, Massimo. "Europe or Philosophy." *Phenomenology and Mind*, vol. 8, 2015, pp. 138–45.
- Calotychos, Vangelis. *The Balkan Prospect: Identity, Culture, and Politics in Greece After 1989*. Palgrave, 2013.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton UP, 2008.
- Chitnis, Rajendra, et al. eds. *Translating the Literatures of Small European Nations*. Liverpool UP, 2020.
- CodinaSolà, Núria. "World Literature and the Production of the Minor." *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, vol. 50, no. 1, 2023, pp. 5–14.
- CodinaSolà, Núria, and Pieter Vermeulen. "Introduction: The Aesthetic Agency of Minor Literature." *Interventions*, 2024, pp. 1–19. doi:10.1080/1369801X.2024.2314275.
- Dainotto, Roberto M. "Does Europe Have a South? An Essay on Borders." *The Global South*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2011, pp. 37–50. doi:10.2979/globalsouth.5.1.37.
- . *Europe in Theory*. Duke UP, 2007.
- D'Auria, Matthew, and Fernanda Gallo, editor(s). *Mediterranean Europe(s): Rethinking Europe from Its Southern Shores*. Routledge, 2023.
- D'haen, Theo. *The Routledge Concise History of World Literature*. Routledge, 2012.
- Domínguez, César. "Estudios literarios comparados y minorización: por una literatura comparada pequeña." *Textualidades (inter)literarias: lugares de lectura y nuevas perspectivas teórico-críticas*, edited by Ángel Abuín González, Fernando Cabo Aseguinolaza, and Arturo Casas. Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2020, pp. 173–213.
- Domínguez, César, and Theo D'haen eds. *Cosmopolitanism and the Postnational. Literature and the New Europe*. Brill, 2015.
- Domínguez, César, and Manus O'Dwyer eds. *Contemporary Developments in Emergent Literatures and the New Europe*. Servizo de Publicacións da Univ. de Santiago de Compostela, 2014.
- Drakulić, Slavenka. *Café Europa: Life After Communism*. Abacus, 1996.
- Dussel, Enrique. "Eurocentrism and Modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures)." *Boundary 2*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1993, pp. 65–76. doi:10.2307/303341.
- Edfeldt, Chatarina, et al. eds. *Northern Crossings: Translation, Circulation and the Literary Semi-Periphery*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2022.
- Erlin, Matt, et al. "Cultural Capitals: Modeling Minor European Literature." *Journal of Cultural Analytics*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2021, pp. 40–73. doi:10.22148/001c.21182.
- Ganguly, Debjani, editor. *The Cambridge History of World Literature*. Cambridge UP, 2021.
- Gasser, Lucy. *East and South Mapping Other Europes*. Routledge, 2022.
- Gnisci, Armando. *Da noialtri europei a noitutti insieme: Saggi di letteratura comparata*. Bulzoni, 2002.
- Goldiş, Alex, and Ștefan Baghiu eds. *Translations and Semi-Peripheral Cultures*. Peter Lang Verlag, 2022.
- Gunaratne, Anjali I. "The Rise of Global Anglophone." *Interventions*, vol. 25, no. 5, 2023, pp. 563–78. doi:10.1080/1369801X.2022.2161057.
- Hammond, Andrew. *The Novel and Europe: Imagining the Continent in Post-1945 Fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- Helgesson, Stefan, and Pieter Vermeulen eds. *Institutions of World Literature: Writing, Translation, Markets*. Routledge, 2016.
- Holmén, Janne, and Norbert Götz eds. *Mental Maps: Geographical and Historical Perspectives*. Routledge, 2022.
- Khachatryan, Elizaveta, and Álvaro Llosa Sanz eds. *Scandinavia Through Sunglasses: Spaces of Cultural Exchange Between Southern/Southeastern Europe and Nordic Countries*. Peter Lang, 2019.
- Klobucka, Anna. "Theorizing the European Periphery." *Symplokē*, vol. 5, no. 1–2, 1997, pp. 119–35. doi:10.1353/sym.2005.0061.
- Lazarus, Neil. "Spectres Haunting: Postcommunism and Postcolonialism." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 48, no. 2, 2012, pp. 117–29. doi:10.1080/17449855.2012.658243.
- Lionnet, Françoise, and Shu-me Shi eds. *Minor Transnationalism*. Duke UP, 2005.

- Maia, Rita Bueno, et al. eds. *How Peripheral Is the Periphery? Translating Portugal Back and Forth*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015.
- Martí Monterde, Antoni, and Enric Sullà, editor(s). *Weltliteratur i literatura comparada. Perspectiva des d'Europa*. Universitat de Barcelona, 2021.
- Martínez Tejero, Cristina, and Santiago Pérez Isasi eds. *Perspetivas críticas sobre os estudos ibéricos*. Edizioni Ca'Foscari, 2019.
- Moretti, Franco. *Atlas of the European Novel*. Verso, 1998.
- Müller, Gesine, et al., editor(s). *Re-Mapping World Literature: Writing, Book Markets and Epistemologies Between Latin America and the Global South*. De Gruyter, 2018.
- Orsini, Francesca. "Against Minoritization: Five Strategies for World Literature." *Interventions*, 2024, pp. 1–19. doi:10.1080/1369801X.2024.2314277.
- Pérez Isasi, Santiago, and Ângela Fernandes, editor(s). *Looking at Iberia: A Comparative European Perspective*. Peter Lang, 2013.
- Picornell, Mercè. "La hipótesis del ovillo desmadejado. Caracterizar los estudios ibéricos desde lo insular." *Perspetivas críticas sobre os estudos ibéricos*, edited by Cristina Martínez Tejero and Santiago Pérez Isasi. Edizioni Ca'Foscari, 2019, pp. 57–88.
- Prado-Fonts, Carles. *Secondhand China: Spain, the East, and the Politics of Translation*. Northwestern UP, 2022.
- Roig-Sanz, Diana, and Neus Rotger, editor(s). *Global Literary Studies: Key Concepts*. De Gruyter, 2023.
- Rotger, Neus. "Pensar la novela global." *Ínsula Revista de letras y ciencias humanas*, vol. 903, 2022, pp. 2–5.
- . "Postwar Intellectuals and the Concept of European Literature: Exile, Memory, Reparation." *Primerjalna književnost (Comparative Literature)*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2023, pp. 157–75. doi:10.3986/pkn.v46.i3.09.
- Rotger, Neus, et al. "Introduction: Towards a Cross-Disciplinary History of the Global in the Humanities and the Social Sciences." *Journal of Global History*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2019, pp. 325–34. doi:10.1017/S1740022819000147.
- Santos, Boaventura de Sousa "A New Vision of Europe: Learning from the Global South." *Demodiversity: Toward Post-Abyssal Democracies*, edited by Boaventura de Sousa Santos and José Manuel Mendes. Routledge, 2020, pp. 31–53.
- Shi, Flair Donglai. "Introduction: A Manifesto for Critical World Literature Studies." *World Literature in Motion: Institution, Recognition, Location*, edited by Flair Donglai Shi and Gareth Guangming Tan. Ibidem Verlag, 2020, pp. 13–41.
- Shih, Shu-Mei. "Global Literature and the Technologies of Recognition." *PMLA*, vol. 119, no. 1, 2004, pp. 16–30. doi:10.1632/003081204X22828.
- Siskind, Mariano. "The Genres of World Literature." *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, edited by Theo D'haen, David Damrosch Theo, and Djelal Kadir. Routledge, 2011, pp. 345–55.
- . "The Globalization of the Novel and the Novelization of the Global: A Critique of World Literature." *Comparative Literature*, vol. 62, no. 4, 2010, pp. 336–60. doi:10.1215/00104124-2010-021.
- Stan, Corina, and Charlotte Sussman eds. *The Palgrave Handbook of European Migration in Literature and Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2023.
- Todorova, Maria. *Inventing the Balkans*. Oxford UP, 2009.
- Vidal-Pérez, Aina. "Mediterrani global. Poètiques mediambientals del litoral en la novel·la actual" [*Global Mediterranean. Environmental Poetics of the Shore in the Contemporary Novel*]. 2023. Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, PhD dissertation.
- Weller, Shane. *The Idea of Europe. A Critical History*. Cambridge UP, 2021.
- Wolff, Larry. *Inventing Eastern Europe*. Stanford UP, 1994.
- WReC (Warwick Research Collective), *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature*. Liverpool UP, 2015.