



# Towards a Vernacular Poetics of World-making: Edouard Glissant, Abdelkébir Khatibi, and Kaouther Adimi

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## ABSTRACT

Drawing on a select group of literary and intellectual voices from the Francosphere, this article examines how writers and theorists from outside Europe deploy experimental linguistic and literary forms to deconstruct dominant definitions of the world and the kinds of world-making processes widely understood to constitute it. Rereading works by the Martinican writer, poet, and thinker Edouard Glissant and the Moroccan sociologist and literary critic Abdelkébir Khatibi, and applying their insights to the work of the Algerian writer Kaouther Adimi, the article advances an account of what it refers to as a “vernacular poetics of world-making”. Through an analysis of these writers’ works, the article shows how they implicitly deploy vernacular poetics to simultaneously destabilise and rearticulate ideas of “world” and posit a poetics of world literature “from below”. In so doing, the article advocates for a mode of reading that engages a slower, more contemplative, self-reflexive thinking, arguing that the power of a vernacular poetics is in its capacity not so much to change the world but to reveal the world as it is, in its founding epistemic heterogeneity.

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The liberal discourse of world literature has become synonymous with patterns of economic globalisation, where texts “circulate beyond their culture of origin”, “gain in translation”, and offer “a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time” (Damrosch, *What* 4, 281). One of the most influential early theoreticians of this new world literature, Pascale Casanova, describes the flow of literature emerging from beyond Western imperial centres as moving from “peripheries” towards the former colonial “centres” of Paris and London (Casanova).<sup>1</sup> In 2007, writers and critics led by Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud sought to conceive of a singularly French “littérature-monde” that reproduced the problems of Casanova’s broad idea of France, and Paris in particular, as the “world republic of letters” (Barbery et al.).<sup>2</sup> This logic, as Galin Tihanov reiterates, equated world literature with discourses of “globalisation and transnationalism” and uncritically viewed it “as a facilitator of cosmopolitan attitudes” (469). Indeed, the idea of world literature has itself become something of a global commodity, as it has proliferated since the early 2000s in numerous anthologies and companions (Damrosch, *How to Read*; Damrosch, *Teaching*; Damrosch and Pike; D’haen, Damrosch and Kadir). The privileging of world literature, globalisation, and economic criteria in studying and recognising non-European literatures may appear natural from the perspective of the West, and of Westernised educational institutions. However, as Dilip Menon has recently written, “[f]or too long we have thought with the trajectories of a European history and its self-regarding nativist epistemology that was rendered universal largely through the violence and conquest of empire” (5). The idea that literature flows naturally out of “peripheries” and into former colonial “centres” reinforces the kinds of simplistic thinking that reiterates colonial power structures and neglects to account for alternative definitions of the world and the world-making processes that bring that world into existence.

Drawing on a select group of literary and intellectual voices from the Francosphere, this article examines how writers and theorists from outside Europe deploy experimental linguistic and literary forms to deconstruct dominant definitions of the world and the kinds of world-making processes widely understood to constitute it.<sup>3</sup> Rereading works by the Martinican writer, poet, and thinker Edouard Glissant and the Moroccan sociologist and literary critic Abdelkébir Khatibi, and applying their insights to the work of the Algerian writer Kaouther Adimi, I advance an account of what I call a vernacular poetics of world literature—that is, a translingual literary idiom that immerses the reader in an emplaced spatio-temporal encounter with the world, distinct from more normative accounts of world-making. As such, vernacular poetics is poised to challenge dominant and destructive ways of understanding the world into the future and, crucially, the linguistic and epistemological categories people use to envision the future. I argue that, taken together, Glissant, Khatibi, and Adimi implicitly deploy a vernacular poetics of world-making to simultaneously destabilise and rearticulate ideas of “world” and posit a poetics of world literature “from below”.<sup>4</sup> Premised on an understanding of societies as inherently diverse and multilingual, a vernacular poetics of world-making offers a critical counterpoint to dominant object-oriented and (often) monolingual European discourses of world literature that take circulation and canonicity as their primary optics. At the same time, a focus on vernacular poetics allows us to reach beneath the surface of literature and world

1 See Pheng Cheah’s critique of this “new” world literature in the first chapter of his 2016 book *What is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature*.

2 For a comprehensive overview of this manifesto and its multiple blind spots, see Hargreaves, Forsdick and Murphy.

3 The term “Francosphere” is seen as preferable to “Francophone” by critics such as Charles Forsdick, who use it as a starting place to “explor[e] the transcultural and intercultural dimensions of Frenchness as well as [...] the multiple cultural, political, and linguistic circuits by which such a concept is formulated and then perpetuated”. For Forsdick, the “Francophone” is flawed in the same way that the French “littérature-monde” manifesto maintains a monolingual nationalism when it comes to literary production in French and the French-language publishing industry (“The Francosphere” 5–7).

4 I understand the translingual here as the literal presence of multiple languages on the page, but also as the multilingual fabric, or poetics, of texts that are written in French-speaking settings outside metropolitan France. As Charles Forsdick stresses in his discussion of the “*World-literature in French*” manifesto, texts appearing as monolingual on the surface often exhibit a “semiodiversity”—a diversity of meaning—that relies precisely upon being situated outside France and increasingly authored by exophonic writers. Forsdick writes: “This semiodiversity can also include the creation of a poetics, evident in modernist literature as well as—with different emphasises—in postcolonial writing, that embeds various forms of orality within the literary text” (“*World-literature*” 36).

literary discourses to consider alternative ways of conceiving the world in a decolonial mode. In this alternative vision of the world, diversity and multiplicity are privileged not as objects or aims to be attained but as a fundamental part of what it means to be in the world.

## TOWARDS A VERNACULAR POETICS OF WORLD-MAKING

Developing an idea of a vernacular poetics of world-making involves considering some of the recent research on what Stefan Helgesson and others have called the “cosmopolitan–vernacular dynamic” (Helgesson, “Introduction” 4; see also Helgesson et al.), which has been in development as part of the major Swedish research project “Cosmopolitan–Vernacular Dynamics in World Literatures”. Other alternative visions of world-making, particularly in literature, have emerged as part of what Karima Laachir, Sara Marzagora, and Francesca Orsini refer to as a “ground up” approach to world literature (293).<sup>5</sup> These alternative versions of world literature seek to move away from more totalising accounts that have implicitly and explicitly prevailed in discourses of world literary studies since the 2000s—namely, Casanova, Damrosch (*What*), Franco Moretti. Where scholars of world literature—particularly those focused on circulation—take cosmopolitanism as an unquestioned horizon for writers, critics such as Helgesson and Laachir, Marzagora, and Orsini have sought to interrogate the role of the local, the multi- or trans-lingual, and what Héctor Hoyos (borrowing from the geographer John Tomaney) has called a “parochialism from below”, as they exist in opposition to or complementarity with the cosmopolitan. While the cosmopolitan ideal has been associated with writers wishing to provide new definitions of the world, and to have their publications appear within global markets of circulation, it has too frequently been forgotten that the cosmopolitan exists only through the vernacular and the rooted lived experiences of writers and their subjects (Lazarus). As I argue with reference to Glissant, Khatibi, and Adimi, a vernacular poetics of world-making is integral to the genesis of a cosmopolitanism (the creation of an alternative world) that acknowledges the existence of distinct temporalities of experience and diverse epistemologies across different geographies.

The projects I mention above are two examples of several recent attempts to turn away from dominant spatial understandings of world literature and move towards studying the interactions of the spatial and the temporal as a horizon for rethinking the world in opposition to prevailing discourses of economic globalisation (see, for instance, Cheah). As Helgesson writes, citing Cheah, the temporal offers us a vision of the world, and of world-making, as “a form of relating, belonging or being-with” (cited in Helgesson, “Introduction” 8). Similar processes have been highlighted beyond literary studies, but where the poetic nevertheless plays a crucial role in constituting the world in an alternative way. As the human geographer John Tomaney has theorised, a more emplaced or grounded understanding of living in the world—what he calls “parochialism”—“is not an end state but one of becoming”, whereby it is “the poets [that] test the ground between the local and the universal, the particular and the cosmopolitan, in ways that social scientists often struggle to do” (668). As I show with reference to Glissant, Khatibi, and Adimi, any process of reimagining the world is, at its roots, a vernacular process of generating new understandings of world-making based upon a poetic experience of, and encounter with, worlds that remain undertheorised in Western-centric discourses about world-making and globalisation.

The opposition between the “vernacular” and the “cosmopolitan” has typically been understood in linguistic terms: texts written in vernacular languages have their “local” readers, whereas texts written in the cosmopolitan (European colonial) languages have their “global” audiences, who more often than not access literary writing through a single codified language. However, the vernacular and cosmopolitan are not just linguistic in nature—and, as Helgesson writes, they “need not stand in opposition to one another” (“Ecologies” 59). They are present most prominently through language, but also through style, form, and idiom. And encounters with the vernacular as an unfixed, non-codified language nourish a poetic creativity that challenges codification and classification at the level of formal and stylistic expression. Indeed, even where linguistic, the vernacular and cosmopolitan are often seen intersecting one another.

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5 These novel accounts of world-making have emerged across two recent major projects: the European Research Council-funded “Multilingual Locals and Significant Geographies” and the “Cosmopolitan and Vernacular Dynamics in World Literatures” project, funded by the Riksbankens Jubileumsfond foundation in Sweden.

Multilingual writing is a prime example where vernacular languages are nested within or placed in counterpoint with the cosmopolitan language—most commonly in postcolonial settings. More radically, writers such as Edouard Glissant have offered a different view of language, understanding it not as a singular or bounded means of expression but rather as always relating to other languages and modes of imagining the world (Glissant, *Traité* 26; see also Hiddleston, “Writing” 13–14). Glissant’s relational understanding of language allows us to move beyond an oppositional idea of the vernacular and the cosmopolitan, but it also shifts the discourse towards a poetics of linguistic variation and mixing that collapses stratified conceptions of languages.

In the wake of Glissant, Helgesson shifts discussions of the vernacular and the cosmopolitan away from oppositional frames, arguing that the vernacular exists in a complementary relationship with the cosmopolitan, whereby the local or vernacular is “strengthened through a cosmopolitan orientation” and the cosmopolitan “can only ever realise itself through an ethical attunement towards the vernacular” (“Ecologies” 60). Indeed, as Neil Lazarus has observed, the cosmopolitan—a universal idea of the world as diverse, multilingual, and heterogeneous—is a theoretical and practical impossibility without an understanding of the way the local or the vernacular is immanent in cosmopolitanism:

Not only is there no necessary contradiction between the ideas of the “universal” and the “local” or the “national”, but [...], on the contrary, there are *only* local universalisms (and, for that matter, only “local cosmopolitanisms”, where “cosmopolitan” is taken to describe a particular way of registering selfhood in a particular time and place. (Lazarus 134)

I want to develop further Helgesson’s and Lazarus’s readings of the complementary relationality between the vernacular and the cosmopolitan, arguing that our view of these concepts—and the ways in which they map onto ideas such as the “local” and the “global”—needs to be decoupled from dominant oppositional imaginaries of the world. In what follows, I formulate an idea of a vernacular poetics of world-making that—while it can resemble a “strategic” form of cosmopolitanism (Siskind 205)—is, in and of itself, a means of interrogating the semantics of the very term “world” and its translingual iterations across multiple languages. This encompasses a rethinking of Westernised notions of “worlding” (in relation to the circulation and marketisation of cultural objects) and globalisation (with respect to dominant economic definitions of world-making processes) via a collapsing of dominant notions of time and space. A vernacular poetics of world-making is a process that brings an expansive and yet more emplaced vision of the world into view, understanding the world away from dominant economic definitions and situating world-making processes in the context of a new spatial and temporal horizon that allows us to see how often marginalised individuals and communities exist in a changing world.

Within the Francosphere, different terms for these vernacular processes of world-making have emerged, but they all appear to align with the insight that largely abstract Westernised understandings of globalisation are not properly understood in relation to material and poetic acts of world-making (see Nancy, *La Création*; Tomaney 660). As I will demonstrate, writers such as Adimi and poetic thinkers such as Glissant and Khatibi engage implicitly and explicitly with the semantics of globalisation and world-making to challenge a European coloniality that has dominated so-called “global” thought over a period of history dating back to the colonisation of the Americas in the fifteenth century (Nancy, *La Création* 16; Nancy, *The Creation* 34; Mignolo). For Jean-Luc Nancy, globalisation in its economic designation means the “suppression de toute forme-monde du monde” [suppression of all world-forming] and further ushers in the onset of “une catastrophe inouïe, géopolitique, économique et écologique” [an unprecedented geopolitical, economic, and ecological catastrophe] (*La Création* 53; *The Creation* 50). Clearly, this has implications far beyond the literary, forcing us to reflect more broadly on the role of poetics in challenging dominant geo-historical narratives as well as philosophical and scientific dogma. I do not seek to locate these writers’ works in that specific history of colonisation, nor do I examine in any detail the challenge they present to history, philosophy, and science. Rather, I argue that their vernacular poetics forms part of an ongoing effort to shift the focus of world-making away from an *object*-oriented or extractive pursuit of knowledge and towards a *process*-oriented form of knowing and caring for the world in its founding epistemic heterogeneity.

Perhaps most prominently, the Caribbean thinker, poet, and writer Edouard Glissant has repeatedly sought to redefine his understanding of the world and the kinds of cultural and linguistic processes that bring the world into existence. Inspired by the cultural and linguistic heterogeneity of his birthplace of Martinique, his 1981 text *Le Discours antillais* [*Caribbean Discourse*] is unapologetic in its rejection of colonialism, as it offers an affirmation of the founding plurality of Caribbean culture. Tracing the roots of Martinique's contemporary history to the violent past of the transatlantic trafficking of enslaved Africans, Glissant firmly rejects European ideas of history as both fantasy and whitewash of the diverse pasts of the Caribbean region. While some critics have described a break from the political to the "ethical" or "relational" in Glissant's later work (*Bongie, Édouard; Hallward*), others have noted how *Le Discours antillais* already encompasses a relational dynamic in its acknowledgement of "the human spirit's striving for a cross-cultural relationship, without universalist transcendence" (Glissant, cited in *Hiddleston, Understanding* 140). As Jane Hiddleston writes of Glissant's work, "Diversity inaugurates relationality [...] whereas Sameness fuels the European expansionist project, Diversity emerges in the resistance of the people" (*Hiddleston, Understanding* 140). In other words, a relational understanding of the world is one that reveals its heterogeneous origins and offers an alternative view to that of the epistemological doxa perpetuated by European coloniality.

The relationality that Glissant foregrounds in *Poétique de la Relation* [*Poetics of Relation*] (1990) is rooted in an understanding of the world through poetic form. Calling on Deleuze and Guattari, Glissant employs the "rhizome" to eschew the idea of "origin" and specific notions of place to think beyond the reductions of monolithic thought. In his 1997 *Traité du tout-monde* [*Treatise on the Whole-World*], Glissant uses the terms "globalisation" [globalisation], "mondialisation" [globalisation], "globalité" [totality], and "mondialité" [globality] in an interchangeable way and yet with an acute sense of the need to resist what he views as negative standardised forms of worlding embodied in economic definitions of globalisation (*Bongie, Friends* 334). An increasing sense of "world anxiety", as Jean-Baptiste Arrault puts it (cited in *Rosemberg* 2) is particularly present in Glissant's 2005 collection of writings, *La Cohée du Lamentin*, where he returns to the ambiguous semantic field of world-making. Here, Glissant defines "mondialité" in opposition to "la mondialisation", which he sees as "le revers négatif d'une réalité prodigieuse" [the negative side of a prodigious reality] (*La Cohée* 15). Thus, "mondialité" grounds the vernacular and the cosmopolitan in such a way that one cannot exist without the other, but it also, crucially, introduces the notion of time by reminding us that reality is constantly in movement and incomplete in its capacity to change. "La mondialité" is, in Glissant's words,

Cette énorme insurrection de l'imaginaire qui portera enfin les humanités à se vouloir et à se créer (en dehors de toute injonction morale) ce qu'elles sont en réalité: un changement qui ne finit pas, dans une pérennité qui ne se fige pas. (*La Cohée* 24–5)

This enormous insurrection of the imaginary which will finally bring human beings to want and to create (outside of any moral injunction) what they are in reality: a change which does not end, and which exists in a perennial, unfrozen state.<sup>6</sup>

While less prominent than the work of Glissant, and appearing in print before much of Glissant's later work, the writings of the Moroccan sociologist, author, and critic Abdelkébir Khatibi resonate strongly with Glissant's approach to unsettling standardised definitions of world-making and offer a poetic vision of the world via a vernacular temporal horizon.<sup>7</sup> If Khatibi can, on one level, be seen to anticipate Glissant's spatio-temporal reconceptions of globalisation and world-making, his use of language points towards a level of engagement

6 I have translated "les humanités" as "human beings" here, but the possibility that this term might also refer to the disciplinary area of the humanities shouldn't be dismissed (even if it is not in common usage in Francophone contexts). Indeed, as Ewa Domanska writes, the humanities is a "future-oriented" discipline "guided by the idea of critical hope and epistemic justice" and providing "critical tools for imagining different scenarios of the future", whose "prototypes" are being sought out in "art, film, literature, and history as well as in real, everyday life" (141).

7 A recently published piece by Jane Hiddleston underlines how Khatibi has not previously been related to discourses of world literature. Taking a different view, Hiddleston argues that the climate of cultural division in North Africa presents a challenge to Khatibi's more idealistic pursuit of literary internationalism (see *Hiddleston, "Un Nouvel Internationalisme"*).

with notions of world-making along temporal lines. The diversity of Khatibi's writings (as a poet, novelist, professional sociologist, and literary and cultural critic) highlights his ability not just to move across disciplinary modes of thinking but to engage in a genuinely transdisciplinary mode of thought as he deploys poetics in his sociology and cultural criticism. As Alfonso de Toro has written, Khatibi establishes a new idea of "post-coloniality" that "surpasses the traditional binary oppositions of culture and of regions/areas" and comes in the "form of a more transdisciplinary, transtextual and transcultural deconstructionist thinking that has the capacity to re-codify and decentre history, culture and language" (De Toro 131). My own sense, which I share with several of the contributors to a recent edited volume on Khatibi, is that he is a decolonial thinker, given his continued efforts to "overcome [...] the logic of coloniality underneath the rhetoric of modernity" (Mignolo, cited in Hiddleston and Lyamlahy 32).

Khatibi's 1983 book *Maghreb Pluriel*, a collection of writings that sets out to deconstruct the hierarchical thinking of Western modernity, contains the essay "Pensée—autre", in which Khatibi explores alternative ideas of globalisation from the Maghreb. In one passage, Khatibi writes of the Maghreb as a "globalizing" or "worldly" site in its own right: a space that acts as a juncture in terms of both the geography of East and West/North and South, but also linguistically—between Tamazight, Arabic, French, and Spanish. It is unclear whether Khatibi does this consciously, but he appears to situate this site of intersecting cultures, identities, and languages in a temporalised conception of world that is itself in motion. Thus, while Glissant sought to explore the semantics of world-making in nominal terms (through the word *mondialité*), Khatibi's engagement with world-making seems to draw on a vernacular notion of time that is inherent in any act of imagining the world. Here, the temporal dimension of world-making emerges out of a seemingly implicit use of language, representative of how people think the world from the translingual locality of the Maghreb:

Il faudrait penser le Maghreb tel qu'il est, site topographique entre l'Orient, l'Occident et l'Afrique, et tel qu'il puisse se mondialiser pour son propre compte. D'une certaine manière, ce mouvement historial exige une pensée qui l'accompagnerait. D'une part, il faut écouter le Maghreb résonner dans sa pluralité (linguistique, culturelle, politique), et d'autre part, seul le dehors repensé, décentré, subverti, détourné de ses déterminations dominantes, peut nous éloigner des identités et des différences informulées. (Khatibi 39)

We should think the Maghreb as it is, topographical site between the East, West, and Africa, and such that it can become global for its own account. In a way, this movement has always been underway. But this *historial* movement necessitates an accompanying thought. On the one hand, one should listen to the Maghreb resonate in its (linguistic, cultural, political) plurality, and on the other, only the outside rethought, decentred, subverted, diverted from its dominant determinations, can allow us to go beyond unformulated identities and differences. (Khatibi and Yalim 22–3)

On the surface, Khatibi appears to be making a point about the need to think historically to better inform how we rethink dominant understandings of the local and the global. The Maghreb is and has been a "globalising" or world-making space in its own right, an inheritor of the encounters and exchanges of its long history, of the myth of an Al-Andalusian *Convivencia* that is said to have swept across the region in the wake of the Muslim conquest of the Iberian Peninsula in the early eighth century (see Soifer). More recent "globalising" histories include that of the still dominant influence of Algerian decolonisation on global anti-racist and decolonial thinking and, in particular, the role of the Algerian government in supporting revolutionary movements across the so-called "Third World", providing refuge to the Black Panthers and welcoming figures such as Ché Guevara and Nelson Mandela (see Byrne; Mokhtefi). Khatibi draws our attention to North Africa as this region of *irreducible* political, linguistic, and cultural plurality that cannot be decoupled from its history of movement and (transcultural) encounters.

However, it is clear to any bilingual reader that the published English translation of Khatibi's essay does not capture what I would argue is a crucial nuance in relating the concept of world-making as a temporal process. Indeed, there is an implicit dimension of Khatibi's thought that remains present in the way he expresses his idea of the global and that furthers Glissant's thinking around the importance of vernacular world-making in forging a new or alternative

idea of the world that unsettles dominant Western epistemologies. In the original French version of Khatibi's essay cited above, the reflexive verbal form "se mondialiser" functions as an untranslatable poetic figure that creates an active and mobile, but also self-conscious, image of geographical space (the Maghreb) in a temporal realm. In other words, Khatibi's vision opens to the question of time, as distinct from the spatial, imperialist cartography of maps, fixed borders, and nations. Khatibi's use of the reflexive verb resonates with Cheah's notion of "temporalization" as a "force of worlding", whereby the world is constituted by a *bringing into relation* of beings (Cheah 8–9). But it also demonstrates the power of mixing poetics and theory, together with an attunement to how language is a "threshold" for "enter[ing] spaces of thought other than ours" (Menon 25). Such a "threshold" has also been understood as an "interlingual 'translation zone'" or a form of "temporal co-presence" enacted by world literary texts such as Khatibi's (see Forsdick "World-literature" 32, citing Emily Apter and Mary-Louise Pratt). The point here is that the implicit presence of a temporal, multilingual, vernacular horizon in Khatibi's conception of world-making can be seen as reflective of a broader lived experience in the Maghreb that is distinct from dominant Westernised notions of worldliness.<sup>8</sup>

In his 2016 book *In the Shadow of World Literature* Michael Allan points out two different terms for the (secular) "world" in the Arabic language.<sup>9</sup> The Arabic word *'alam* portrays a sense of the world, and of world literature, in relation to a set of nations and "national traditions that compose it" (Allan 10–11), whereas the term *dunya* "refers to being worldly, mundane, secular, earthly, or temporal" (Allan 11).<sup>10</sup> In other languages, such as Swahili, the Arabic *dunya* is taken up as a loan word, referring to "the extent of the world", its vastness, or the "world at large".<sup>11</sup> On the surface, these definitions might appear to move us closer to the Arabic *'alam*. However, there is also a sense of "life" in *dunia* (Vierke and Mutiua) that draws us back to Allan's definition of the Arabic *dunya* as relating to the "worldly", the "mundane", or the "temporal" and which is also clearly present in Khatibi's articulation of world-making from the perspective of the Maghreb.

Linking this to the way in which the vernacular is immanent in the cosmopolitan, we can see how these different definitions of the world will inevitably differ based on the distinct linguistic, cultural, and epistemological positionalities of readers or critics. However, this is also an opportunity for a Western reader or critic to consider how oppositional thinking produces a mode of thought that reduces definitions of the world to well-rehearsed categories such as "local" vs. "global" or "vernacular" vs. "cosmopolitan" and, indeed, the less-well-researched notions of *dunya* and *'alam*. A reader schooled in Western thought might take for granted that the "extent of the world" or the "world at large" relates to a world composed of nation states, but the Swahili definition of *dunia* prompts us to consider how, from a different spatio-temporal, linguistic, and epistemological positionality, the world will inevitably appear differently. Indeed, if *dunya* offers something akin to the "vernacular", and *'alam* refers to a "cosmopolitan" ideal of nations, then it is imperative to stress that the world defined as *dunya* (that "worldly, mundane, secular, earthly, or temporal" sense of the world) is constitutive of *'alam* (the world as an interconnected and transnational space).

This also leads us to consider *dunya* on its own terms, much like Khatibi reconceptualises the role of the Maghreb as a world-making force in its own right, without placing it into an oppositional

8 This distinctiveness, and Khatibi's proximity to a more rooted or located idea of Maghrebi culture and society, is arguably captured most notably in the art book he jointly created with Ali Amahan on the Moroccan carpet, *Du signe à l'image: le tapis marocain*, published in Casablanca in 1994. As Khalid Lyamlahy underlines, Khatibi's aim here is to break down barriers between popular culture and theory, or what Khatibi himself refers to as restoring a "dignité théorique" [theoretical dignity] to popular culture (Khatibi, cited in Lyamlahy 281).

9 I do not address the difference between secular and religious worlds explicitly in this article, but it is important to stress that thinkers such as Khatibi and Glissant offer their alternative visions of the secular world while being informed by religious and spiritual epistemologies.

10 This temporal sense of *dunya* is also the case in the dialectical Arabic of Algeria—more commonly referred to as Darija—where the term "denya" refers to a sense of everyday life lived in a grounded and earthly temporality. My thanks to Boukhalfa Laouari for helping me with this and to Sarah Arens for raising the question.

11 These definitions are provided in Mohamed Abdulla Mohamed's Swahili–English dictionary under the entry "dunia". I am indebted to Clarissa Vierke for drawing my attention to the Swahili definitions, which are discussed in a forthcoming chapter co-authored with Chapane Mutiua.

or dialectical framework.<sup>12</sup> The fact remains that the majority of people living in the world encounter it not through abstract ideas of the nation, the global, or the cosmopolitan, but in a mundane, earthly, and vernacular way. For most people, *dunya* is the world they experience; it is their sole point of access to the “world at large”, which is *at the same time* linguistically and temporally inflected, rooted in material experiences of creation. It is not clear whether Khatibi draws a temporal horizon of world-making from his knowledge of these alternative definitions of the world in Arabic, but it certainly fits with a tendency in his work to advance what Walter Mignolo has called “an epistemology of and from the border of the modern/colonial world system” (52).

In a chapter devoted to Khatibi’s essay, Mignolo explains how the eponymous idea of “pensée-autre” [other thinking] comes about from Khatibi’s position “from the border” and sits within a “double critique” that rejects the kinds of linear thinking that dominate in Western European thought and that have crept into a particular geopolitics of knowledge adopted by anti-colonial intellectuals (Mignolo 52, 67–8, 80–1). For Mignolo, “other thinking” (or “border thinking” as he prefers) “overcome[s] the limitation of territorial thinking” and allows Khatibi to construct the Maghreb not so much as a geographical site or “geohistorical location” but in terms of a “crossing of the global in and of itself” (69). This, according to Mignolo, is what Khatibi means when he refers to the Maghreb “tel qu’il est” [as it is]: “as the difference that cannot be told”, as an “area” that cannot be studied without “a kind of thinking beyond the social sciences and positivistic philosophy”—what is required is “a kind of thinking that moves along the diversity of the historical process itself” (69). This is not a demand for a more uprooted *method* of apprehending the Maghreb as a space that can ultimately be reduced through a (spatial) mode of study. Rather, Khatibi wishes to decentre dominant systems of knowledge, while *at the same time* situating geographical space in a temporal domain. The figure of the “crossing” thereby disrupts dominant, top-down accounts of globalisation and world-making by revealing the omnipresence of the vernacular as *the* world-making force. This alternative temporality, advanced in different ways by Glissant and Khatibi, is articulated through a vernacular poetics of world-making that I expand upon below. In gesturing towards the fundamental temporal incompleteness of the world, thinkers and writers such as Glissant, Khatibi, and Adimi are not primarily offering a vision of how readers might go about remaking the world; rather, the vernacular poetics of world-making they deploy reveals that the world is and always has been in a perennial state of change and transformation “from below”—a truth obscured in dominant Western conceptions of the modern world.<sup>13</sup>

## KAOUTHER ADIMI

Similar tensions between what Mignolo refers to as “local histories” and “global designs” are present across the novels of the Algerian writer Kaouther Adimi, which have appeared in Algeria and France over the past decade. Unlike Glissant and Khatibi, Adimi does not write in any explicit way about processes of world-making or globalisation. And, indeed, Adimi’s literary output is relatively modest by comparison with the diverse array of forms produced by Glissant and Khatibi. Formal experimentation is therefore conducted within the body of the novel, rather than across multiple genres. Nevertheless, the vernacular poetics of world-making is exemplified in Adimi’s writings, especially in her 2010 novel *Les ballerines de papicha* [*Ballet Shoe Girl*], first published by the fledgling independent Algerian publisher Editions Barzakh and subsequently released by Actes Sud in France under the title *L’Envers des autres* [*The Other Side of Others*].

<sup>12</sup> As Mignolo stresses of Khatibi’s notion of “pensée-autre” (an other thinking), which he conceptually aligns with “border thinking”, it is “no longer conceivable in Hegel’s dialectics, but located at the border of coloniality of power in the modern world system” (67).

<sup>13</sup> Glissant and Khatibi are not the first to remark on how temporal accounts open a sense of “incompleteness” of the world. Their work builds upon a corpus of post/colonial modernist writing—perhaps most notably that of Victor Segalen, whose influence Charles Forsdick argues is present in both Glissant and Khatibi’s writing (see Forsdick, “From the ‘Aesthetics of Diversity’”; “Segalen and Khatibi”). Glissant and Khatibi are particularly relevant for the present article because of the way they deploy an experimental modernism to break down the boundaries between theory, history, and literature/poetics, implicitly challenging the idea that these must be distinct methodologies and reminding readers that world-making occurs through all acts of creation. On the question of what is lost when poetics is removed from history, see Menon (13).



Born in 1986, Adimi is one of a generation of young Algerian writers who came to writing and publishing in French through a close engagement with the publisher Editions Barzakh and its function as a bridge to the French publisher Actes Sud, with which it has an agreement to co-publish novels of interest across the Mediterranean. Unlike its French counterparts, Editions Barzakh allows its writers the time and space to experiment, especially when it comes to aesthetic form and linguistic expression: many of the texts published in their literary catalogue incorporate multilingual expression with formal experimentation that would be unlikely to be published by any mainstream French publisher.<sup>14</sup> By choosing to write in French, Adimi nonetheless set out her ambition early on in her career to reach the metropolitan centre of the French publishing market, and thereby appears to have adopted a vision of world literature as defined by its movement from a vernacular into a cosmopolitan realm. In a 2017 interview, Selma Hellal, Adimi's Algerian publisher and co-founder of Editions Barzakh, confirmed that Adimi had long desired to "make it" and have her work recognised in the literary capital of Paris (pers. comm., 23 May 2017). However, while on the surface Adimi's trajectory would appear to confirm this desire (progressively moving to publish her novels in France), the works themselves give a more nuanced and self-reflexive account of that outward process of movement to the former colonial "centre".

Adimi's first three novels could certainly be viewed as neatly encapsulating a definition of world literature that "circulate[s] beyond [its] culture of origin" and that provides the Western reader with "a form of detached engagement [...] beyond [their] own place and time" (Damrosch, *What* 4, 281). Between 2010 and 2017, Adimi went from publishing a relatively unnoticed first novel with Editions Barzakh to a second and third with the major Parisian publishing house Editions du Seuil. In the years since the publication of the 2017 novel, *Nos Richesses* [*Our Riches/A Bookshop in Algiers*],<sup>15</sup> the book has been translated into several languages and has won numerous literary prizes.<sup>16</sup> Here, the cosmopolitan ideal is realised through the physical movement of literary production from a "peripheral" space to an international publishing "centre"—a success story for the author, the European publisher, and the "peripheral" publishing house, which is understood to have "fostered" a talent by allowing them to experiment with the "local" or the "vernacular" in ways that have given birth to an apparently cosmopolitan form of expression.

The problem with this narrative is that it reinforces an opposition between the vernacular and the cosmopolitan that reduces the vernacular to a distant or exoticised object-function, whose usefulness is understood in terms of its "developmental" role, as the non-European writer (writing in a European language) accedes to the cosmopolitan space. Such a concept of movement across geographical space and economic markets not only resembles that (not so) old colonial idea of the *évolué*—the non-European who must prove themselves sufficiently culturally "evolved" to gain French citizenship—but also pays scant attention to the poetic content, style, and form of the literary works themselves. In what follows, I ask how we might understand Adimi's trajectory (and the literary works that make up that trajectory) in terms that do not oppose the "periphery" and the "centre" or the "vernacular" and the "cosmopolitan". Drawing from Mignolo's reading of Khatibi, I deploy the spatio-temporal idea of "crossing" to conceptualise how vernacular poetics can lead to an "insurrection de l'imaginaire" [insurrection of the imaginary] (Glissant, *La Cohée* 24–5) that, rather than produce change through a linear temporality, immerses the reader in an encounter with distinct temporalities that establishes a mode of communication exceeding expectation.

*Des ballerines de papicha* tells the story of a family living in Algiers, where each character drives the narration through their own chapter describing a single morning in May. This multi-perspectival structuring of the novel around individual characters results in a text that presents multiple different articulations of lived time within the city, as each individual narrative explores the mundane daily lived experiences of the characters through their own

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<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Mary Anne Lewis explicitly links Khatibi's awareness of the conditions of Maghrebi writers and the Algerian publisher Editions Barzakh in her 2016 article on the topic (see Lewis).

<sup>15</sup> The UK title is 'Our Riches', while the US title is 'A Bookshop in Algiers'.

<sup>16</sup> *Nos Richesses* received several French literary prizes, including the Renaudot des lycéens 2017; Prix du Style 2017; Prix Beur FM Méditerranée 2018; Choix Goncourt de l'Italie 2018; Mention Spéciale Prix littéraire Giuseppe Primoli 2018; and Prix de l'Algue d'or 2018. The novel has, so far, been translated into Catalan, German, Chinese, English, Greek, Italian, Spanish, and Turkish. In March 2022 the novel was adapted and aired in the UK on the BBC Radio 4's 'Book at Bedtime' series: see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0014wtc>.

eyes. Threading through the text are several core narratives of characters whose lives involve challenges with mental health, sexual identity, and violence. While the novel is firmly situated in time and place—the single morning of May; the city of Algiers—its plurivocal form means that the standard temporal frame of a single twenty-four-hour period is blown open into a series of everyday narratives that are placed in relation to one another in such a way that they collectively tell the story of a living, breathing city, brought to life in the bodies, words, and worlds of its inhabitants.

The title of the novel, *Des ballerines de papicha*, immediately conveys the vernacular realm in which the book was conceived and produced. Later subjected to an intralingual translation by the French publisher, the title becomes *L'Envers des Autres* [*The Other Side of Others*]—a potentially problematic rendering in the way it gives a conflictual and oppositional portrayal of the contents of the novel. I have tentatively translated the title as “Ballet Shoe Girl”, but this inevitably fails to capture the nuances of the vernacular Algerian word “papicha”, which, like the French word *coquette*, alludes to an immature young girl.

The links between the individual characters is established principally via their familial relationships: Adel and Yasmine, Sarah and Mouna are all related by blood, while Hamza is married to Sarah. Though each chapter captures the experiences of one of the characters in the novel, the city itself often surges into the imaginations of those characters, especially as regards their perceptions of time and space. This is particularly the case as poetic form lifts the otherwise mundane content of the scenes described into a figurative “crossing” that is both rooted within the time and space of that character’s immediate experiences and transcends the city into a more expansive temporal realm of the imaginary. Here, vernacular poetics reveals the world as a multi-scalar time-space where the seemingly unremarkable, the everyday, or mundane event contains within it a profound form of experience that is transformational for character and reader alike.

The eponymous *ballerines* belong to the young Mouna, who delights in her journey to school, as she shows off her brand-new shoes. She sings in poetic verse:

[...] quand je dégringole la pente de Didouche,  
Les papiches crient: papicha, papicha!  
Et moi je cours, les cheveux au vent,  
Le sourire aux lèvres, les ballerines par devant,  
J'ai des ballerines de papicha [...] (84–5)  
[...] when I tumble down the Didouche hill,  
The *papiches* shout: *papicha, papicha!*  
And I run, my hair in the wind,  
Smile on my lips, my ballerinas in front,  
I have my *papicha* ballet shoes [...]

It is on this same journey that the mundane movement through the busy city traffic is transformed into a poetic act that lifts the reader out of the immediate scene and into a temporal realm, opening up possibilities of movement, of a figurative temporal “crossing” that hints at a profound “insurrection of the imaginary” (Glissant, *La Cohée* 24–5) and that in turn reveals a deeper truth about the world as a spatio-temporal entity:

Nous zigaguons entre les voitures qui filent à toute allure, indifférentes à nous qui sommes comme deux malheureuses taches de couleur perdues dans un flot de carrosseries ambulantes. Les passages pour piétons ne servent qu'à décorer. Casser le gris foncé par quelques bandes blanches, ça fait de l'effet. Des automobilistes klaxonnent fiévreusement, s'interpellant méchamment, stressés par la nuit qui vient de mourir. Ils foncent vers leur travail, ahuris par l'immense soleil. Tata Yasmine dit toujours que les gens sont comme ça, parce qu'ils oublient que la nuit va revenir, qu'ils ont peur d'être obligés de passer leur vie dans la lumière du jour. (84)

We zigzag between the cars that speed by at full pace, indifferent to us, like two unfortunate spots of colour lost in a flood of travelling metal boxes. Pavements are for decoration only. Breaking up the dark grey with a few white stripes, it has an effect. Motorists violently honk their horns, hurl insults, stressed by the night that has just passed. They rush towards their work, bewildered by the immensity of the sun.

Aunt Yasmine always says that people are like that, because they forget that the night will come again, that they are afraid of having to spend their lives in the light of the day.

This scene from a street in Algiers morphs from a literal crossing of a junction to a fluid and mobile vernacular poetics punctuated by the rhythm and rhyme felt by Mouna's body and rearticulated in verse that infuses space with a sense of worldly time. The pulsing effect of the words "zigzaguons entre les voitures qui filent a toute allure"; of the sounds "casser le gris foncé par quelques bandes blanches, ça fait de l'effet"; and of the "automobilistes [qui] klaxonnent fiévreusement, s'interpellant méchamment" sends character and reader into a repetitive process of movement, as the spatial quality of the scene cedes to the temporal level of poetry, which carries us across this busy scene of everyday city chaos. The repetition, together with the more direct invocation of the ebb and flow of day and night, recalls Glissant's alternative definition of world-making in the word "mondialité": the "changement qui ne finit pas" [change without end] that persists in "une pérennité qui ne se fige pas" [a perennial, unfrozen state] (Glissant, *La Cohée* 24–5). In this scene, the poetic plane of the imaginary co-exists with the mundane, temporal, and worldly existence of a character whose daily life is seemingly unremarkable. At the same time, the warp and weft of poetry reveals the everyday as remarkable. In her study of the links between Khatibi and the French travel writer Victor Segalen, Nathalie Roelnes eschews the realism of some critics and refers instead to the experience of "readerly immersion" and "poetic communion" in Segalen and Khatibi's work (cited in Forsdick, "Segalen and Khatibi" 185). This idea of poetic communion captures very well the effect of Adimi's vernacular poetics: it holds readers in a literal crossing that embodies a far more profound and differentiated experience of the everyday.<sup>17</sup>

In other scenes from the novel, poetics plays a role in configuring the multiple planes of meaning where the content of a story is transformed by its form. If Mouna's embodiment of the poetic movement of the literal "crossing" of an Algiers intersection reveals the world in its temporal multiplicity, then Adel's scene figures another time and space of "crossing" between violence and care and between consciousness and the realm of the unconscious. Adel recounts the following encounter in an Algiers café (ironically named "Eden"), as three local men—Nazim, Chakib, and Kamel—attack him. As in Mouna's scene, the body plays a crucial role in reclaiming a potentially violent and desensitising encounter with the world and refiguring that encounter in its temporal multiplicity:

Kamel, Chakib et Nazim. Ils ont une sale mine. L'air crevé, les yeux rouges et les mains qui tremblent. [...] Lorsqu'ils s'approchent et entourent ma table, je garde la tête baissée sur mon verre, les mains aplaties sur mes genoux, tentant de contrôler le tremblement de mon corps. [...] Chakib me crache au visage un unique mot censé résumer son dégoût, résumer mon être, mon cœur, mon corps, ma vie: femmelette. Les serveurs détournent. Je me lève doucement, essayant de dégager une impression d'assurance, que je suis loin de posséder. Kamel m'empoigne par le col de ma chemise et me retient. Juste avant que le poing de Nazim ne s'abatte sur mon visage, j'ai une vague pensée pour maman qui a pris soin de repasser ma chemise. Rapide la pensée, juste le temps que le poing explose mon visage et que le sang obstrue mon regard. / Je n'en suis pas certain, mais je crois que j'ai hurlé. Les coups se sont abattus sur moi. Mon corps n'offrait aucune résistance et ce fut le silence dans l'Eden, ce café sombre dressé comme une mauvaise plante au milieu d'une rue grouillante de monde. Ils m'ont ensuite déshabillé. Fébrilité, colère, jouissance ? Je ne sais pas. Que ressent-on à l'idée de saccager le mal ? Que ressent-on lorsqu'on est en train d'éradiquer la monstruosité ? L'impression du devoir accompli, j'imagine. / Kamel se chargea de m'enlever mon pantalon. Il respirait bruyamment. Ses mains ont couru sur mon corps, l'ont palpé, ont évalué la fine taille. Juste avant de sombrer dans le néant, juste avant de perdre connaissance, j'ai entendu des bruits de flash

<sup>17</sup> In this regard, a vernacular poetics of world-making arguably allows readers to engage in "scalar thinking" that has important implications for understanding how environmental change is driven by human practices. As Dipesh Chakrabarty writes, "Understanding what anthropogenic climate change is and how long its effects may last calls for thinking on very large and small scales at once, including scales that defy the usual measures of time that inform human affairs." Poetry has the ability to shift perspectives of time and space beyond the level of description—such is the power of the form to embody the world as a multi-scalar site of change and transformation.

et d'éblouissantes lumières ont éclairé mes paupières fermées. Après, je ne sais plus trop. Après, c'est maintenant. Le videur m'a jeté dans la rue, par la porte derrière pour éviter de faire peur aux gens. Il pleut. Une pluie, fine et serrée. Une pluie incongrue pour cette période de l'année (102–6).

Kamel, Chakib and Nazim. They look terrible. A tired look about them, red eyes and trembling hands. [...] As they approach and surround my table, I keep my head down on top of my glass, my hands flat on my knees, trying to control my shaking body. [...] Chakib spits in my face a single word that sums up his disgust, my being, my heart, my body, my life: *sissy*. The waiters turn away. I stand up slowly, trying to exude a sense of confidence that I'm far from possessing. Kamel grabs me by the collar of my shirt and pulls me back. Just before Nazim's fist slams into my face, I have a vague thought for mum, who'd carefully ironed my shirt. A quick thought, just time for the fist to burst open my face and for the blood to block my gaze. / I'm not sure, but I think I screamed. The blows rained down on me. My body offered no resistance and Eden fell silent, this dark café standing like a weed in the middle of a crowded street. Then, they undressed me. Excitement, anger, pleasure? I don't know. What does it feel like to attack evil? What does it feel like to eradicate monstrosity? A sense of accomplishment, I imagine. / Kamel took off my trousers. He was breathing heavily. His hands ran over my body, feeling it, assessing the slender waist. Just before sinking into nothingness, just before passing out, I heard flashing noises and dazzling lights illuminating my closed eyelids. Afterwards, I don't really know. After is now. The bouncer threw me out into the street, through the back door to avoid scaring people. It's raining. A fine and narrow rain. A strange rain for this time of year.

The scene is a violent encounter of bodies, its end alluding to a sexual assault, or Adel slipping into unconsciousness as a result of the blows he has received. The language of the body is present throughout the attack, as is the “body” of the neighbourhood, which is the initial source of rumours about Adel's sexuality: “Le quartier cache en son sein une rumeur qui gronde” [the neighbourhood hides within its bosom a grumbling rumour] (103). But these spatial exchanges give way to a poetic temporality that reveals a crossing to a kind of ambivalent *jouissance* that is uncomfortably immanent in the violent attack. While the first parts of the attack are communicated in the present tense, the transition to what appears to be the unconscious level of the imaginary is marked by an explicit reference to time (“[r]apide la pensée, juste le temps que le poing explose mon visage”) and followed by description in the past tense. After the attack is over, the scene returns suddenly to the present moment of the everyday and to the fine rain that covers the city street. However, time is seemingly out of joint with expectation, as we are reminded by the unseasonable weather that time (*le temps* in French, referring to both time and the weather) gives an account of change in the world. The attack has surely changed Adel, but its telling (and, in particular, the capacity of vernacular poetics to inject a self-reflexive idea of time into the scene) reminds the reader that what might otherwise be dismissed as one instance among others of homophobic violence in the city of Algiers is transformed into an encounter that marks the everyday as the time of a secular revelation that the world is made in these seemingly brief moments of change that are experienced as profound and perhaps protracted periods of time in the lives of the individuals affected.

Returning to our earlier discussion of the multiple definitions for the world across languages—and the competing definitions of contemporary globalisation—there is an important reminder that the cosmopolitan ideal is but an ideal imagined out of everyday experiences in and of the world. The ambivalence with which Adel experiences his attack, and the power of poetics to explore this ambivalence alongside the several other perspectives of characters in the novel, makes this scene about more than the violent attack that it ostensibly depicts. The scene also makes up part of a novel that presents and interrogates what the human geographer Mark Jackson calls the “relational, situated, positions of living, breathing, eating, loving, disputing” in a city that encompasses a multiplicity of individual lives and bodies that are placed alongside and into conflict with one another (Jackson 14). For Jackson, such “positions of living” are examples of “border thinking” (or “border gnosis”) conceptualised earlier in relation to Khatibi's writing as “overcom[ing] the limitation of territorial thinking” that emerges out of Westernised ontologies and epistemologies (Mignolo 69); they are, in other words, vernacular geographies that encompass a poetics of “careful, disobedient, but affirming, ‘sense-abilities’”, transmitted

via the “aesthetics of touch, taste, smell” (Jackson 14). In the case of the attack on Adel, this aesthetic sits uncomfortably alongside the violence of a potential sexual assault. The poetic rendering and narrative ambivalence of the scene places the reader firmly in an uneasy position when it comes to processing these passages, as the possibility is left open that it is not only the victim who is in need of care. Indeed, the attacker, Kamel, reveals his own sexuality through an act of violence, making the scene a far more complicated encounter between bodies in space and time. The point is that this scene unveils the world in its messy complexity—its capacity for violence, its potential for care, and the ambivalent realm that captures most people’s actual everyday experiences of life. In so doing, it also resists the tendency of a reader to resort to oppositional thinking which often results in the reproduction of stereotypical commonplaces around violence and homophobia in a non-Western city.

The non-dominant stereotypically “feminine” qualities that are associated with Adel are also present in Hamza’s chapter. Hamza cries frequently because of his struggles with mental health and tells the story of his life in terms of his failure to live up to the norms of being a good husband to his wife. In a final section, which follows directly on from Hamza’s chapter, an epigraph announces a report in several local newspapers that a young man has taken his own life. The multi-perspectival form of the novel—each character being allotted a chapter of their own—means the epilogue of the text stands in isolation from any specific character and leaves the identity of the dead young man unknown. While Hamza would be an obvious candidate, given his struggles with his mental health, this tragic death leaves the victim’s family “sous le choc” [in shock] and the neighbours in a state of confusion (Adimi, *Des ballerines* 155). Thus, again, Adimi’s novel challenges the assumptions a reader might immediately make about her characters’ lives. These are lives lived in a city that appears both claustrophobic and liberating because of the novel’s capacity to construct the world as a varied set of temporalities that intersect to create individual and collective perceptions of space.

Moreover, these diverse and heterogeneous visions of the city sit alongside a plural linguistic tapestry, as the novel is both punctuated and framed by the use of the vernacular Algiers dialect. As we have already mentioned, the title of the novel, *Des ballerines de papicha*, immediately places it within the vernacular Algerois speech and culture; other instances of Algiers dialect feature throughout the text, in, for example, the use of the words “el houma”, for neighbourhood, “chemma”, for a form of tobacco, or “hogra”, for the sense of contempt felt by a population repeatedly humiliated by their corrupt leaders. The implicit nature of these multilingual elements is lost from the intralingual translation of the novel into French, as it arguably does not “gain in translation” (Damrosch, *What* 4), but is reframed with a new title and explanatory footnotes (see Ulloa). Indeed, how Adimi’s first novel travels once it is circulated beyond the independent publisher in Algiers can be characterised as the opposite of Damrosch’s definition of world literature. Here, the “plurilingual ecology” (Ouyang 283) of Adimi’s novel is lost, as individual words are singled out and subjected to a process of explicit translation.

Published again in the first instance by the Algiers-based Editions Barzakh in 2015, Adimi’s second novel, *Des Pierres dans ma Poche* [*Rocks in My Pockets*], does not continue the more visible multilingual fabric of the first text. In opening with an epigraph from Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway*, the novel appears to immediately gesture beyond the vernacular poetics and setting of *Des ballerines de papicha*. However, the novel represents a form of “crossing” that appears to hesitate between the vernacular and the cosmopolitan in both its content and the material context of its circulation. Here, the attention shifts to the account of an unnamed thirty-something Algerian woman who narrates her story of moving from Algiers to Paris. Meanwhile, in the real world of the book market, Adimi’s novel succeeds in being picked up by the major Parisian publisher Editions du Seuil and is published one year later in 2016.

*Des pierres dans ma poche* unfolds on several intersecting levels. The main plot follows the unnamed narrator, who lives in the Rochechouard district, a poor inner-city neighbourhood of Paris, having moved there from Algiers five years previously. The story follows the narrator’s day-to-day existence in Paris. Working for a publishing house and wandering the streets as she returns home from work, the narrator receives continuous phone calls from her Algerian mother, who is preparing for the marriage of her youngest daughter and eagerly awaiting the return of her eldest. The narrator is about to turn thirty and is continually reminded, by her

mother, friends, and colleagues, that this is the age to marry. Her mother implores her to return to Algiers, while her doctor remarks that she should find a husband who would “take care” of her. The Algerian past intersects this Parisian narrative, through both the mother’s phone calls and the narrator’s memories of her childhood friend Amina, with whom she grew up during the civil war of the 1990s. The underlying story, further hinted at by an intertext with Virginia Woolf’s biography, is one of the narrator’s deep and intractable depression. The title, *Des Pierres dans ma poche*, is a reference to Woolf’s death by suicide in 1941. The novelist drowned in the River Ouse, placing rocks in her pockets before walking into the water. The nameless narrator of *Des Pierres dans ma poche* carries stones in her pocket, symbolising the small but weighty memories of her Algerian past and the expectations placed on her to adhere to social norms, constituting a banal yet important part of her present life in Paris.

The novel’s geographical liminality is captured in the narrator’s hesitation between allegiances to Algiers and Paris, but there is also a liminality evident in the form of the novel. The never-identified narrator adds to the sense of hesitation and uncertainty, while the figure of the telephone and the drawn-out phone conversations reflect a suspended “crossing” between different times and spaces. Liminality of form can be seen in the narrator’s only meaningful relationship in Paris, which she maintains with Clothilde, a woman living precariously on the streets of the capital. The narrator gives Clothilde money and the two exchange stories. Clothilde, whose voice emanates from isolated vignettes that intersperse the text, also offers insightful commentary on love and happiness: “le bonheur, c’est un ensemble de petits moments parfaits [...] Ils offrent un sentiment de plénitude, à vivre sans restriction” [happiness is a set of small perfect moments (...) They offer a feeling of fullness, to be experienced without limitation] (81). Meanwhile, the narrator places herself in a liminal “entre-deux” [in between] on multiple different levels, as she self-identifies as the

Barre médiane: bien au milieu, pas devant, pas derrière, pas laide, pas magnifique.  
Coincée entre Alger et Paris, entre l’acharnement de ma mère à me faire revenir à la maison pour me marier et ma douillette vie parisienne (79).

Middle line: right in the middle, not in front, not behind, not ugly, not beautiful. Stuck between Algiers and Paris, between my mother’s determination to bring me home to get married and my cosy Parisian life.

By layering the suspended geography of the “entre-deux” between Algiers and Paris with comments on the narrator’s “average” appearance, her mother’s desire for her to marry her off, and the much-vaunted transition from the twenties to thirties, the novel tells the story of geographical movement that results in a kind of stasis—a kind of “drowning” also captured in the intertext with Woolf’s biography. In this way, it is tempting to view *Des Pierres dans ma poche* as a novel exploring a spatial crossing between Algiers and Paris and the anxieties associated with the prospect of returning to the home city.

Another way of interpreting the novel is through the lens of the material circulation of texts. Here, the text could be said to register its own “semiperipheral” status—what Sharae Deckard and Stephen Shapiro have called a “third calibrating” or “contact zone that makes it possible for the core and periphery to transmit value to each other” (see [Deckard and Shapiro 10](#)). Given the novel is written in French, we might refer here to the *intralingual* “translation zone” where characters and author alike negotiate a process of movement between spaces as a kind of *translanguaging*, especially in light of the different linguistic and cultural repertoires the narrator deploys to speak between the French and Algerian contexts. Indeed, the return to Algiers also offers the possibility of a re-engagement with the distinct temporality of the vernacular and of a future where the narrator is no longer weighed down by the stones in her pocket that characterise her time in Paris:

Un jour, je reviendrai à Alger seule et ce ne sera pas un drame. [...] Je reverrai des couleurs éclatantes, des sourires fatigués, des mains tendues vers le ciel, des écharpes abandonnées, des yeux en forme de points d’interrogation. / Je briserai la barre médiane. / Ce sera en automne. Au petit matin, je pénétrerai dans la ville. Je ramasserai des pierres et elles n’alourdiront plus ma poche (175).

One day, I will return to Algiers alone and it will not be a drama. [...] I’ll once again see dazzling colours, tired smiles, hands held up to the sky, abandoned scarves,

eyes in the shape of question marks. / I will break the middle line. / It will be in the autumn. In the early morning, I will enter the city. I'll collect some stones and they'll no longer weigh heavily in my pocket.

The final scene of the novel cedes further to an image of the recurring seasons, their circularity, the ever-present anxiety of change, captured in both content and poetic form as this final paragraph of the text, punctuated with assonance, reminds the reader that paying attention to the passage of time helps to recognise the mundane moments of everyday life as remarkable:

Les semaines, les mois passeront. L'hiver, étrange saison, débutera. Alors nous commencerons à regarder le ciel avec anxiété. La ville, ouverte à tous les vents, sans surveillance, sans protection, s'inquiétera. / Le froid s'installera (176).

Weeks, months will pass. Winter, that strange season, will commence. Then we'll begin to look anxiously at the sky. The city, open to the wind from all directions, unguarded, unprotected, will worry. / The cold will set in.

As Adimi expressed in a 2017 interview published in *Jeune Afrique*, Algiers is not simply a “lieu de retour” [place of return] but one of “passage” (Mabrouck 2017). The vernacular poetics exhibited here unites time and space in an unending image of passage, “crossing”, or “temporal co-presence” (Mignolo 69; Pratt cited in Forsdick “World-literature” 32) that we described earlier in relation to Khatibi's writing. Indeed, returning to the multiple temporal layers of the novel, as it alternates from the present story of Clothilde and the narrator in Paris, the past experiences of Algiers, and the futurity of the final scene, we can see how the passage of time, and how it relates to space, is a major concern of the novel. As in *Des ballerines de papicha*, this final scene of Adimi's second novel creates a link between time and the weather, as the city itself becomes a character, unprotected and anxiously open to the elements, subjected to a perpetual, unending change that is also familiar and mundane, captured in the poetic metre. If the initial “return” is very much situated in what Mignolo named “territorial thinking”, then the vernacular “passage” or “crossing” forms part of a kind of Khatibian “other thinking” or “border thinking” (Mignolo 69). This allows us to reinsert an element of time into a conversation overly focused on space. Moreover, images of “crossing” and “temporal co-presence” deconstruct accounts of time and space and, thereby, dominant top-down narratives of world-making, revealing the world as that Khatibian “difference that cannot be told” (Mignolo 69) and ushering in what Glissant calls the “énorme insurrection de l'imaginaire” [huge insurrection of the imaginary] that would permit human beings (and humanity in general) to see “ce qu'elles sont en réalité” [what they are in reality] (Glissant, *La Cohée* 24–5)—that is, nothing but elements subject to endless change and transformation by time.

In what appears to be a shift in the use and treatment of time by Adimi, *Nos Richesses*—the third and final text considered in this article—is structured around three interlinked periods of time articulated clearly through subsections of the novel labelled by dates. The main narrative is set in the year of the novel's publication, 2017, and follows a young Algerian student, Ryad, who has been asked by his uncle to return from his studies in Paris to help a friend clear out an old Algiers bookshop, which he plans to transform into a café. The second narrative is told through a series of fictionalised first-person diary entries made by the *pied-noir* publisher Edmond Charlot between 1935 and 1961, while a third, more strictly historical narrative written in the first-person plural, situates Charlot's diary entries and marks key moments in Algerian history. These historical vignettes, which are labelled in a particular time and place, circle from the present of “Alger, 2017” back to “Algérie, 1930” and then returning to “Alger, 2017” via the key historical moments of Algiers 1939, Germany 1940, Sétif in May 1945, Algeria 1954, and Paris 1961. The historical tone of the novel, and in particular its blending fiction with non-fiction, is reinforced by the presence of a bibliography of archival and text-based sources at the end of the text. Thus, while it is far more visible, time in the novel is very much situated in relation to determined dates in history, deployed by the author in what resembles a more classic historical fiction. Here, genre appears to be a restricting presence, as it packages time and space for a specifically French audience.

The critical reception of *Nos Richesses*, which has been by far the most successful of Adimi's novels, has tended to stress several aspects. For some, this is a novel about the status of literature, and particularly its *rejection*, by the authorities in contemporary Algeria; it is about

the loss of the material book in an increasingly digitised era; for others still, the novel is about revealing the work of the little-known yet important cultural figure of Edmond Charlot—and, by implication, the work of smaller publishers in the Francosphere.<sup>18</sup> According to some critics, the novel foregrounds literature as something that stays with us across multiple time periods despite the material transformations occurring in the world (conflict, globalisation, digitisation).<sup>19</sup> As Adimi herself stresses in an interview: “C’est une histoire d’amitié, c’est une histoire sur l’importance de la littérature, sur l’importance de l’Histoire et sur ces richesses qui sont la littérature, l’Histoire à Alger qui est la ville où j’ai grandi” [It’s a story of friendship, it’s a story about the importance of literature, about the importance of history and about these riches which are literature and history in Algiers, which is the city where I grew up] ([Librairie Mollat](#)). However, much of the more mainstream reception of the novel doesn’t pick up on how these intersecting stories might register Adimi’s own implicit sense of anxiety about her trajectory into the French literary “centre” or the entry of her work into a transnational “world” literary system. In other words, the novel’s focus on the status of literature in both Charlot’s and Ryad’s worlds implicates these characters in another, perhaps hidden, story about world literature and the curtailing of the writer’s capacity to experiment with a vernacular poetics of world-making that characterises the earlier novels.

Even if the novel can be said to represent the cultural “richesse” [riches/worth/value] of literature and the bookshop (which is named “Les Vraies Richesses” [The True Riches]), Charlot’s and Ryad’s narratives register a clear anxiety about the way literature has been caught up in a set of decisions made for economic expediency. Since Charlot’s death, the building has belonged to the local municipality and been operated as a lending library, but, having squandered money gained through the sale of oil, the nation is apparently in need of bread, not books; mosques, not libraries. Such oppositions are seen by the former guardian of the bookshop, Abdellah, for what they are: a factitious and divisive rhetoric that pits populations against each other and places a culture of money above all else. Indeed, the new owner reels off enticing descriptions of doughnuts to be filled with sugar, apple or chocolate and sold in his new café to a nearby university student market. Ryad’s arrival in Algiers will mean throwing away what this new owner views as a collection of worthless old books. Ryad himself has no interest in reading; he has trained as an engineer, but failed to find a work experience placement back in Paris that he needs to complete his training. Ironically, the destruction of Charlot’s former bookshop comes to stand in for Ryad’s final training as an engineer. In this way, the novel draws attention to a contemporary movement away from an interest in cultural production, but it also offers an indictment of the supposed “usefulness” of the engineering degree (and the privileging of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics subjects) for the “global” age. Paris is not just the new cultural destination for a particular kind of literature, but the seat of a knowledge for a new “global” epoch. This is a knowledge that, while built on the coloniality of power, does away with the vernacular histories of colonial encounter it sees as irrelevant to social, political, and economic life in the *métropole*.

As we read on, we learn of the founding of the bookshop and the small associated publisher, Editions Charlot. Initially, Charlot’s story is one punctuated by a series of successes. Albert Camus is a regular visitor, correcting his manuscripts and smoking cigarettes while perched on the steps outside. We are regularly reminded of other big names that passed through its doors: Jules Roy, André Gide, Kateb Yacine, Emmanuel Roblès, Mohammed Dib. Writers such as Camus entrust Charlot with their manuscripts and the bookshop thrives in its first days, regularly selling out of the smaller print runs it can afford to make. Charlot published the famous Vercors resistance text *Le Silence de la Mer*. And, in 1945, he opened a Paris branch of his publisher together with Jean Amrouche and Charles Poncet. Charlot was in his early thirties when the Paris branch got into trouble, initially because of paper shortages (post-war paper quotas favoured the more established publishers, such as Gallimard). Charlot soon runs into financial trouble: he struggles with the more officialised French legal system and has no access to the paper he needs to meet the orders of the Parisian bookshops. The big Paris publishers

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<sup>18</sup> Since 2000, several small independent Algerian publishers have emerged in the capital city of Algiers, publishing works in Arabic, French, and, to a lesser extent, the indigenous language of Tamazight. This includes Adimi’s publisher, Editions Bazarkh, alongside others such as Editions Casbah, Editions APIC, and Editions Alpha.

<sup>19</sup> See, in particular, Florence Bouchy’s review in *Le Monde*. Jane Hiddleston’s recent article takes a more sceptical view, as the critic underlines how Charlot’s story presents a dream-like and delusional idea of world literature (see Hiddleston, “Un Nouvel Internationalisme” 395).



attempt to poach Charlot's writers, suggesting that he is on the verge of bankruptcy. Charlot writes in his diary:

Les éditeurs parisiens ont de l'argent, du papier, des réseaux. Et nous ? Des écrivains—les meilleurs—, de la volonté, mais ça ne suffira pas. [...] Je passe de nombreuses nuits à faire et défaire les comptes. Je suis découragé. Rien ne va. (150)

The Parisian publishers have money, paper, networks. And us? Writers—the best—willpower, but that won't be enough. [...] I spend many nights doing and undoing the accounts. I am dejected. Nothing is going right.

The depressing reality hits home, as Charlot is unable to pay his authors. He relocates to an old brothel and writers begin to abandon the Charlot publishing house: Jules Roy complains of the lack of publicity, Camus takes back his *droits d'auteur*. Charlot is removed as a director and Amrouche takes over. Gallimard, Seuil, and Juillard take on Charlot's writers. All that remain are Charlot's "rêves de littérature et d'amitié méditerranéenne" [dreams of literature and Mediterranean friendship] (154). In December 1949 the publisher is finally wound up by the Tribunal de Paris, marking the end of a "cruelle aventure parisienne" [cruel Parisian affair] (157). Adimi's novel draws attention to the economic imperatives in which literature has been caught up; in so doing, the author appears to offer a critique of the economic "value" placed upon cultural "products" over and above their cultural "richesse" [worth].

In the final section of the novel, which takes the reader back to Algiers in 2017, the still anonymous collective "nous" invites the reader to imagine visiting the site of "Les Vraies Richesses". Here, Adimi cites a passage from Jules Roy's 1989 book *Mémoires barbares*, in which he remembers his publisher Charlot and highlights how he felt the latter and those writers he published were moving beyond the national spaces of France and Algeria and into the space of what he calls "la littérature mondiale" [world literature] (Adimi, *Nos Richesses* 211). For Roy, Charlot was unlucky not to survive, but perhaps invested too much in the writers he published and thought too little of himself. Painting Charlot as the selfless forefather of this "littérature mondiale", the inclusion of Roy's perspective further invites us to read Charlot's story as a commentary on Adimi's own trajectory as a writer and the more general movement of writers from the former colonial "periphery" of Algiers to the cosmopolitan "centre" of Paris. The novel registers a critique of the capitalist world system that facilitates the uneven and unforgiving journey to that cosmopolitan centre, but it also sets out to challenge the binary constructs of "centre" vs. "periphery", "vernacular" vs. "cosmopolitan", and "local" vs. "global". Adimi presents Charlot as a failed publisher, but the reference to Roy's comments about "littérature mondiale" pushes readers to see this failure to live up to the demands of the cosmopolitan marketplace as imperative for the kind of "world literature" Charlot sought to foster. A poetics of vernacular world-making may not be visible in this third novel—and indeed it may be obscured by Charlot's aspirational cosmopolitanism—but it is implicitly present as what has been lost, especially when one reads *Nos Richesses* alongside the previous two texts.<sup>20</sup>

Adimi's apparent anxiety, expressed through the form and content of *Nos Richesses*, is a product of the fact that the author is caught in a bind she cannot easily escape. As has been astutely observed by the Warwick Research Collective, "the novel as a commodity form is always already embedded in ideology and consecrated as market object, even as it attempts to demystify or expose those same ideologies" (Warwick Research Collective 113, emphasis added). Thus, while *Nos Richesses* might indeed offer an implicit critique of the market of world literature, or the capitalist world system that enables writers such as Adimi to move into the centre, the novel is at the same time complicit in perpetuating the francophone and world publishing markets in "peripheral" or "minority" writing.

If *Nos Richesses* does not achieve the kinds of demystification that might have been broached in the more experimental narratives of Adimi's first two novels, it nevertheless succeeds in creating a subtext that challenges the premise that literature, culture, and knowledge "belong" in the transnational centre of Paris. While, on one level, the novel conforms to a particular historical style, no doubt welcomed by the Parisian publisher, it implicitly questions the

<sup>20</sup> Charlot's aspirational cosmopolitanism is clearly also reflected in his interest in French-language texts, but it is important to note that the French-language novel was dominant at this time among both colonial and postcolonial modernist writers. The Arabophone novel did not emerge until the 1970s in Algeria and Tamazight has only very recently emerged as a language of literary expression in Algeria.

process by which cosmopolitan culture is brought into existence. For Adimi, the bypassing or destruction of vernacular culture creates a kind of vacuous cosmopolitanism, embodied in Ryad's character. Educated in the so-called centre of cosmopolitan culture, Ryad has forgotten the more mundane past of his vernacular roots; he, much like Adimi herself, has moved away from an everyday, temporal, and worldly experience of the vernacular (of what we earlier theorised as a world called *dunya*) and moved towards a transnational culture (a form of *'alam*) that compresses time into a series of contained historical moments and the spatial category of the nation state.

In this wider world, where the cosmopolitan lives, and where the “the extent of the world” (Vierke and Mutiua) is based upon ever-greater interconnection and expansion of national markets, a more grounded poetics of world-making is lost. The loss of the bookshop, in other words, symbolises the loss of alternative ways of thinking and doing outside of a dominant modern capitalist totality.

## CONCLUSION

In *What is a World?* Pheng Cheah writes how “decolonisation is a temporal project of emergence” that has the capacity to “open other worlds where new collective subjects can emerge and change the world political stage” (Cheah 194). And, while literature's capacity to do this political work in any direct or consequential way has rightly been challenged, literature and poetic form do have an ability to reveal the world in a more emplaced, linguistically sensitive way: ever-changing in its endless movement and plurality, but also always to some degree “uncreated” (Rosemburg 2). One of the things that Glissant, Khatibi, and Adimi demonstrate through their work is that to see the world in decolonial perspective is to see the world in a continual state of heterogeneous “becoming”.

There is a risk, of course, that by explicitly aligning these writers' works with questions of world-making, world literature becomes a form of decolonial realism, characterised by an idealism reinforced by comparativists and postcolonial critics who perceive their research in terms of studying theoretical and literary production from “elsewhere”.<sup>21</sup> As Priyamvada Gopal stresses in a recent article on decolonisation and the university, we must be careful not to merely “repackage” knowledge from elsewhere as a form of “decolonised” epistemology, but rather understand that knowledge is fundamentally “porous” and “everywhere relies on the flow of ideas and insights” (Gopal 893). It is ultimately arguable whether any of the works studied in this article fundamentally decentres or decolonises approaches to world-making. And it is true that literary expression, such as that pursued by Glissant, Khatibi, and Adimi, has typically been reserved to “highly educated” groups (Hiddleston, “Un Nouvel Internationalisme” 395). However, vernacular poetics brings attention among existing literary and cultural critics and, crucially, educators to the necessarily located dynamics of the flow and porosity of knowledge, as always the result of the totalising reach of coloniality as a system of power that makes the modern world.

In the preceding analysis, I hope to have shown how the vernacular poetic imagination, seen from beyond the dominant linguistic and cultural geographies of the Francosphere, matters for our understanding of world literature and its role in revealing a more emplaced idea of world to its readers. Of course, Adimi, Glissant, and Khatibi are just a snapshot of a far larger set of writers deploying poetics in a way that articulates a mode of critical and self-reflexive thinking and that reveals the world in its emplaced spatial and temporal aspects. The entry of human-induced planetary climate change onto the agenda of the world's media has produced an increasing body of writing, thinking, and critical scholarship that has, in Jackson's words, been “learn[ing] to listen to these ‘already here’ worlds”. And, while I make no claim to intervene here into an already vast (and fast growing) body of scholarship on literature, the arts, and climate change, I want to repeat Jackson's warning about the traps the discourse of urgency sets for writers, thinkers, and critics: “one of the great dangers in any response to a declared emergency is a

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<sup>21</sup> Such a charge emerges in several critiques of Cheah's book. See, for example, Dominic Davies' article, in which he notes how Cheah's normative understanding of the world “ends up collapsing dialectical analysis into a singular line that affords only a restrictively situated sight and sense of the world” (317). See also Shir Alon's review in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, which underlines Cheah's reliance on a Derridean notion of world-making as well as the Anglocentrism of his literary examples.

certain unreflexive obedience, an obedience that takes the epistemic terms of engagement as given due to claims of imminence, utility, and efficiency” (9). Jackson is referring here to the hastily constructed concept the Anthropocene, but his comments seem equally important when thinking about world literature and its critical blind spots when it comes to language and the geopolitics of knowledge. The call for a slower, more contemplative, self-reflexive thinking draws us back to a vernacular horizon, to understand how the universal is inflected at the local level and to decentre the binary categories that continue to dominate the theory and practice of world-making.


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