

TRANSLATING MEDIATION IN TRAVEL WRITING: INDIA IN  
PIERRE SONNERAT'S *VOYAGE AUX INDES ORIENTALES*  
*ET A LA CHINE* (1782)

SANJUKTA BANERJEE

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## Abstract

In recent decades, a growing number of studies have focused on the parallels and interconnections between travel writing and translation to examine the ways in which both practices can be understood to represent the foreign, particularly in colonial contexts. Scholarship on non-Anglophone European accounts of India, however, has remained indifferent to this nexus. This dissertation addresses this gap through an exploration of the discursive strategies of representation at play in eighteenth-century French travel writing on India, a mostly neglected body of work in translation studies. Approaching early colonial India as a triangular colonial space and a site of pliable, competing colonialisms between France and Britain, I examine the plurality of mediations readable in a specific account, to underscore translation not only as an interlingual process but an entire problematic. To this end, I provide an annotated English translation of excerpts from French naturalist traveller Pierre Sonnerat's *Voyage aux Indes orientales et à la Chine* (1782), an example of interlingual travel notable for its ethnographic account of India. My focus is on the assumptions and mechanisms at play in translating difference into commensurability, particularly in relation to the traveller's located understanding of language and its entwining with other categories of knowledge. Beginning with an exploration of the co-constitutive nature of Anglo-French relations in early colonial India and in the knowledge networks of the "global eighteenth century," inflected and sustained by the local, I examine translation and travel (writing) as connected practices and concepts, their connections with the ethnographic and scientific, and the ethical implications of knowledge construction through travel and translation in contexts of empire. The annotated translation is based on an analytical apparatus bringing together science, religion, and language—grounded in specific histories—to go beyond the perspective of the traveller and include the "travellee," to consider both as socialized subjects linked to networks of other social agents.

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## Introduction

### Description of project

In the last three decades, a growing number of studies have focused on the parallels and interconnections between travel writing and translation to examine the ways in which both practices can be understood to represent the foreign, particularly in colonial contexts. Scholarship on travel accounts of early colonial India, however, has remained largely indifferent to this nexus. This study seeks to address this gap through an exploration of the discursive strategies of representation at play in eighteenth-century French travel writing on India, a mostly neglected body of work in translation studies. It is particularly interested in examining the plurality of mediations readable in a specific account, to underscore translation not only as an interlingual process but an entire problematic. To this end, I have translated and annotated sections from French naturalist traveller Pierre Sonnerat's *Voyage aux Indes orientales et à la Chine* (1782), an example of interlingual travel notable for its ethnographic account of India.

This project is based on a number of premises. First, travel writing—due to its ability to shapeshift and blend genres, disciplines and perspectives—is uniquely situated to interact with a broad range of historical periods. Second, language and translation have always been central to the construction and dissemination of travel texts, a point that can be seen in conjunction with two factors, a) the problematics of translation and the writing of history are inextricably bound, and b) travel texts typically tend to obscure the presence of local translators/interpreters. Third, often anchored in distinct local contexts, travel accounts are often also embedded in a larger, international discursive network (Schulz-Forberg 15). Fourth, it subscribes to the view that while mobility among modes of identification and languages has become one of the markers of contemporary life, it is not exclusive to our time.

Further, a historical perspective of travel tells us that mobility cannot be reduced to a “specific typology or a dominant model” (Polezzi 2006, 173). It is worth mentioning here that while socio-historical studies have approached translation and travel writing as history, such a perspective may risk ignoring the ideological underpinnings and literary conventions that govern the nature of representations in travel texts and translations, especially when “historiography as the West extols it is moot” (Gaddis Rose 163). Finally, my approach to examining the multilingual context of India in an early-colonial travel narrative is based on the premise that language (and translation) as a universal to all societies is not put to the same use across cultures.

If the potential of travel writing to help examine the variety of exchanges in which travel and translation intertwine has yet to be fulfilled, this is partly because the field continues to be dominated by studies of Anglophone sources. In addition, while research at the intersection of travel writing and translation in colonial contexts has examined a range of cultural encounters at both micro and macro levels, it has neglected much of the eighteenth-century Francophone accounts of India—reflecting the general tendency to subsume these writings within the dominant British colonial discourse of the nineteenth century. This is a serious oversight, because, firstly, the second half of that century was one of major transition in India’s encounter with the West. While scholarship on colonial presence in India has overwhelmingly focused on the British factor, the mutual dependence of the French and the British for sustenance and survival<sup>1</sup> in India in those years challenge any notion of a culturally and politically demarcated Britishness within British discourses of India, indeed

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<sup>1</sup> As Alam and Alavi (2001) point out, “[c]onstructions of British India and a colonized ‘other’ as mere narrative productions within the vast political discourse of colonial domination are now being questioned. The colonized ‘other’ and the colonial experience as a whole are being located in more pliable cultural interface as material as well as discursive negotiation between Britain and India. But while British ‘Self’ and Indian ‘Other’ are no longer binary opposites, a reified image of the former as culturally definable and politically demarcated does persist” (18).

within British colonial success (Alam and Alavi). Secondly, the second half of the eighteenth century saw the publication of numerous French travel accounts of India (D'Souza 11).<sup>2</sup> This largely unexplored body of texts could provide insight into the nature of mediations present in colonial accounts, the interconnections between them, if and how these reflect, perpetuate and subvert some of the common tropes of European representations of India and of travel writing in general.

My focus on the strategies of representation at play in travel writing and /in translation stems from an awareness of the inherent interdisciplinarity and transculturality of both practices. At the same time, the traveller and the text at hand call for an interdisciplinarity that is specific to this project. It is worth noting here that European travel writing during the age of Enlightenment is intertwined with the history of European mapping and surveying of territories and the natural world and the emergence of a scientific approach to knowledge in general. The now established theoretical approaches that analyze travellers as translators and interpreters are those that help link the eras of seventeenth and eighteenth-century European explorers with the production of (systematic) knowledge about the world outside, placing topics as diverse as natural history, language, religion within the same grid. The process of labelling flora and fauna, for example, often ran parallel to mapping and enumerating languages, arranging the latter into typologies and hierarchies informed by European epistemological assumptions. Therefore, in seeking to fashion a theoretical approach, this dissertation has drawn on perspectives that promise to be conducive to investigating the individual and the social dimensions of knowledge production in and through travel writing. Three main questions inform my exploration:

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<sup>2</sup> According to D'Souza, between 1757 and 1815, 135 accounts of India were published.

What dominant ways of apprehending and textualizing the other in travel readable in the account at hand?

How does translation—as both an interlingual practice and in the expanded sense of “cultural translation” (referring here to the practice of decontextualizing and recontextualizing an entire culture in writing)—figure here?

On a more general level, how might one include the socio-cultural, ideological and epistemological contexts of the traveller *and* her/his elided other in the translation of a specific travel account?

As already mentioned, research at the intersection of travel and translation has not paid sufficient attention to the decades of the mid and late-eighteenth century, the period before the British emerged as the undisputed colonial power in India. This exclusion speaks of the intertextuality of scholarship on India’s colonial past. If mainstream scholarly research has relegated French writings on India to a marginal position, this is in keeping with the peripheral status of the Indo-French encounter in current British, French and Indian historiography. French accounts of India have for a long time been subsumed into the larger categories and tropes of Anglo-centric colonial representation. This has meant that the potential of travel writing to help examine the variety of mediations and discursive strategies in which it intertwines with translation, especially in colonial contexts, has remained unfulfilled.

### **Negotiating the descriptive and the explanatory**

This dissertation, in its analysis of the discursive strategies of representation, of the confluence of the personal with the sociocultural and political, approaches translation as a social practice best studied through an interdisciplinary approach. It is concerned with understanding the mechanisms of description that shape representations, and their

implications for the local, whether language, knowledge or their practitioner. Its goal is to bring together the descriptive (noting patterns and regularities) and the explanatory (focusing on the traveller /translator and the contingent nature of their representation), norms and strategies, and above all systems and individuals. The notion of intersection, fundamental to the concept of *histoire croisée* (Werner and Zimmermann)—of history as marked by crossings—that I draw on, calls for attending to the entities as relational, multidimensional. This is clearly against the binary-based approaches in research which fail to accommodate of all those ambiguous and overlapping areas of translation that resist clear-cut classification (Agorni 132). It is in sites of intercultural encounter, (Pratt 1992, Pym 1998) made possible by travel, that the “complex, materialist character of translation phenomena can be best observed” (Agorni 132). Eighteenth-century India was a contact zone that brought together languages, texts, and ideologies which have been straightjacketed to tell a largely one-dimensional story, that of the British. Here the descriptive and the explanatory are not to be seen in oppositional terms: in my attention to the facets of intertextuality in a particular text, I treat them as points on a continuum and co-constitutive. This seems to be one of the most effective ways of accommodating the historical, linguistic and epistemological in the exploration of the travel and translation phenomenon at hand.

Such considerations have been addressed in translation studies in limited ways: the polysystem model, for example, examines translation in a continuing, dynamic relation with large social and cultural developments (Even-Zohar 1978, 1990). But the approach has also been criticized<sup>3</sup> because of its rather “mechanical” understanding of forces at play in translation processes (Agorni 127) and for its inadequate attention to the material, social milieu of translation. Such criticism underscores that questions of power can seem obscure

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Theo Hermans, *Translation in Systems: Descriptive and System-oriented Approaches Explained*.

and ineffectual unless they are linked to the actual people involved in translation activities (127). A systems-based theory should go beyond merely positing that translation is both produced by and in turn produces the environment that houses it and include the aspects involved in the process (Hermans 1985, 118-119). The socio-cultural context of translation production (and reception) has also been addressed by the “cultural turn” (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990) and has extended translation studies to travel writing, although it has largely left non-fictional texts out of its purview. The almost exclusive focus on literary production has meant ignoring the powerful interdisciplinary connections shaping translation activities across and within cultures and textual genres. While criticism of the more deterministic aspects of systematic models in translation research has led to increased attention to the agency of individual or to the role of ideology and power,<sup>4</sup> these approaches have left out analyses of translation, in both its narrow and expanded senses, in contexts of colonial encounter between India and Europe, particularly those that do not focus on Britain.

### **Including the local**

One impetus for this study comes from an awareness of the “local” inflecting representations that circulate through travel, the manner in which the native interlocutor can be understood to figure in discourses in the travel texts shaped by the socio-cultural, historical, linguistic contexts of the traveller and their other. The colonial presence in India and colonial representations of the region, primarily because of the country’s linguistic

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<sup>4</sup> For example, in the work of André Lefevere foregrounding the social and /as the individualized in translation activities. Lefevere calls attention to the role of patronage and ideology on the one hand, and poetics on the other (1992). More recent work has continued in a similar vein through the concept of norms (Toury 1995; Chesterman 1997; Hermans 1996) approaching translation to be a socially patterned type of linguistic communication and connecting the production and reception poles in translation practice. There have also been norms-based perspectives relevant for shedding light on a community’s expectation of a translation (Hermans 1999, 77– 78) and in including both its social and individual features.

plurality, would rarely have access to information that could be construed as pan-Indian. So the attention to the local is partly to enable a fuller appreciation of the range of mediations involved in the shaping and circulation of knowledge about the country. At the same time, the local cultural and linguistic mediator, the “go-between,” belonged to a heterogenous group that was becoming increasingly mobile within India in the late 1800s.<sup>5</sup> Their itinerancy draws attention to the experiences of the traveller and the “travellee,” (Pratt 1992) as marked by synchronicity and copresence.<sup>6</sup>

One promising way of investigating and reconstructing the interwoven contexts of specific translation phenomena and including the local seems to be through “localism,”<sup>7</sup> a concept that helps explore “the contingent nature of the various agencies and institutions involved in translation practices” (Agorni 129). Foregrounding the local and circumscribed aspects of cultural phenomena, localism aims at grounding translation in its environment by locating the details of its historical, social and linguistic contexts. Crucially, it stresses its connections with other translation or translation-like phenomena, such as travel writing. The concept is useful for the current research because it promises to bring together both the individual and the social dimensions of translation: the local can encompass both of those categories, and the goal of rendering it visible requires bringing together the descriptive and interpretive. This can counter the mechanical bias implicit in systemic thinking.

The idea of the local tends to conjure images of spatio-temporal, cultural stasis, or at least of immutable embeddedness, which this research seeks to challenge. As a metonymical method, producing well defined yet “‘provisional’ images, based on relations of contiguity and combination” (Agorni 130) localism seems to respond to that goal. “Rather than striving

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<sup>5</sup> This shift can be explained by a change in the traditional indigenous knowledge networks brought upon by the colonial enterprise of textualizing India. The process started in the second half of the eighteenth century.

<sup>6</sup> See discussion of the term “travelee,” coined by Mary Louise Pratt, later in the introduction.

<sup>7</sup> The concept was coined by Maria Tymoczko. See *Translation in a Postcolonial Context*.

for a ‘perfect’ correspondence with their original, metonymical processes of translation work via connections, producing contextualizations that could be open to variation and specificity, which eventually create multiple meanings, instead of a single, exemplary solution” (130). Here the circumscribed aspects of cultural phenomena are brought to attention through the local underscores the need to think of mobility *in place*. This is the concern that Islam expressed in his elaboration of the sedentary mode of travel. Focus on “locating” instances of translation also requires the reader/ translator to sit inside the text and articulate the subtext. “The complex pictures resulting from this practice [...] provide case studies with a ‘thick’ materialist specificity” (131). It is at its best in historical analyses of translation phenomena and stands for mediation at methodological and epistemological levels. It seems ideal for taking account of a confluence of factors—material and experiential—shaping translation for both individuals and communities.

This attention to methodological and epistemological mediation can help negotiate the gaps that plague scholarship on cultural encounters in contexts of power asymmetry. It is particularly relevant for research into travel accounts that typically leave out names of the local linguistic mediator. Localism in this context helps shed light on facets of the local’s historicity, its translation of itself over time. The goal here is not only to re-member the mediators in the translation and knowledge network, but also make evident the intertextuality of the research process itself.

This research stemmed from an interest in considering translation as a process involving negotiations by agents to both individual and collective ends. The attention here is on the traveller and the local Indian, but also on the colonizer as a heterogenous entity, often contributing toward both common and divergent goals. The little-known continental network that provided a naturalist traveller like Sonnerat, a social climber like Antoine Polier or an orientalist like Anquetil-Duperron with opportunities for fashioning their careers and defining

the image of France also facilitated British success in early colonial India. All of it depended on and contributed to knowledge construction and circulation through translation.

One additional perspective that this research draws on comes from Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT), which was initially developed as an interdisciplinary approach to social sciences and technology studies, and later extended to agent and process-oriented research in translation studies (Buzelin 2005).<sup>8</sup> ANT focuses on the progressive constitution of a network of both human and non-human "actants" (Latour) whose identities and qualities are defined according to prevailing strategies of interaction. Constantly redefining each other, actor and network in this concept are mutually constitutive and are considered as two facets of the same phenomenon rather than be equated with individual and society. One of the main elements in the formation of an actor-network is translation as a *process* where actors construct common meanings and need continuous negotiations to end that are at times interwoven. Here networks as intermediary arrangements are more significant than the poles of global / local, a perspective that is compatible with the concept of *histoire croisée*. This is certainly true of the network of European and Indian intermediaries that developed in eighteenth-century India, where the idea of unadulterated or oppositional identities of people and places does not seem applicable. Actor-networks are marked by unpredictability and ambiguity, and point to the difficulty of reifying the process by which facts and artefacts are produced insofar as the processes can only be analyzed from inside.

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<sup>8</sup> See Bruno Latour's *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society*. See in particular H  l  ne Buzelin, "Unexpected allies: How Latour's network theory could complement Bourdieusian analyses in translation studies." On sociology of translation see *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*. In that volume, see Michaela Wolf, "Emergence of a sociology of translation"; H  l  ne Buzelin, "Translations in the making"; Daniel Simeoni, "Between sociology and history."

This leads to the goal of positing a translation model in which spaces present themselves as routes and connections rather than surfaces and frontiers. Here explanation takes into account the micro-level working of the network itself. It aligns with the non-diffusionist impulse behind research on travellers and translators as primarily cultural mediators. The micro-history involved here further aims to transcend the assumption of the researcher's position as external to the object of the study, recognizing that that all phases through which research unfolds are constructed and not a given. In this, its natural ally seems to be translation that emphasises contexts as integral to the processes.

### **Pierre Sonnerat: author of *Voyage aux Indes Orientales et à la Chine***

Pierre Sonnerat, variously described as traveller, naturalist, draughtsman, explorer, colonial administrator, was born in Lyon in 1748. Both sides of his family were in the business of *passementerie*,<sup>9</sup> which, according to his biographer Madeleine Ly-Tio-Fane,<sup>10</sup> explains his interest in drawing. Crucially, Sonnerat was the nephew and godson of Pierre Poivre, the botanist, colonial administrator and entrepreneur who had already been to parts of Asia (including South India) and Africa by the time Sonnerat was born.<sup>11</sup> Poivre and his associates inspired the trend of peaceful expansion through trade in French official foreign policy,<sup>12</sup> which seems to have shaped Sonnerat's attitude toward French colonialism as well. Poivre did not succeed in his attempt to expand trade, but his field observations during the quest earned him a place in the *Académie royale des sciences*.

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<sup>9</sup> The art of elaborate trimming and embroidery.

<sup>10</sup> In *Pierre Sonnerat, 1748-1814: An Account of His Life and Work*.

<sup>11</sup> Poivre travelled to India between 1745 and 1747, the account of which is included in *Un manuscrit inédit de Pierre Poivre: les mémoires d'un voyageur* (1968).

<sup>12</sup> Poivre's advice was sought for the organization of French possessions in India and elsewhere in the region in the aftermath of the Treaty of Paris (1763). The pivot of peaceful expansion through trade was to be the spice project: the profits derived from spice plantation would serve to promote an expansionist colonial policy.

Sonnerat was introduced quite early in his life to his godfather's immediate circle of friends: individuals of a range of backgrounds who shared an interest in natural science, overseas exploration and mercantilism—the three often indistinguishable from each other. His formal introduction to this group happened in 1767, when he joined Poivre's journey to Isle de France (Mauritius) as the latter's private secretary. That trip would set the course for the younger Pierre's career as a naturalist: in 1768 he met Philibert Commerson, who was accompanying explorer Antoine de Bougainville as naturalist on the latter's circumnavigation.<sup>13</sup> Commerson was a prominent scientist, and more importantly, in contact with the most important European intellectuals of the time and a protégé and collaborator of the Swedish botanist and taxonomist Carl Linnaeus. Whatever its real extent, a professional connection with Commerson was flaunted by both Sonnerat and his supporters,<sup>14</sup> and it helped Sonnerat develop contacts in scientific circles, including with English naturalist Joseph Banks.<sup>15</sup>

After his first voyage to Asia, Sonnerat's attention was directed at consolidating his position as a man of science and colonial administrator, the two being interdependent for a successful overseas career as a naturalist. He was already an associate member of the *Académie des Sciences, Belles-Lettres et Arts* de Lyon, and in 1773 was elected

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<sup>13</sup> There seem to be several versions of the nature and extent of this association. Sonnerat is believed to have accompanied Commerson on field work for three years. But it has also been suggested that it was Sonnerat who claimed to have been associated with the talented naturalist. In any case, the meeting with Commerson would prove to be one of the most consequential in Sonnerat's career as a naturalist.

<sup>14</sup> For example, when Sonnerat's patron comte d'Angiviller, *Directeur général des bâtiments et jardins du roi* under Louis XVI, solicited the budding naturalist's promotion as Commissaire de la marine, he stated that Sonnerat worked with Commerson between 1768-70.

<sup>15</sup> Banks was known for his voyage around the world with Captain James Cook (1768–71), and like Poivre, he was interested in economic plants and their introduction into countries. The acquaintance with Banks would prove useful for Sonnerat when he needed a safe passage from India to France after being captured by the British.

*Correspondant* of French botanist and explorer Adanson.<sup>16</sup> The academic distinction, however, did not offer financial security. The latter depended on advancement in the bureaucratic hierarchy, which happened when Sonnerat was appointed *Sous-commissaire de la marine*.<sup>17</sup>

In 1775 Sonnerat applied to travel to Pondichéry (now Puducherry), the French trading post in Southern India, to collect for the *Cabinet du roi*.<sup>18</sup> But once he arrived there in 1777, scientific pursuits had to be abandoned to take care of more pressing problems. The English East India Company (henceforth EEIC) army laid siege on Pondichéry in 1778 in retaliation for French involvement in the American War of Independence and responsibility fell on Sonnerat to manage the hospital in the territory during a 77-day defence. The French eventually capitulated and Sonnerat was forced to return to Isle de France. But his conduct during the siege was deemed exemplary, so that on his return to France in 1781 he was in a position to demand, through his patron, a promotion to the post of *Commissaire des colonies*. According to the custom of the time, this would also enable him to engage in private trade. It was around this time that Sonnerat worked on completing his major work, *Voyage aux Indes orientales et à la Chine* (henceforth *Voyage*), and the interest in trade perhaps explains why in the book he made overtures to the French mercantile community rather than to the more established *philosophes*<sup>19</sup> and ecclesiasts. Responding to opposition to overseas colonies by

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<sup>16</sup> In support of this application, Adanson described Sonnerat as an active, industrious young man with perfect knowledge of drawing and miniature illustration who had worked as a draughtsman of natural history under the supervision of Pierre Poivre, his relative and intendant of Ile de France, when Commerson visited the island with Bougainville (Ly-Tio-Fane).

<sup>17</sup> *Marine*: Ministry in charge of colonies.

French overseas territories were placed under the *ministère de maritime* after the fall of the French East India Company following the Seven Years War.

<sup>18</sup> A property originally bought by Louis XIII in 1633, the *Cabinet du roi* became a cabinet of curiosities, then subsequently the *Jardin du roi*, then *Jardin des plantes*, and after 1793 the *Muséum national d'histoire naturelle* in Paris.

<sup>19</sup> Most historians agree that it was the French *philosophes* who aroused popular hostility in France toward the colonies. "The philosophes set the tone and others followed without thinking, so that

the physiocrats—who he thought selectively supported travel accounts that agreed with their criticism of overseas trade—Sonnerat asserts that a population without commerce is a burden to the state (II: IV, 4). A maritime and commercial country not only takes care of its own subsistence, but also that of other nations.<sup>20</sup> The interest in trade went hand in hand with research into natural resources, and in India it was also closely tied to his work as a colonial administrator and the French goal of recovering its lost territories and prestige.

In 1786 Sonnerat returned to Pondichéry as *Commissaire des colonies*. This second sojourn in India would, however, end much like the first one: he was captured by the English East India Company (henceforth EEIC) army during the latter's invasion of Yanaon and Pondichéry (1793). Between 1793 and 1816, Pondichéry remained under British control. Sonnerat's captivity would last almost twenty years,<sup>21</sup> during which he concentrated on preparing the manuscript for an updated version of *Voyage*.<sup>22</sup>

Pierre Sonnerat was one of the most cited among French and English travellers of his time. *Voyage* has been considered one of the most notable eighteenth-century travel accounts

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anticolonialism became almost a cult in France [...]” (Das 23). One of the currents that made up the anticolonial position of *philosophes* was the physiocratic opposition to colonies, even for economic reasons. The physiocrats championed agriculture as the main source of riches, supported trade only if it was *laissez-faire*. The less popular mercantilist philosophy considered overseas settlements to be vital for the expansion of national economy. Colonies were to supply the parent country with commodities which it could not produce. It is this utility of colonies which interested the pro-colonial advocates in France. The “commercial principle” was emphasized as the sole justification for any overseas enterprise (23), and overseas expansion for the sake of conquest was actively opposed. But the physiocratic opposition to colonies for economic reasons seems to have been the most powerful influence of the time that swayed public opinion in the days leading up to the Revolution.

<sup>20</sup>*Voyage*, Vol 2, 4. This view also figures in his introduction to the description of India in *Voyage particularly* of its geological makeup and natural resources and seems to shape his understanding of Indian history. See discussion later in this chapter.

<sup>21</sup> He was repatriated to France in 1813 with the help of British naturalist Joseph Banks.

<sup>22</sup> *Nouveau voyage aux Indes orientales*.

The manuscript, based on Sonnerat's second sojourn in India, disappeared at Sonnerat's death in 1814 and remained untraced until 1978, when naturalist Madeleine Ly-Tio-Fane, author of the only biography of Sonnerat, learned that it was preserved in the Library of New South Wales in Sydney.

of India. Yasmine Marcil<sup>23</sup> indicates that it was the most mentioned travel account in the French periodical press in the late 1700s (thirty-two times between 1780 and 1789).<sup>24</sup> Soon after its publication it was translated into German (1783) and English (1788-89), and extracts were published in German (1784), Dutch (1786) and Swedish (1786). The work attracted attention in the British periodical press as well: between 1782 and 1795, English periodicals<sup>25</sup> brought out dozens of notices announcing the publication of the work in original or in English translation (Francis Magnus 1788), alongside reviews of or references to it. More importantly, while scholarship on Sonnerat has mostly focused on his contribution to natural science,<sup>26</sup> *Voyage*'s appeal clearly reached beyond scientific circles in Europe, and for a reason. The main subject of the sections on India was the culture and religion of the country. It was intended to provide an educated public with a systematic verbal and pictorial overview of related themes such as mythology, customs, and ceremonies. These were the themes that had occupied European antiquarian, theological and philosophical inquiries about India since the late seventeenth century. The integrity of the work was questioned by Orientalists Anquetil-Duperron and Joseph de Guignes on the ground that it lacked originality. But such criticism needs to be seen alongside its wide appeal, and arguably testifies to its significance as an eighteenth-century document in the history of knowledge circulation. Its compilatory character not only points to the heterogeneity of sources Sonnerat drew on, it made *Voyage* a

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<sup>23</sup> *La fureur des voyages* (2006). Among the French periodicals that advertised or reviewed *Voyage* was *Le Journal encyclopédique*, *Mercure de France*, *l'Année littéraire*.

<sup>24</sup> Sonnerat's other travel account was *Voyage a la Nouvelle Guinée* (1776)

<sup>25</sup> Among these *The Calcutta Gazette*, *The Calcutta Chronicle*, *The New Review* and *The British Critic*.

<sup>26</sup> Sonnerat's *Voyage*, ostensibly belonging to science, is generally listed under that rubric in archives.

One exception is Paola von Wyss-Giacosa's article titled "Confronting Asia's 'Idolatrous Body,'" which examines the verbal and visual representations of Hindu religious practices in Southern India in *Voyage*. The article analyses "the use of body and bodily categories in early modern reflections on orthodox Christianity and idolatry" (*Commun(ica)ting Bodies* 20).

commonly cited source for other European works on Asia: William Jones refers to Sonnerat multiple times in his reflections on Hinduism and comparative study of religions.<sup>27</sup>

References to the German translation of *Voyage*<sup>28</sup> are found in the works of Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottfried Herder. Therefore, Sonnerat and his *Voyage* offer an ideal site for exploring both the specificity of French construction of India and the translational relations between networks of agents, influence and information that shaped eighteenth-century European knowledge of the subcontinent.

### **Scope of project and description of sections**

This dissertation extends research in travel writing and translation to the context of early colonial India, with a focus on the second half of the eighteenth century, a much-neglected period in scholarship on colonial India. The attention to non-fictional and non-Anglophone travel writing on India addresses an additional gap in both travel writing and translation studies, since studies of colonial-era discourses of India from the perspective of travel and translation have tended to focus on literary texts in English. My focus draws attention to writings by amateur and professional writers whose accounts of travel were their only foray into authorship. It is motivated by an interest to examine colonial discourse in a form *relatively* free of consciously aesthetic requirements of fictional writings (Spurr 2). The general neglect of non-fictional travel narratives is reflected in translation studies. However, as I explain in my discussion of the generic characteristic of travel writing, the distinction between the fictional and non-fictional is difficult to negotiate.<sup>29</sup> But it is also crucial to

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<sup>27</sup> See the thirteen-volume *The Works of Sir William Jones: With the Life of the Author* by Lord Teignmouth (1807).

<sup>28</sup> *Reise nach Ostindien und China: auf Befehl des Königs unternommen vom Jahre 1774 bis 1781 von Herrn Sonnerat* (1782), translated by Johann Pezzl.

<sup>29</sup> I subscribe to the view that texts of pure fiction or non-fiction are theoretical constructs that do not correspond to any given texts (Genette cited in Hooper and Youngs), and a central concern common

recognize this dividing line when attending to accounts that have primarily been received as political, historical and scientific texts. The history of translation has largely been written by specialists in literature and language, who continue to ignore the considerable body of historical, political, philosophical, economic, scientific travel texts that enjoyed wide readership in Europe in the “global eighteenth century” (Martin and Pickford Davies, et al.).

The historical interest of the project also lies in contributing to studies that subscribe to eighteenth-century India as a triangular colonial space, a site of competing colonialisms between France and Britain. This situating of travel writing and translation in a pliable network of information (Alam and Alavi) aligns it with concepts such as connected histories, circulation and *histoire croisée*.

The focus on the second half of the eighteenth century was also determined by the decision to examine Pierre Sonnerat’s *Voyage*. This in turn lends theoretical and methodological specificity to the project: its interdisciplinary analytical framework puts travel writing and translation studies in dialogue with ethnography, science, and linguistics with a focus on multilingualism.

Chapter 1 outlines the context of European presence in India in the second half of eighteenth-century with a view to taking note of the major differences that set apart French attitudes to India from British ones. This attention is related to my interest in exploring *if* and *how* this difference finds expression in a particular travel account. This chapter also seeks to establish a rarely studied aspect of European colonial presence in the subcontinent — the codependence of the French and the British in the gathering and construction of knowledge about India for a European audience. By positing India as a triangular discursive colonial space, I seek to draw attention to the relational and interactional dimensions of colonial

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to both fictional and non-fictional travel texts is that of representation hinging on seamless mixings of the “seen” and the imagined.

agents / subjects and ultimately of colonial and orientalist<sup>30</sup> knowledge construction. The intersection of the local and global in the specific historical context is further addressed through the concept of *histoire croisée* and a discussion of the native translator /intermediary as “go-between.”

Chapter 2 examines the intersections of travel writing and translation studies. It focuses on the co-constitutive nature of this relationship, and on the connected yet distinct ways of knowing and representing difference in these practices. The generic flexibility of travel writing is explored with attention to the fraught relation between fiction and non-fiction in travel writing and alongside an elaboration of translation as a process of extracting meaning from the verbal *and* non-verbal signs of a culture. The “cultural translation” that travel writing performs is examined in light of the relation of both practices to ethnographic approaches of representing others. The aura of authority associated with ethnographic accounts is deemed important in view of two factors: first, the relation of eighteenth-century travel writing in Europe to Enlightenment science and, second, the connection between the history of ethnography in travel and the emergence of analytical categories which marked travel writings. The decision to examine the writing of Pierre Sonnerat, a naturalist, has necessitated a consideration of the discourse of science that shaped travel writing and translation in eighteenth-century France and Europe. One way of reading the overt and implicit connections between texts and discourses is through the lens of intertextuality, which is also discussed in this chapter. The theoretical elaboration is underpinned by perspectives that look at the ethical dimensions of travel (writing) and translation.

Chapter 3 deals primarily with the *why* and *how* of recontextualizing a case of cultural translation. The goal is to shape a perspective that puts translation, description and

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<sup>30</sup> In this dissertation I refer to “orientalist” (adj. and noun) and orientalism in both the eighteenth century and postcolonial senses of the terms.

explanation in the same plane, help understand the relation between the individual and the social as a process that does not allow for exteriority on the part of the researcher. My objective here has necessitated a discussion that is not beholden to any one theoretical approach. It draws on perspectives that help see dominant transnational discourses alongside and interwoven with local socio-cultural, linguistic practices in a site of cultural contact. It may seem to have a degree of recursiveness to it: for example, the discussion of description and explanation as entwined in representations of language leads to an exploration of the rhetoric of science in travel writing and translation; at the same time, scientific discourse is explored as predicated on a rhetoric of the “original,” one that is also central to European ideas of language and translation. The bounded nature of the “regimes of description”<sup>31</sup> underscores the paradigmatic function of the tropes used to represent the other, the necessary incorporation of the other in the orbit of the same. My exploration of the ethical in the chapter recognizes that attention to the local—language and its practitioner—is integral to any remapping of the “view from nowhere” that travel writing can promote. It is also interested in identifying words and tropes in the narratives that provide openings into the contexts of the traveller and the “travellee,” referring to the position of people and places “travelled to.”<sup>32</sup> In this sense, the native translator /interpreter is also the travellee, although not vice versa. The goal is to underscore, in a limited way, the heterotopian character of travel—the overlapping of spaces and temporalities that a focus on translation can unravel.

Chapter 4 presents a contextual reading and translation of excerpts from Pierre Sonnerat’s *Voyage*. As already stated, the decision to address this text is partly influenced by

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<sup>31</sup> I borrow this expression from Bender and Marrinan, *Regimes of description: in the archive of the eighteenth century* (2005).

<sup>32</sup> Pratt’s term shares ground with the more familiar figure of the native “informant” (Clifford 1986, 1997) invoked in colonial or/ and ethnographic texts. I prefer to use the former, since, in the discourse of the local, the two are not the same: travellee encompasses both the informant and the one who “participates at the receiving end” (Pratt 1992, 242) of the encounter *without* actively engaging with the traveller.

my awareness of the paucity of scholarship on “non-fictional” travel accounts<sup>33</sup> of India from the late eighteenth century. It also stems from an interest in Sonnerat as a gifted popularizer who combined first-hand experience of travel with the dominant intellectual interests in Europe of the time. While he is primarily recognized as a naturalist, illustrator<sup>34</sup> and a collector of natural specimens, those experiences seem to play primarily a mediating role in his account of India. Seen from this perspective, the indeterminacy of travel writing as a genre and the omnipresence of translation in these texts have a perfect accomplice in Sonnerat’s position in the eighteenth-century knowledge network connecting India and Europe.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Among works dealing with French representations of India, focusing primarily on fictional works, at times overlapping with fictional travel writing, see Kate Marsh, *India in the French Imagination: peripheral voices, 1754-1815*; Binita Mehta, *Widows, Pariahs, and Bayadères: India as Spectacle*; Lisa Lowe, *Critical terrains: French and British orientalisms*; Kate Teltscher, *India Inscribed: European and British Writing on India, 1600-1800*; Jackie Assayag, "L'aventurier divin et la bayadère immolée: L'Inde dans l'opéra." *L'Inde et l'imaginaire* (1988): 197-228, and *L'Inde fabuleuse: le charme discret de l'exotisme français, XVIIe-XXe siècles*; Pompa Banerjee, *Burning Women: Widows, Witches, and Early Modern European Travelers in India*; Srilata Ravi, *L'Inde romancée: l'Inde dans le genre romanesque français depuis 1947*.

Most of the scholarship on French presence in India between the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries covering “non-fictional” texts has focused on the works of a handful of travellers and observers. Among them Jean Baptiste Tavernier and Le Gentil, physicians like François Bernier and Charles Dellon, engineers like Legoux De Flaix, architects like Claude Martin, and most of all mercenaries like Allard, Ventura, Réne Madec, Law de Lauriston, Dubois de Jancigny, Gentil, Claude Martin and Benoit De Boigne. For travellers see Edward Farley Oaten, *European travellers in India during the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; Distant lands and Diverse Cultures: the French Experience in Asia 1600- 1700*, edited by Glenn J Ames and Ronald Love; Also see Jean Marie Lafont, *Indika. Essays in Indo- French relations 1630- 1976*. Among studies of non-fictional texts see Jyoti Mohan’s “British and French Ethnographies of India: Dubois and His English Commentators.” And *Claiming India: French Scholars and the Preoccupation with India in the Nineteenth Century*.

<sup>34</sup> Until now, Sonnerat has been studied mostly as a naturalist. Two works worth noting are Thomas Anderson, *Reassembling the strange: naturalists, missionaries, and the environment of nineteenth-century Madagascar*; Michael Adas. *Machines as the measure of men: Science, technology, and ideologies of Western dominance*. The only exception to these may be Paola von Wyss-Giacosa’s study of the visual representations of religion in Sonnerat’s *Voyage* in “Confronting Asia’s ‘Idolatrous Body.’” None these works, however, focus exclusively on Sonnerat or *Voyage*.

<sup>35</sup> I do not claim that Sonnerat was unique in this respect. But he is among the most cited travellers in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century intellectual discourses across Europe that are not limited to natural science or science in general.

This dissertation does not intend to present a survey of French travel writing on India, nor is it an exhaustive study of Sonnerat's *Voyage*. It is meant to be a case study from a vantage point—that of the intersection of travel (writing) and translation. My point of departure for this inquiry was a curiosity about the apparent cultural anomaly that artefacts of Indo-French encounter may seem to represent in postcolonial India, their enmeshment in early colonialism in the subcontinent largely obscured by later developments. Reading Sonnerat's account has turned that curiosity into a question about translation—between languages as well as modes of constructing the world. The polyvalence of Sonnerat's text in the cultural and political histories of India and Europe has determined the nature of the interdisciplinarity brought to bear on its analysis. Rather than focusing exclusively on Sonnerat the naturalist, this dissertation uses natural science as part of the analytical apparatus that also includes religion and language. I consider this approach crucial for exploring the nature of the intertextual (linguistic, literary, cultural) “baggage” permeating translation in travel writing. It is rendered more specific through an interpretive approach to include both the traveller and the travellee as historical subjects in the cultural mediation that connected eighteenth-century India to global networks. Additionally, it is a move toward shifting similar analyses away from national histories toward at once local contexts and transnational approaches based on the model of cultural transfer. In this respect, this project extends research that examines eighteenth and nineteenth-century history of India as embedded in an imperial network of information and includes the French factor. Sonnerat's account here is representative of colonial-era French travel writing on India and overlaps with British accounts. But it is also idiosyncratic: its intertextuality suggesting processes that were unique to a particular representation of India. This also determines which local—culture and its practitioner—is brought into the analysis. These considerations have necessitated an exploration of both the spatial and temporal dimensions of translation, it is the latter that help

trace the tenuous yet essential connections between individual European travel accounts and the larger colonial project of turning knowledge into power in India, a process that crystalized in the nineteenth century. Awareness of the temporal dimension is important for understanding if and how certain colonial-era modes of harnessing knowledge have endured to our time.

Sonnerat's interest in India's antiquity was shared by several other French travellers in eighteenth-century India, including Anquetil-Duperron, d'Obsonville, Polier: they often drew on the same sources to write their accounts. But the discourses were also mediated by distinct affiliations and experiences. It is my hope that the project will inspire further interdisciplinary research into the numerous hitherto unexplored French accounts of India written in the late eighteenth century.<sup>36</sup> A different text, read and translated through a different disciplinary and analytical framework, may shed light on yet other facets of mediation at the intersection of travel writing and translation.

### **Translating *Voyage*: notes on methodology**

The decision to translate Pierre Sonnerat's *Voyage* stems from the understanding that translation, like history, is "at once a sequence of human acts, and a narrative recounting it, both being and representation" (Asad 1995, 225). Secondly, the cross-lingual and cross-cultural study of concepts and discursive practices, including concepts and practices of translation, requires the use of translative operations.

*Voyage* was published in two volumes, the first of which, consisting of 363 pages divided into three parts, describes aspects of India. My focus in this volume are the observations on religion, history, and language.

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<sup>36</sup> For a comprehensive list of the French accounts from the period, see Guy Deleury's *Les Indes florissantes: anthologie des voyageurs français 1750-1820* (1991).

The research and translation approach adopted in this project stems from the goal of situating *Voyage* and its content in their socio-political, cultural, and discursive contexts. The translation draws on the concept of “thick translation” proposed by Anthony Appiah (1993, 2000), which drew on anthropologist Clifford Geertz’s elaboration of the concept of “thick description.” The method seeks to put translation in the same plane as the explanatory and the interpretive, to suggest ways in which Sonnerat’s account could be read with attention to the co-constitutive relation between the mediating factors in the text.

The sections translated are the Foreword, Introduction, and excerpts from Chapter XII (on language and writing). The process of reading the text-in-context has necessitated a consideration of the paratextual elements in the publication, since these help reflect on the material conditions of production of the book in a particularly vivid manner. My decision to translate the Foreword has been determined by the fact that it seems to be written by the author—which is often not the case—and emerges as integral to the exploration of *Voyage*. The significance of the paratextual elements to the translation is discussed in relation to translation and travel writing.

Translation figures in this research as both the object and mode of analysis. The annotations of excerpts from the translated sections (introductory chapter and chapter on language) of the main text are organized in three main categories: religion, time, language. The categories interweave in the annotations, reflecting the co-constitutive nature of their relationship, and are connected to perspectives in translation studies as well as travel writing, ethnography, science, and linguistics.

My focus here is on exploring the assumptions and mechanisms at play in translating difference into commensurability, particularly in relation to the traveller’s *located* understanding of language, which has emerged as the dominant category. Its entwining with religion and time is explored through a comparative approach looking at French and Indian

attitudes to language, with a focus on the multilinguality of India. Here the French understanding is juxtaposed against the context of the Indian vernacular language and its practitioners. The goal here is to go beyond the perspective of the traveller to include the travellee and consider both as socialized subjects linked to networks of other social agents.

This dissertation does not include a discussion the English translation<sup>37</sup> of *Voyage* by Francis Magnus. The excerpts I have translated are meant to elaborate arguments and furnish examples, and a comparison with Magnus' rendering is outside the scope of this study. I want to note, however, that Magnus' translation takes quite a few liberties with the source text, the most noticeable being the rearrangement and exclusion of contents present in the first edition. For example, the chapter on European interference in India since 1763 (the only reference in the book to the contemporary political context of India involving Europeans) (Chapter 1 of Book 1 vol I in *Voyage*) is left out in that translation.

The translated sections (Foreword, Introduction, excerpts from Chapter XII) are included in their entirety in Appendix B.

### **Note on the choice of edition**

Despite the mixed reviews it received in the European press, and partially because of the criticism it evoked, *Voyage aux Indes orientales et à la Chine* garnered a wide European readership.

In 1806, more than two decades after the first publication of *Voyage*, French naturalist Sonnini de Manoncourt published a second edition comprising parts of Sonnerat's original manuscript and scientific notes prepared by the editor, with the addition of official documents which were no longer official secrets (Ly-Tio-Fane 130).<sup>38</sup> I have decided to examine the first

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<sup>37</sup> *Voyage to the East Indies and China* (1788-89).

<sup>38</sup> As I note in Chapter 1, Between 1782 and 1795 *The Calcutta Gazette*, *The Calcutta Chronicle*, *The New Review* and *The British Critic*, the last two published in London, brought out dozens of notices

edition since the latter one, because of the two-decade gap that separates it from its predecessor, is situated in its own distinct socio-political setting, an exploration of which is outside the scope of the present project.<sup>39</sup>

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announcing the publication of the work in original or in English translation, alongside reviews of or references to it.<sup>38</sup> Yasmine Marcil's study of travel accounts in European periodical press (2006) indicates that Sonnerat's work on India was the most mentioned (thirty-two times between 1782 and the end of the century) of the travel accounts published in late eighteenth-century France.

<sup>39</sup> One obvious difference is that first and second editions are located before and after the French Revolution (1789).

## 1 Anatomy of a Triangle

### 1.1 Introduction

Travelling in India in the 1780s, Le Maistre de la Tour, French military adventurer and officer in Haider Ali's army, bemoaned the tendency of the English in India to distort Indian names, and the fact that the French gazetteers—because they copied the English—repeated the mistakes (xi-xii).<sup>40</sup> The Irish novelist Charles Johnston, in India around the same time, noted with comic dismay the mixture of “frenchified English and Angli[ci]sed French” that characterized Kolkata society of the time. For Johnston, who made his reputation as a novelist in the 1760s, during the Seven Years War between France and Britain, such a mixture was nothing short of compounding oil and vinegar. Yet his “staunchly British protestant perspective in the Calcutta Gazette was subtly undermined, he realized, by his own Irishness” (Roberts 12). Johnston's realization of the provisional nature of national and ethnic groupings in the context of European colonialism is so acute that he views India as a lunar realm wherein all the common prejudices of nationality are challenged. “As for your country, suspend your patriotism for a few minutes, and you shall see enough to make you sick of it forever” (12). If the references to French in these stories seem out of place in the context of eighteenth-century India, it is because mainstream scholarly research on India's encounter with the West has largely treated early colonial India as an Anglophone space. In keeping with the elision of the Indo-French encounter in current British, French, and Indian historiography, French discourses of India, much of it found in travel accounts, have been subsumed into the larger categories and tropes of Anglo-centric colonial representation. The history of the French on the subcontinent, particularly from the eighteenth century, has instead been largely confined to military and trade histories, histories of the *comptoirs*

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<sup>40</sup> *Histoire d'Ayder-Ali-Khan* (1783), vol. 1.

(fortified trading posts), and biographies of individuals employed there (Marsh 2009, 2). The general and overwhelming focus on Anglophone texts has had the effect of undermining the mediated and heterogenous nature of colonial knowledge and oriental scholarship, their construction and circulation, suggesting instead an unadulterated British presence in India in the early days of colonialism. This perception is hardly borne out by the travel accounts from the time.

This dissertation is premised on a view of eighteenth-century India as a triangular discursive space involving India, France and Britain. In focusing on the French factor, it subscribes to and extends the view that far from being the site of a monolithic imperial presence, eighteenth-century India was more of a contact zone, to use Mary Louise Pratt's term (1992)—a site of encounter between disparate European and native presences.

Following current research in Francophone representations of India that argues against merging the eighteenth-century French accounts with the largely Anglophone discourses of the nineteenth century, I approach the French accounts as dynamic and distinct representations that should be explored on their own terms, while taking note of the continuities between European discourses of the subcontinent within and across the two centuries.

This approach to understanding early colonial presence in India is informed by research that considers Indo-French encounter of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as integral to understanding the specific nature of colonial discourse of the subcontinent.<sup>41</sup> It is particularly indebted to the work of Kate Marsh (2009, 2013), which examines French language representations of India and posits eighteenth-century India as a triangular colonial

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<sup>41</sup> See for example, Ian Magedera. *France-India-Britain, (Post) Colonial Triangles: Mauritius/India and Canada/India, (Post) Colonial Tangents*"; Ian Magedera and Kate Marsh. "'Les cinq noms sonores': the French voice in the story of British India 1763–1954"; Maya Jasanoff. *Edge of Empire: Conquest and Collecting in the East 1750-1850*.

space, a site of “competing colonialisms” (Marsh 2013,19, Elizabeth Ezra 3-4) shaped by France’s subordinate position to Britain. Marsh underlines the discursive relationship between France, India, and Britain, thereby challenging the simplistic and persistent image of colonial presence in India as exclusively Anglophone. This approach has the salutary effect of questioning the binary-bound view of colonial representation that Edward Said’s theory of orientalism would seem to support.<sup>42</sup> It seeks to unravel the intertwined history of France and Britain in India, and foregrounds France’s subordinate colonial status as a crucial factor in shaping France’s relation with Britain both in India and Europe. Here any elaboration of opposition between the colonizer and the colonized must make room for a *shifting* mediating third presence: France as a subordinate colonizer, for whom late eighteenth-century India was as much a “locus for exploring British alterity and assessing French national interests as [...] for engaging with the inhabitants of the subcontinent” (Marsh 2009, 4). Through a synthetic reading of fictional works and travelogues, Marsh has posited a significant counter-narrative to the *grand récit* of the British Empire in India, establishing that within French cultural production, “the trope of India was employed not as a means of imposing and maintaining its own colonial power but rhetorically to oppose another colonizer, its European rival Britain” (5). Moreover, despite its negligible importance in French commercial and territorial

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<sup>42</sup> Among critics of Said’s *Orientalism*, see *Critical Terrains* by Lisa Lowe. Distinguishing between British and French orientalisms, Lowe “resists totalizing orientalism as a monolithic, developmental discourse that uniformly constructs the Orient as the Other of the Occident,” arguing instead for a view of orientalism as consisting “of an uneven matrix of orientalist situations across different cultural and historical sites” (4-5). In addition, each of these orientalisms is internally complex and unstable, with narratives of gendered, racial, national, and class differences complicating the narrative of orientalism (5). For a general account of arguments for and against Said’s approach also see the introduction *Orientalism: A reader*, edited by Alexander Lyon Macfie; Also see Richard King’s. *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and “The Mystic East.”*; David Kopf’s. “Hermeneutics versus history”; John M MacKenzie’s “Edward Said and the historians”; Aijaz Ahmad’s “Between Orientalism and historicism: anthropological knowledge of India.”

interests, India in the second half of the eighteenth century had “cultural ramifications for conceptions of ‘Frenchness’” (5), as illustrated in the recurring themes and strategies of representing India in French texts of the time. Besides introducing these re-orientations, works like Marsh’s are crucial for the present research, particularly for its adoption of a “European ‘planetary consciousness’” (Pratt 1992, 9, Marsh 2009, 4) brought to bear upon the study of colonial presence in India at a specific time.

Another major study premised on a triangular view of eighteenth-century India is that of Muzaffar Alam and Seema Alavi titled *A European Experience of the Mughal Orient: The Ijaz-I Arsalani* (2007). In their introduction to this English translation of Swiss-French traveller and Anglophile Antoine Polier’s Persian letters, Alam and Alavi delve into the complexities of the Indo-French encounter and its integral role in the emergence of the EEIC from a tentative to a stable colonial presence through mid and late eighteenth-century (Alam and Alavi). It disputes the “reified image of the British as culturally definable and politically demarcated” and puts to question the “notion of [...] an unadulterated Britishness within Britain’s colonial success” (Alam and Alavi 18). More importantly for this research, Alam and Alavi’s work underscores the distinct and complex nature of Indo-French cultural interaction—including the mediating role of the British in it—and the collection, construction, and movement of knowledge through translation that it facilitated.

## **1.2 Context of French presence in India**

France’s political influence in India was largely determined by the extent of its geographical possessions in the region. The idea of establishing an empire in India was no doubt given impetus by the tumultuous internal political situation in the subcontinent in the first half of the eighteenth century: a weakened Mughal ruler based in Delhi and rising conflicts between regional powers like the Nawab of Awadh, the Marathas, the Nizam of

Hyderabad and the ruler of Mysore, all vying to fill the power vacuum. But the role of Joseph-François Dupleix (1697-1763), the first European to take advantage of internal disputes of Indian rulers (Sen 27) for the French East India Company's (henceforth, the FEIC) territorial expansion, was equally important in this context. The short-lived French political influence in India reached its zenith under Dupleix's governorship. His plan to intervene in local disputes for territorial gain ultimately failed because of lack of support from Versailles while similar plans were successfully implemented by the British.

The diminishing importance of France's presence on the subcontinent in the second half of the eighteenth century while the British under the aegis of the EEIC increasingly occupied centre stage was related to the political scenario in Europe. British victory over France and Spain in the Seven Years War culminated in the Treaty of Paris (1763), following which French territories in India were reduced to the five *comptoirs* of Pondichéry, Karikal, Yanaon, Mahé, and Chandernagor, the first four scattered along the southern coastline of India,<sup>43</sup> the last one an isolated pocket in Eastern India near Calcutta (now Kolkata). The post-treaty years saw French presence in India become not only "peripheral" (Marsh 2009, 1), but also lacking territorial unity (Sudipta Das). The trading posts, occupying approximately 56,000 hectares or 560 square kilometres, maintained that size until 1962, when France formally ceded control and left India.<sup>44</sup>

Anglo-French antagonism, illustrated by a series of military encounters and a general state of war and hostilities, dominated the period. The French foreign policy of *revanche* in

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<sup>43</sup> A number of the French travellers, including Pierre Sonnerat, spent much of their time in South India due to the location of the *comptoirs*, and restrictions imposed on their movement by the EEIC. This largely explains the specificity of their knowledge of the subcontinent, as well as the rich French scholarship on literatures and languages of South India, particularly in Tamil studies.

<sup>44</sup> Ironically, while India gained independence from Britain in 1947, the *comptoirs*, however nominal their autonomy, continued to exist until 1954, when power was formally handed over to India. This *de facto* withdrawal was not ratified by the *Assemblée nationale* until 1962. By then the French presence in India had persisted for almost 300 years.

the years between 1763 and 1783—seeking to reverse the Peace of Paris by restoring pre-war commercial and colonial equilibrium—motivated the monarchy’s attitude towards the British in Europe, North America and India. In North America, Anglo-French rivalry reached its climax during the Seven Years War, and the best-known scene of eighteenth-century Anglo-French imperial war, the Battle of the Plains of Abraham (1759), unfolded on the banks of the St. Lawrence River (Jasanoff 17). In India, British dominance of Indian trade was the rationale that provided the impetus for Anglo-French confrontations. While British triumph over the French in Quebec has been considered the defining moment in Anglo-French wars and the British empire, as Jasanoff observes, equally consequential for shaping Britain’s global position was the battle of Plassey (1757) in India, in which EEIC troops led by Robert Clive defeated the nawab of Bengal, the latter known to have French allies.

Two points warrant attention in this context: first, the French accounts draw attention to the fact that despite the predominantly Anglophone nature of postcolonial discourses surrounding India that examine the intersecting relationship between imperialism, orientalism and romanticism (Marsh 2009, 2), British rule in India was not unchallenged. While any “attempt to interpret the nature of the French presence in India must necessarily take into account the “general objectives” (Sudipta Das 4) of Versailles—since they were largely shaped by France’s European interests—the view that French designs in India were non-imperialist has its dissenters, who maintain that the French sought to resuscitate their lost power after the debacle of 1763. British historiographer of the EEIC Robert Orme described the French as “aggressors” (5) and “their intent was no less than to add provinces in Asia to the dominion of their monarch” (5). Second, when reading the French texts, one should not draw conclusions from individual accounts to create an idea of a homogeneous and unproblematic French national identity, given the Parisian intellectual domination of the

printed word in eighteenth-century France (Marsh 2009, 3). My discussion of French attitude of India's languages seeks to underscore this point.

Notwithstanding the French policy of *revanche* toward Britain, territorial expansion for its own sake was against the policy of the FEIC representatives. The French Governor General's expansionist policy was proving to be costly and a major cause for concern among shareholders. The rationale provided by the FEIC for its decision to recall Dupleix to France was the need for commercial stability (Marsh 2009, 13). The Governor General had forced the FEIC into a war that had proved fatal to commercial success. In 1777, the French Governor General in Pondichéry Law de Lauriston wrote to the Ministère de la marine that the French needed arms for India only to be able to carry out trade "on an equal footing with the European nations most favoured by the powers to whom India belongs" (Lauriston 110, cited in Marsh 2009, 13).<sup>45</sup> The other important factor behind the decision was the Court's concern that Dupleix's actions would lead to another military conflict with Britain (Marsh 2009, 13). In December 1754, his successor, Godeheu, characterized by Voltaire as a "négociant sage et pacifique" (wise and peaceful merchant) (Voltaire 1774, 177),<sup>46</sup> concluded an agreement according to which the British and the French were to forgo involvement in conflicts between Indian princes and renounce ambitions of territorial expansion. The policy of non-intervention however did not last long. The effect of the Seven Years War was soon felt in India. In the aftermath of the Treaty of Paris which ended the war, French foreign policy was guided by principles of restoration and conservation rather than expansion.

The French foreign policy of *revanche* in the years between 1763 and 1783—seeking to reverse the Peace of Paris by restoring pre-war commercial and colonial equilibrium—could not be separated from the British dominance of Indian trade, or from the principal

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<sup>45</sup> *État politique de l'Inde* (1777). Translation from French in Marsh (2009).

<sup>46</sup> *Fragmens sur quelques revolutions dans l'inde*.

combat in Europe (Sudipta Das 11). India became as much a site for assessing French national interests and elaborating a distinct French intellectual identity as for knowing the inhabitants of the region. There was this juxtaposition of increased knowledge about the subcontinent—its geography, languages, religion, society—and a positing of French presence as an alternative to British despotism. French cultural production during this time and the trope of India in it should be seen in terms of maintaining France's territorial possessions and furthering its commercial interests, but also opposing the other colonial presence even if mostly rhetorically. Following France's entry into the American War of Independence in support of the American rebels, the *comptoirs* were once again occupied by the British, a fate experienced first-hand by Sonnerat. The Treaty of Versailles of 1783 saw no attempt on the part of the French government to improve on the Treaty of Paris. Intervention in the American War of Independence had financially ruined the French government, which was in charge of the trading posts at the time. Despite appeals from Indophiles, adventurers and soldiers who advocated for a more active French presence in India, Versailles steadfastly stuck to its policy of non-intervention. The precarious state of the *comptoirs* became absolute (Marsh 2009, 15) during the revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. In 1801, once again, France lost their possessions in India, which were returned to her as part of the Second Treaty of Paris of 1815. This time, however, the trading posts were demilitarized and left economically dependent on the surrounding British territory.

As with other European countries, France's encounter with India began with commercial interests. In 1604 King Henri IV—following the examples of the English and Dutch governments, which had already established Indian companies—sanctioned the issuing of the first charter to a FEIC. The first recorded French expedition to the subcontinent took place that year followed by another in 1615. Despite reports of the subcontinent's fabulous wealth it was only in 1664 that Jean-Baptiste Colbert revived the flagging trade with the

Orient with the formation of the *Compagnie française des Indes orientales*. Colbert wanted to make use of the advantages of Asian commerce for the kingdom and prevent the Dutch and the English from profiting from it alone—a concern which seemed to influence French travellers interested in commerce at least until the end of the eighteenth century. The FEIC—like its Dutch and English counterparts—had a national monopoly on trade between the State and Indian traders, the right to maintain an army, negotiate treaties, exercise justice and mint money. The first fortified trading posts of the French were established at Surat in 1668, and at Masulipatam in 1669, on condition that they would pay a portion of their profits to the local ruler. The FEIC, however, soon encountered difficulties when it incurred expenses in its attempts to create colonies in Madagascar and on the uninhabited Ile Bourbon (La Réunion). It was unable to provide its shareholders with any profits after 1680, and eventually ceded monopoly to a group of merchants from Saint-Malo. The creation of a new FEIC in 1719 was not enough to rid French trade of its problems.

French trade with India, based on importation of luxuries (textiles, spices, incenses, coffee, tea, indigo, diamonds, etc.), was only intermittently as successful as that of its European counterparts (Marsh 2009, 10). To offset a recurrent deficit, French currency was exported to India for the purchase of luxury goods for importation—a system that created a network between India, the West Indies and Africa: bullion and species (also known as *piastres*) would be collected from the West Indies, much of the latter reexported to India to be exchanged for cotton and calicoes, which in turn were shipped to the African Coast to be exchanged for slaves. By virtue of its connection to this network, India enjoyed special importance for a time, even if it was the least profitable establishment in this arrangement. What is worth noting in the context of a global eighteenth-century history is the manner in which such disparate places were often connected through the traveller's itineraries: examples like Charles Godeheu's 1755 *Mémoire sur le Sénégal* chronicling his voyage from

Gorée Island on the West African coast to Pondichéry in South India were by no means atypical for the time. These connections mediated and found mediated presence in French representations of the exotic other, betraying a “slippage of meaning between all non-European people”<sup>47</sup> and the conflation of the three geographical areas of colonial expansion, India, Africa, and the Americas, in some works (Marsh 2009, 64-65).<sup>48</sup>

The FEIC’s trade woes were compounded by restrictions imposed on imported goods from India, as stakeholders in the French textile industry sought to protect their products against foreign competition. The commerce of India had been ruinous for the European fabric manufacturers. Despite the increasing popularity of *Indiennes* (Das, 4), Indian fabric was banned from entering France until 1759. In general, the cost of keeping the FEIC afloat was hardly justified by its returns. The fate of the FEIC’s commerce is discussed by Voltaire, himself a shareholder and a defender of trade,<sup>49</sup> when he notes the “grand et ruineux commerce de l’Inde.”<sup>50</sup> If, however, trade meant overseas expansion and /or monopoly of a compagnie (rather than commercial freedom), there was little appetite for it in pre-revolutionary France. The rise of anti-colonial sentiment was clearly discernible and became especially widespread in the aftermath of the Seven Years War. Therefore, when in 1769 the

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<sup>47</sup> Marsh notes that the conflation of various non-European identities “under the single signifier ‘indien’ was however not unique [...] to French writing [...]. While the philosophical discourses attempted a precise geographic definition of *Inde*, the trading term ‘*Indes*’ referred to a vast geographical area” (2009, 65).

<sup>48</sup> The conflation of the geographical areas could be seen in literature. Kate Marsh (2009) has discussed Olympe de Gouge’s play *Zamore et Mirza; ou l’heureux naufrage, drame indien* (1788) as an example of the ethnic and geographical confusions and approximations (66-77) that connected India, Africa and the Americas.

<sup>49</sup> In line with the views of Enlightenment political economists and inspired by his contacts with the merchant community in England (Gottman 142).

<sup>50</sup> “Grand ruinous trade with India.” *Précis du siècle de Louis XV* (1763). Cited in French and in English translation in Marsh (2009, 11).

FEIC's privileges in India were suspended, the decision was both a commercial and a political one.

The prominence of India in French philosophical debates of the eighteenth century, particularly in the 1770s and 1780s, was largely due to its role in “anti-colonial” thinking (Marsh 2009, 122). The confluence of various anti-colonial opinions in France before the French Revolution is partly attributable to hostility to the *ancien régime*: anti-colonial arguments and mounting criticism of the French monarchy were linked (Marsh 122-123 citing Pitts). Increasing trade with the wider world generated discussion about France's accumulation of territories. For French intellectuals, land accumulation for commerce was not necessarily pernicious, but commerce needed to remain distinct from oppressive practices that would constitute colonialism in modern commentary (123).<sup>51</sup> Criticism of European practices in French discourses about India was informed by the doctrine of the physiocrats, who opposed overseas expansion and the slave trade and supported American independence and idealized the noble savage (Marsh 2009). For the Physiocrats, France's hope of economic recovery in the aftermath of the Seven Years War lay in agriculture rather than overseas trade and colonies. (Marsh 2009, 123). The French bourgeoisie, as Sudipta Das points out (23) was “wary of investing in distant overseas ventures” and would rather spend money on enterprises nearer home. Peasants were anticolonial because the only tangible effect of remote overseas possessions was the threat of competition for their own farm products (23). Popular antipathy toward colonies seems to have been spurred by the *philosophes* (23)—“The opinions of adversaries of distant professions culminated in the clear and intransigent disapproval of Montesquieu, and Diderot” (René Sédillot quoted in Sudipta Das, 23). In the introduction to his translation of the Persian *Zend-Avesta*, traveller Anquetil-Duperron<sup>52</sup>—whose stay in

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<sup>51</sup> This opinion was shared by Montesquieu, Voltaire, Raynal, Diderot.

<sup>52</sup> Anquetil travelled to India in search of Sanskrit and Farsi texts, and his writings, including the introductions to the translations, provide insight into the triangular colonial relations in India

India coincided with the Seven Years War—noted his disappointment with the colonial enterprise and the “greediness and arrogance of Europeans” in India (Stuurman 260).

Anquetil’s criticism of colonialism and Eurocentrism (Stuurman 256), manifest in his oriental scholarship,<sup>53</sup> was no doubt shaped by the rhetoric of liberty persistent among the *philosophes* in France and French officials in India in the eighteenth century. At the same time, in the late eighteenth-century French travel accounts, it had become customary to make at least a token reference to European rapaciousness in India. The French fancied themselves potential liberators (Marsh 2009, 136) of India. The idea of French trade free of British control was seen to be consistent with Indian liberty (Marsh 2009, 134). But, despite its checkered history, maritime trade with India had its defenders in France’s influential circles. As a result, as late as 1785, a new *Compagnie* was set up. It enjoyed a monopoly on Indian trade until 1790, when it was abolished by the *Assemblée nationale constituante* in revolutionary France.

### 1.3 The Anglo-French network in eighteenth-century India

Anglo-French rivalries in mid and late eighteenth-century India intertwined with indigenous rivalries in consequential ways for Europe and India. While the weakened Mughal ruler was based in Delhi, regional powers like the Nawab of Awadh, the Marathas, the Nizam of Hyderabad, and the ruler of Mysore were gaining in strength. There were conflicts between the semi-independent local princes alongside clashes between the Europeans (French, English, Dutch). The French representatives, irrespective of the central

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<sup>53</sup> Anquetil-Duperron disagreed on certain points with the French *philosophes*. In his *Législation orientale* (1778) he sought to debunk the idea of absence of private property in Asia, central to Montesquieu’s theory of oriental despotism, through a translation of Mughal legal documents. Here he cites authors who adopted Montesquieu’s perspective, crucially EEIC employee Alexander Dow. See Whelan “Oriental Despotism: Anquetil-Duperron’s Response to Montesquieu” and Stuurman “Cosmopolitan Egalitarianism in the Enlightenment: Anquetil Duperron on India and America” for discussions of that work.

policy of the FEIC, enjoyed a certain amount of freedom in this instability. The distance between France and India was no doubt a contributing factor in a decentralized French presence. But however anti-expansionist in its essence, French strategy in India could not be separated from the general consensus among the French on the need to limit British power. With the diminishing presence of the Dutch through the mid 1700s, the only effective challenge to British territorial expansion in India could be posed by France, and France's plight in India did not befit its status in Europe. On the other hand, while certain Indian rulers viewed France as a political ally against the British, for the French to hold on to the Indian territories the commitment to fighting the British needed to be more rhetorical than real. In any case, the official pledges of help for the regional Indian rulers in India never materialized, and developments in India often demonstrated a gap between the policy of Versailles and its implementation on the ground.

The series of defeats suffered by France during the Seven Years War had also left hundreds of French nationals and Francophones on Indian soil available for private hire, and a large number of them found employment across the region—often in local kingdoms for training indigenous armies. Several of them, organized into French brigades mainly in the states of Mysore, Hyderabad and Gwalior, were a cause for great concern to the EEIC. Depending on their ideological affiliations and personal histories, these “military adventurers” espoused royalist sympathies (as did Benoit de Boigne) or brought ideas of revolution to India (for example, the founding of a Jacobin club in Seringapatam in 1797) (Marsh 2009, 18). At least in part, the lack of support from Versailles led these men to enlist the help of local rulers in the mission to curb the expansion of British power in India.

The circumstances of French travel to India during the period is also part of the rapidly changing character of European presence in general in eighteenth-century India, many of whom decided to settle down in the subcontinent and developed vested interests in

the politics of the land. While Anglo-French rivalry came to characterize inter-European relations in India during much of the second half of the century, an informal network of Europeans dominated by Frenchmen was in operation. These men—architects, engineers, naturalists, traders, informers—often worked with both the EEIC officials and the Indian rulers and were an integral part of the support system that helped sustain and expand British influence in India under the EEIC (Alam & Alavi 19).<sup>54</sup> Many of them travelled to India with the hope of making a fortune and returning home more established than they were when they left. Many of them, including Frenchmen, worked for the local princes, often changed jobs and exchanged information with the regional rulers and the British. While several of the French travel accounts from this period are by individual scholars, translators and men of science whose travels to India were sponsored by private patrons in France or/ and relatives already employed in India (like Anquetil-Duperron, Antoine Polier), there were others who served multiple establishments at the same time—like Pierre Sonnerat, who was affiliated with both the *Académie royale des sciences* and the FEIC. The EEIC officials, while open to using the French to their political advantage, expressed unease at their presence: British officers complained about the fact that Shuja-ud-Daula, the ruler of Awadh, maintained Frenchmen in his service, and attempts were made “to put a stop to such tribes of these Frenchmen” (Alam and Alavi, 19). The EEIC even decided to issue passports to officers traveling within India on service in order to monitor and restrict the movements of the French. Antoine Polier, a Swiss-French<sup>55</sup> and one of the most prominent European travellers in India at the time, enjoyed the patronage of both Shuja-ud-Daula and the British. Polier supplied Warren Hastings with information about Frenchmen residing in India. At the same

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<sup>54</sup> See a detailed discussion of this in Alam and Alavi. “Introduction.” *A European Experience of the Mughal Orient: The I'jaz-i Arsalani* (Persian Letters, 1773-1779) of Antoine-Louis-Henri Polier.

<sup>55</sup> Polier, often identified as French, belonged to a family of French Protestants who had fled to Switzerland in mid-sixteenth century because of religious persecution of Huguenots in France.

time, there was talk in the British ranks of his role in encouraging French trading and espionage activities. And the British sought to curtail the ease with which Polier was able to travel in India.<sup>56</sup>

The French were a source of both suspicion and sustenance for the British: some of these men were indeed in direct contact with officials in the French *comptoirs* and received support and letters of recommendation from the FEIC representatives when seeking employment under the local rulers (Alam & Alavi). But there was also no denying the need in the British camp for the surveys, maps and other intelligence gathered by men like Antoine Polier, Jean-Baptiste Gentil, Claude Martin, and others, who made up the “continental underbelly” (Alam and Alavi 18) of the EEIC. Administrative need influenced a compromise between theory and practice in Britain’s relation with other Europeans in the subcontinent.

It is worth noting that while neither Versailles nor the successive Republican and Imperial regimes had a coherent policy regarding expansion in India, perception of French influence in that region was a constant preoccupation in intellectual and colonial discourses in France, and any interpretation of French prestige increasingly involved taking into account the British factor. But the situation in India in some ways was not unlike other sites of encounter in the eighteenth-century global expansion of European trade: “[...] the national labels of ‘French’ and ‘British’ were flexible categories at best” (Jasanoff 27). The EEIC army, much like the army of the British Crown, relied heavily on continental European volunteers – at times drawing as much as half its strength from non-British nationals. The FEIC was also a hybrid creation, consisting of a range of Europeans, including Scots and Irish. The boundaries between ally and opponent could not be defined exclusively in ethnic

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<sup>56</sup> A skilled mediator and an expert at self-fashioning, Antoine Polier built a successful life in India as an informant for the Europeans and Indians, and as a collector and seller of Indian manuscripts and art. He was also a major supplier of ancient Indian manuscripts to the British and was made a member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1786.

and racial terms (27). What is not commonly recognized is the precarious state of British presence in India before the turn of the nineteenth century—the period under consideration in this study was a formative one for Britain and for India: in 1750, with a population of eight million, Britain was half the size of its historic enemy France, “an imbalance that provoked tremendous national anxiety” (5). In the mid 1700s, it was one of several European nations—including Portugal, the Netherlands, France, Denmark—that maintained trading outposts along the coastline of India. Things would change dramatically in the next hundred years both within and outside Europe: by the mid 1800s, Britain would enjoy unprecedented diplomatic and political authority in Europe and overseas (5). But such an outcome was not a given in the preceding century.

#### **1.4 Connected discourses**

In her study of British discourses of India during the former’s transition from “trading partner to ruling power,” Kate Teltscher explores some of the common European conventions for representing India between 1600-1800 that eventually made way for a more distinctly British colonial discourse. One of her main arguments is that in the period concerned, “European and British texts create a network of intersecting and contending discourses about India” (2). If seventeenth and eighteenth-century British accounts of India, dominated by merchants, captains, diplomats and accompanying chaplains, tended to focus on the possibilities of trade and represented India as a land of fertility and wealth (Teltscher), this convention was not unique to English writing. It travelled linguistic and cultural boundaries in Europe through translation. Trade was the primary reason for travelling to India for almost all Europeans in the period mentioned, and until the mid-eighteenth century, it is more accurate to talk of a European rather than English (or British) tradition of representing India (Teltscher 1995, 3). Despite “national or regional differences between Europeans [...], by the

middle years of that century, a sense of commonness, as well as a clear sense of distinctness from the ‘Asiatics’ existed” (Subrahmanyam 230),<sup>57</sup> and was reflected in the travelogues. Travel writings in European languages during seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including in French, were frequently translated into English and helped establish many of the *topoi* that circulated in Anglophone accounts of India (Teltscher 1995, 3). François Bernier’s *Mughal History* (1656-68) and Jean-Baptiste Tavernier’s *Six Voyages* (1675) were two well-known works translated in 1671-2 and 1677 respectively. In the first half of the eighteenth century, “Europe viewed India through the medium of the missionary letters” (4). Between 1702 and 1776, the French Jesuits published their collection from around the world, including India. Selections of these, titled *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, were translated into English in 1743, into German between 1728 and 1755, and were an important reference for French intellectuals. The second half of the century saw a steady stream of travel accounts, scholarly journals and histories, together with some novels and poetry, published in both London and Calcutta. French naturalist Pierre Sonnerat’s *Voyage*, one of the most cited French accounts of India in Europe, was translated into English in 1788 and enjoyed wide coverage in the British press. This does not deny the traffic of information from English into French and other European languages. Bernard Cohn has convincingly argued that British texts such as dictionaries, grammars, treatises produced in the mid-eighteenth century “had the effect of converting Indian forms of knowledge into European objects” (1996, 21). The familiarity of the European reading public with the British world during the eighteenth century, turning *anglophobie* into *anglomanie*, owed much to French translations of English travelogues (Marcil 2006).

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<sup>57</sup> “Profiles in transition: Of adventurers and administrators in south India, 1750-1810.”

Recognizing the gradual emergence of a distinctly British tradition of writing about India after 1765—the year the EEIC was granted Diwani<sup>58</sup> of Bengal—should not however overshadow the fact that the second half of that century also saw the publication of a large body of French writings on India, including 135 travel accounts between 1757 and 1815 (D’Souza 11). These writings underline the role of interplay of “European mimetic capital” (Greenblatt 8) that easily crossed linguistic and national boundaries and individual European and native voices in constructing discourses of India. They also established many of the commonplaces in travelogues that distinguished India from the more generalized image of the Orient.<sup>59</sup> <sup>60</sup> For instance, alongside the feminine images of India (*sati* and the *bayadère*) there was the view of India as an archaic unchanging land, a land of excess and easy fertility, ideas about the native intermediary (the recalcitrant and secretive Brahmin), belief systems (metempsychosis, reincarnation) and the organization of Hindu society in castes. The inclusion of these tropes become obligatory in travelogues for them to be considered convincing portrayals of India, and the images that assigned the region its otherness were based on assumptions that transcended generic divisions of discourses. The second half of the century, with the gradual expansion and consolidation of British influence and territorial control over India, saw the emergence of a more distinct British tradition of writing about the region. In this new context travel writing played its part in “promoting the idea of British rule and also articulating its attendant anxieties” (Teltscher 2002, 192).<sup>61</sup> In the French accounts

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<sup>58</sup> The right to collect revenue.

<sup>59</sup> As Marsh notes, some of the tropes associated with India had already been established in the 1760s. See *India in the French Imagination* (2009), 23-2. See the same work also for a discussion of how the French writing of India was used to construct the otherness of Europeans (27).

<sup>60</sup> The importance of convention in determining the content of travel accounts has been discussed by Charles Batten in *Pleasurable Instruction: Form and Convention in Eighteenth-Century Travel Literature*.

<sup>61</sup> Teltscher notes Jemima Kindersley’s *Letters* (1777), William Hodges’ *Travels in India* (1793) as examples of texts that sought to promote the new set of stereotypes designed to justify British

(for example by Anquetil-Duperron, Pierre Sonnerat) the generic oriental despot came to be replaced (at least partially) by rapacious Europeans (particularly Britons) exploiting the people of India. The defeat of Tipu Sultan (who fought in alliance with the French) in 1799 heralded the beginning of a still more assured British presence in India, and a more confident rhetoric of British supremacy emerged. But considerable overlaps between the European representations persisted: by the turn of the nineteenth century, both English and French travellers were engaged in classifying the religious, social, and political institutions of India. Hindu history, often standing for Indian history during this time, was sought to be integrated into histories of humankind, and ancient Indian civilization compared to those of Egypt, Rome, or Greece (Marsh 2009, 69). Use of certain tropes, as this study will seek to demonstrate, not only had the effect of “leveling” the distinct places the traveller visited within India, it also made local languages or cultural practices synecdochical of the country as a whole.

### **1.5 Some implications of a triangular approach**

An approach to early colonial India as a triangular discursive space recognizes that irrespective of language, genre or discipline, it is necessary that the European travel accounts from that period be situated in a network of agents and ideas, of local, national and transnational influences. Teltscher, for example, organizes a discursive framework around colonial authority, connecting specific areas in which power and authority were at work in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European texts.<sup>62</sup> It is a framework that was “particularly amenable to later colonial use” (1995, 2). A similar one can be organized to

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territorial expansion. These accounts portrayed the incompetence of the Mughal ruler, the inherent submissive nature of Indians or the “benign nature of the British rule” (2002, 192).

<sup>62</sup> Her discussion deals with questions related to power of the Mughal empire, power and women, spiritual authority of the Europeans missionaries.

examine the discourse of language and translation in French travel accounts. In a multilingual context like India's, knowledge of the land for the traveller would have to happen often through specific local experiences relying on the expertise of both native agents and Europeans. And while it is necessary to situate discourses found in the travel texts within specific national, social, religious contexts, there is also a need to recognize how they "reproduce and build on each other" (Teltscher 1995, 2), and the manner in which the native interlocutor figures in them. These accounts therefore "cannot be forced to tell a single narrative" (2).

This situating of travel writing and translation in a network of information aligns with concepts such as connected histories, circulation and *histoire croisée* (Werner and Zimmermann), all of which approach histories as relational and organic, and focus on bringing out the "enmeshed nature of cultures across the world, the commonalities on which intercultural contact is constructed and the ways people or groups of people cross cultural barriers" (Raj 2016, 40). As Werner and Zimmerman point out, the notion of intersection is basic to the very principle of *histoire croisée*. It privileges a "multidimensional approach that acknowledges plurality and the complex configurations that result from it" (Werner and Zimmerman 38) over individual entities "considered exclusively in themselves, with no external reference point" (37-38). As a result, "entities and objects of research are not merely considered in relation to one another but also *through* one another, in terms of relationships, interactions, and circulation" (38 emphasis in original). The perspective, while it draws on a comparative approach, emphasizes the active and dynamic principle of the intersection rather than a "static framework of a [comparison] that tends to immobilize objects" (38). Travel and mobility are therefore central to the elaboration of the concept, which also pays particular attention to the "consequences of intercrossing [and the idea that] to cross is also to crisscross, to interweave [...]. The entities, persons, practices, or objects that are intertwined

with, or affected by, the crossing process do not necessarily remain intact and identical in form. Their transformations are tied to the active as well as the interactive nature of their coming into contact” (38). Such interaction may be based on reciprocity as well as asymmetry (Werner and Zimmerman), since the entities involved in the crossing are not affected in the same manner or to a similar degree. Additionally, as the process of construction and circulation of knowledge in the context of this research suggest, an approach based on the concept of *histoire croisée* underscores that the micro and the macro are inextricably interconnected, so understanding knowledge construction in the political and cultural context of eighteenth-century India and Europe requires taking into account the interconnections between and within the nations and the regions that constitute them.

## 1.6 On “go-betweeners”

In this approach to history and knowledge construction in relational terms, the role of the native translator emerges as critical alongside that of the travel writer. Colonial situations are replete with paradigmatic examples, both fictional and historical, of the traveller versus the local, for instance in the figure of Robinson Crusoe, or Cortes’s interpreter La Malinche—the former “imposing names on people and objects and conducting communication on his own terms” (Polezzi 2001, 77-78), the latter embodying the passive submissive image associated with translation, (as well as for the figure of the interpreter, the often indispensable presence in any exchange in travel).<sup>63</sup> It is worth noting here that like most colonial-era accounts of India, French travelogues are marked by a general tendency to elide the role of the local translator in the traveller’s contact with local knowledge. This creates the impression of a clear distinction between the traveller and the travellee (Pratt), the

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<sup>63</sup> On the figure of Robinson see Hulme, *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the native Caribbean, 1492-1797*.

On La Malinche, see Sherry Simon, *Gender in Translation*.

latter as the former's static other. One goal of this project is to render visible the native translator/interpreter who contributed to the making of the French accounts, in the exchange of knowledge between Indians and Europeans in eighteenth-century multilingual India. Kapil Raj, examining the history of science in colonial India with a focus on mobility of intermediaries, has discussed translators and interpreters as “go-betweens” “ensuring passage between the varied languages and customs” (2016, 41) in spaces of Indo-European encounter in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century India. Raj demonstrates that a variety of go-betweens played crucial roles “not only to enable and sustain the process of European expansion but also to negotiate the very definition of the cultural boundaries which they were to straddle” (Raj 2009, 106). While closely linked with commerce, cross-cultural mediation during this period emerged as a specialized activity in its own right. The intermediaries were known by special appellations: such as *dallal* in Arabic, *meturgeman* in Hebrew, *terjuman* in Turkish (origin of *dragoman* in English), *dubash* or *dobachi* (meaning “person of two tongues”), foregrounding to the multilingual faculty of go-betweens) in most languages of the subcontinent, and “constituted an obligatory passage point for all transactions”(Raj 2016, 41).<sup>64</sup>

While there are numerous references to the local go-betweens in eighteenth-century French accounts of India, one finds few proper names. But even the generic references are worth considering. In his *Voyage dans l'Inde et au Bengale* (1801) Frenchman Grandpré, travelling in the subcontinent in 1789-90, writes about the near-total dependence of European travellers on *dobachis*—the latter generally conversant in multiple Indian and European languages (Grandpré 19). Functioning as translator, advisor, guide, broker and moneylender,

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<sup>64</sup> Raj mentions Marie-Christine Skuncke's book (*Carl Peter Thunberg, Botanist and Physician*, 2014) on the voyage of Linnaeus's pupil Thunberg, to Japan in the late eighteenth century. As he points out, this re-evaluation of the means and methods and brokering talents of a naturalist voyager, “breaks sharply with the common diffusionist perspective” (Skuncke 2014, cited in Raj 2016, 8).

a dobachi was often the traveller's primary source of contact with Indian society (Neild-Basu 2), "rank[ing] high among the shared experiences of European colonial life in Madras" (Neild-Basu 14). Swiss-French Polier, a key presence in the network of Europeans that helped advance the EEIC's imperial project in India in the eighteenth century (Alam and Alavi), employed multiple munshis who wrote the letters on his behalf (Alam and Alavi 13).<sup>65</sup> While munshis (and pandits) as a community of indigenous intellectuals (generally specializing in Islamic and Sanskritic scholarship respectively) had existed since precolonial India, in the eighteenth century their roles somewhat merged with that of the dobachi. Their zone, of particular interest for this research, was largely a vernacular one, and their importance to the Europeans lay in "their ability to mediate between the living languages of India and its classical past" (Hatcher 2017, 110). Understanding their presence involves acknowledging that the "crucial part of the process of intermediation, at least in knowledge-related domains, requires the central actors to be *comparatively* stationary" (Raj 2016, 43 my emphasis). At the same time, this attention "allows for seeing intercultural and interlinguistic relationships at both local and planetary scales [...] and indicates a way of circumventing the prickly problem of changes of social, historical, and geographical scale that has so preoccupied the social sciences, particularly cultural anthropology and sociology" (Raj 2016, 43).<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> According to Alam and Alavi, the "variations in style" suggest that the letters were written by "diverse hands" (13).

<sup>66</sup> As Saunier notes, "these mediators cross scales, places, territories, venture out into spaces with uncertain or moving boundaries, create or use networks. Nomadic experts are neither 'local,' nor 'regional,' nor for that matter are they 'global.' They cross 'classical' territorial formations by juggling with possibilities and constraints, construct spaces tailored to their own activity, cultivate solutions of continuity [and] function through networks" (Raj 2016, 43 citing Saunier).

In eighteenth-century India, besides the polyglot native interpreter/translator,<sup>67</sup> European travellers relatively familiar with the local terrain could also act as go-betweens.<sup>68</sup> One finds the examples of European missionaries, travellers, and colonial officials, with years of experience in the subcontinent, functioning as cultural intermediaries between the locals and the newly arrived. At the same time, the multilinguality of India inevitably required language intermediaries to navigate the infinitely nuanced local linguistic and cultural practices. In such situations, the ambiguous role of the interpreter /translator as both ally and enemy was encoded in the stereotype of the secretive Brahmin who was equally indispensable and untrustworthy.

This image of the local interpreter/ translator has however been reassessed, both in studies of colonial India and in translation studies,<sup>69</sup> by shifting the focus to the points of tension, the in-betweenness and “impurity” that mark the dynamics of translation between unequal partners. This reorientation has in the process connected the myth of the interpreter to current perspectives on translation, turning the uncomfortable position of the translator, straddling the line between cultures, into a metaphor for the unsettled and uncategorizable nature of cultural negotiation and knowledge exchange in general. In light of eighteenth-century India as a triangular discursive space, the image of the mediator as a go-between takes on added complexities.

## 2 Travel Writing and Translation: Theories and Implications

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<sup>67</sup> I refer to the “native” in this research as the “travellee”. Following Pratt’s formulation in *Imperial Eyes* (1992), I define the position of the travellee as that “of the people and places traveled to” (225).

<sup>68</sup> See Hulme’s *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean* (1986) for a discussion of this point.

<sup>69</sup> For example, on Colonial and early colonial India see Kapil Raj’s “Mapping Knowledge: Go-Betweens in Calcutta, 1770–1820.” and “The Historical Anatomy of a Contact Zone: Calcutta in the Eighteenth Century”; Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s “Between a Rock and a Hard Place”; In translation studies see Sherry Simon’s *Gender in Translation* for a reassessment of the local interpreter in a colonial context.

## 2.1 Connected practices

Foremost among translation scholars to draw attention to the links between travel (writing) and translation has been Susan Bassnett, who describes both as “hermeneutic activities” (2000, 106) involving processes of exploration, uncovering and discovering. Bassnett’s attention to the centrality of language in the traveller’s recasting of the foreign—textually and visually—to meet the target reader’s expectations has provided important impetus to research into comparative studies of travel writing and translation, much of it informed by and contributing to postcolonial criticism. Theories at the core of current translation studies have proven central in this respect: a critique of the “schizophrenic position of the literary world with regard to translation” (Bassnett 1995, 140) marked by a preoccupation with a “terminology of negativity,” such as “original,” “accuracy,” “loss,” “betrayal” (140). Such concerns have led to questions about the processes of selection and transmission of texts through translation and how these relate to the highs and lows in translation activity between languages, to colonial and imperial histories—in both their micro and macro manifestations. Questions around the practice of translation within a wider cultural and historical context have brought into the discussion a wide range of texts and discourses—historical, scientific, philosophical, religious, all of which constituted ways of knowing the world and the Self in eighteenth- century and nineteenth-century Europe. Issues central to such knowledge, the construction of which was heavily dependent on accounts of travel and exploration and their circulation through translation, often revolved around the concept of the original (one that is undermined by the idea that meaning is relational)—a preoccupation shared by the majority of European travellers to India, whose purported reasons for travel to India often revolved around locating and accessing ancient texts in their original languages.

Travel and its textual accounts have long been associated with a form of translation of the unknown into terms recognizable to a home audience. The theoretical approaches that

analyze travellers as translators/interpreters are those that help establish links between seventeenth and eighteenth-century European explorations and the construction of knowledge about the world for a domestic European audience. These approaches have come not only from translation studies but also from older fields such as comparative literature, anthropology, etc. Substantial impulse to such approaches and to the analysis of translation as an all-encompassing theoretical model has come from the “shift towards a cultural, rather than strictly linguistic, understanding of translation processes [...]” (Polezzi 2011, 173). This translation in a global sense that travel writing carries out is one of interpretation and representation of the other aimed at making alien places first intelligible and then familiar to the home culture and reader. It is this kind of attribution of meaning that ethnographers have called “cultural translation.”

The idea of “culture as text” has been applied in a most effective and influential way by anthropologist Clifford Geertz. In *The Interpretation of Culture* (1973) Geertz compares culture to a language in the sense of a semiotic code. As he sees it, cultural facts are like texts that demand complex interpretation. The ethnographer, by virtue of the fact that s/he interprets, is a writer of fiction and reality is a product of interpretation. The very act of creating written artefacts making use of rhetorical devices in the target language and by means of selection, editing and analysis points to the production of reality being a complex process not unlike translation (Sturge 2007, 6), although this is a context where the translator creates both source and target texts. Bassnett observes that readings of travel accounts inspired by methodologies derived from fields as diverse as gender studies, cultural studies and postmodern theory expose the “subtexts beneath the apparently innocent details of journeys on other lands that enable us to see clearly the ways in which travellers construct the cultures they experience” (Bassnett 1993, 93). Such readings can help trace the presence of cultural stereotypes, blur the line between the voice of the observer and that of the authority,

and reveal travel writers to be products of their time: “travelling and translating are not transparent activities. They are definitely located activities, with points of origin, points of departure and destinations” (1993,103).

In her analysis Bassnett draws an analogy between the traveller/mapmaker and the translator as two crucial players in the construction of knowledge whose objectivity and impartiality are questioned. Both seem to be subject to attitudes of ambiguity and suspicion, asking to be trusted in their (re) presentation of the source and their faithfulness to reality. The issues of visibility/invisibility that plague the translator are the ones that challenge the mapmaker/traveller as well. The work of both involves a process of manipulation that conditions our attitude toward other cultures. By weaving together the explicit and the implicit, translators intervene in interlingual transfers with every word they choose, just as travel writers constantly position themselves in relation to the context they describe and to their own points of origin (1993, 99).

Studies of the links between travel writing and translation have also been marked by “a tendency to use [the terms] in a rather loose and often figurative manner” (Polezzi 2006, 169), resulting in a shift of attention away from actual practices. Attention to the usefulness of “translation” and “travel” as all-encompassing metaphors—traceable to the etymological root of translation in the Latin word *translatio* suggesting the movement of people or objects across space—has often meant the elision of historicity of languages and translations. Such criticism has come from both translation and travel studies scholars, who call for paying attention to the material contexts of travel and translation and the need to avoid the use of a culturally located (Western) metaphor to all instances of textual transposition.<sup>70</sup> This is

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<sup>70</sup> For approaches to language and translation in India see the Introduction in *Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, edited by Bassnett and Trivedi; In the same volume Ganesh Devy, “Translation and literary history – an Indian view”; Also, Harish Trivedi, “In our own time, on our own terms”; Sujit Mukherjee, *Translation as discovery and other essays on Indian literature in English translation*; Judy Wakabayashi and Rita Kothari, *Decentering translation studies: India and*

significant for contexts like India, where the history of translation and the general attitude to it do not necessarily align with perspectives deriving from European contexts. Reflecting on the use of translation as a term for the postcolonial condition in contemporary English literature of India, Harish Trivedi has questioned the “catachrestic” (Trivedi 2007, 285) use of the word as a metaphorical term (by authors like Lahiri, Bhabha and Rushdie). Both Trivedi and Bassnett point out the need to anchor translation firmly to historically located practice which still speaks of asymmetrical power relationship between the “various local vernaculars [...] and the one master language of our post-colonial world, English” (Bassnett and Trivedi 13). The call here is to keep translation itself from being translated into “a monolingual, monocultural, monolithic world” (Trivedi 2007, 286). In a similar vein, Michael Cronin has linked the increased currency of translation as a term within both popular culture and academic discourse to the specificities of interpersonal communication in a globalized, yet firmly local, post-colonial world, while underlining a paradoxical state of affairs whereby travel and translation come to be used as mere terms emptied of any substance. Cronin points out that major works on travel writing in the last three decades have paid scant attention to the phenomenon of language and translation in the experience of travel (Cronin 2000, 102). A similar criticism comes from Susan Bassnett, who notes that despite its centrality to cultural access, the linguistic dimension of travel is rarely foregrounded in travel writing or travel writing studies (Bassnett 2019, 550).<sup>71</sup>

Notwithstanding the need to anchor the intertwining of translation and travel writing in actual language practices, attention to the links established between the two through their use of common or related metaphors can appreciate the specificity of these connections.

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*beyond*; Elena Di Giovanni, “Translation as Craft, as Recovery, as the Life and Afterlife of a Text: Sujit Mukherjee on Translation in India.”

<sup>71</sup> This absence may be partly attributable to what distinguishes the two: “whereas for translators, a text written in another language is their starting point, for travel writers that ‘text’ is the journey” (Bassnett 2019, 550).

Rainer Guldin notes that the interlinked histories of translation theory and metaphor theory has meant that both the meanings of translation and metaphor have been expanded from purely linguistic to a much broader cultural definition (Guldin 18-19). Within metaphor, the substitution theory stressing the role of metaphors as secondary has given way to perspectives highlighting the epistemological and creative potential for metaphoric thinking. In translation studies, the persistent view of translated texts as secondary to the original, and an unproblematized acceptance of the notion of equivalence have been reassessed and a “transformative view reaffirming the relative autonomy of the translated text and importance of innovative changes occurring during the translation process” (Guldin 18) has become fundamental to the way translation is approached. Both these changes point to a move from a dualistic vision to one underscoring transformation, creativity and action.

Here the relation between translation and metaphor needs to be considered in the broader contexts of linguistic ideologies in Western Europe, since, in spite of its global currency, this connection is very much a situated one. In the eighteenth century, the dominant view of language in Europe was premised on “Plato’s assumption that ideas were located beyond language, and Aristotle’s notion that thinking was possible without language” (18-19). Language was thought of as grammatical clothing worn over a semantic body. The figurative meaning that metaphor creates is subordinated to the original literal meaning that it tries to convey, and translation is understood only in terms of its subordinate relation to the original.<sup>72</sup> This rift in translation is overcome when translational transactions reveal that words are ultimately only metaphors for things. Guldin makes a connection that is useful for understanding the conceptual place of travel in the discussion:

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<sup>72</sup> This view, as we will see, seems to have important implications for how linguistic and cultural practices of the other were understood and represented in European travel writing.

In Aristotle's description metaphor and translation are intimately linked: figurative language is made up of translated words, of which the word "metaphor" is the prime example. Aristotle finally subsumed metaphor under the same species as the foreign. By blurring the frontier between the metaphorical and the foreign, a farther link between metaphor and translation is introduced. (Guldin 21)

Given the context of this study, early colonial era European travel writing on India, the construction of which was fundamentally dependent on translating the foreign for a domestic audience in Europe, it helps to consider the different attitudes to language and translation underpinned by different epistemological bases that the traveller (who was often also the translator) sought to mediate. In India, alongside the importance of oral transmission of religious texts over written ones, religious texts did not possess the same stable status as in the West, where the biblical paradigm helped enforce the duality of original and translation.<sup>73</sup> Secondly, the view of translation as transportation and transference across a border also has to do with a specific way of apprehending languages, as discrete entities separable by clear-cut borders. This spatial connotation (of migration or carrying across) can be seen to be at odds with language and translation practice in India. As Trivedi points out, the use of the Sanskrit word *anuvad* (previously meaning "repetition") to describe the practice of translation as transfer is a modern development brought on by colonialism, "a semantic neologism 'invented to cope with the English word [...], and therefore a translation of 'translation'" (Trivedi 2006, 112). *Anuvad* is still, fundamentally, a temporal metaphor: "The western obsession with spatial dimension of translation and the irreducible duality of original and translation has blinded translation theory to the fact that translation also takes place in time" (Guldin 44). One might add that the spatial metaphor of translation generally posits "translatability as transportability of some unchanged content" (48), a notion that is complicit

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<sup>73</sup> See an elaboration of this point in Chapter 4.

with the privileging of the original over translation. Here the emphasis, recalling once again the metaphor of travel, is on the connection between the points of departure and arrival. The underlying message is that meanings have an existence outside words and their passage from one culture to another is unaffected by the in-between journey. Therefore the notion of in-betweenness in and of translation is a way to think beyond the two points, shifting focus both to the process and the agents of translation.

This attention to the journey has resulted from increased cooperation in recent years between translation studies scholars interested in examining interaction between regions, nations and cultures in historical contexts. Research has explored topics covering geographical locations and historical time to provide insight into past translation practices and the ideological, sociocultural and political circumstances that have determined translation choices and strategies. The accounts of explorers, travellers and chroniclers, often containing references to interpreters and translators, have proved crucial in such research. Pickford and Martin, for example, have noted that Western travel writing's appeal to universality, depending on the reach of the accounts among the European reading public, was itself dependent on translation. Publications like *New Universal Traveller* (1791),<sup>74</sup> *Le Vaillant's*

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<sup>74</sup> Also known as *A Collection of late Voyages and Travels through Europe, Asia, Africa, America and the South-Sea Islands* published by Mudie of Edinburgh. This two-volume nine-hundred-page collection, compiled by the Scottish author Robert Heron, brought together an extensive range of travelogues, including English translations of the Swedish traveller Anders Sparrmann's description of his voyage to the Cape of Good Hope and towards the Antarctic Circle in the 1770s, the Danish explorer Carsten Niebuhr's narrative of his voyage to the Middle East and North Africa from 1772 and the French ornithologist François Le Vaillant's account of his African travels in the 1780s. There are other similar instances: Le Vaillant's *Voyage de M. Le Vaillant dans l'Intérieur de l'Afrique par Le Cap de Bonne Espérance, dans les années 1783, 84 & 85* was translated into German (Berlin 1790-6) and almost simultaneously for Austrian (Vienna, 1792), and Dutch (Leiden, 1791-8) readerships and later into Italian (1816). See Pickford and Martin. "Introduction: Travel Writing, Translation and World Literature."

Yasmine Marcil's *La fureur des voyages* — a study of reviews of European travel writing in the French periodical press between 1750-1789—sheds light on the production, circulation and consumption of European travel narratives during the period. The study, while it does not focus on

*Voyage de M. Le Vaillant dans l'Intérieur de l'Afrique*, Sonnerat's *Voyage* illustrate the considerable use of translation to extend the range of travel literature and its reach among the European reading public.

The context of eighteenth-century French travel necessitates a consideration of the place of the European Enlightenment in the Western intellectual construction of the world. The Enlightenment was not only a philosophical, political and cultural movement but also a geographical and translation phenomenon, “given that it radically rethought questions of territory and community, identity and place, the cosmopolitan and the regional: [it] was therefore local, as much as it was national and international” (Withers 5, 7, quoted in Pickford and Martin 2). Approaching the Enlightenment “as a dynamic, mobile, entity [is a way to follow] up all kinds of different ‘traffic’ taking place in late eighteenth-century Europe” (Pickford and Martin citing Withers 21, 43) with its multiples sites and agents of mediation involved in the writing and circulation of the texts to an ever-widening readership. This meant that explorers such as James Cook, Joseph Banks, Georg Forster, Alexander von Humboldt, Louis-Antoine de Bougainville and Pierre Sonnerat became household names in educated circles across Europe, and “[w]hile translation made a seminal contribution to the shaping of the modern world by constructing, enriching and challenging established notions of identity, it also demonstrated how swiftly language was evolving and what kinds of complexities this brought to the art of translation” (Pickford and Martin 2). At the same time, there is sufficient evidence that in France, the Enlightenment was not always coterminous with language-nation identity.<sup>75</sup> Thus while travel can be seen “as an underlying modality of

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works in translation, gives us an idea of translation's pervasive presence by directing attention to the reception of texts across languages in Europe.

<sup>75</sup> I point this out because, even though Benedict Anderson's persuasive argument linking nation states to national print-languages (2006, 48) “has led to a tendency, at least in the Anglophone academy, to map languages onto nations as fully overlapping research units, [...], ‘books have not been as respectful of national borders as the historians who study them’” (Pickford and Martin 2013, 2, quoting Freedman 1).

human existence itself” (Carravetta 269) it is not only the travellers that are so important in highlighting the interactions between languages and peoples. Central to the processes allowing different worlds to be brought into contact was translation, and, as the social geography of the Enlightenment suggests, many of the works conveying its ideas were written in vernaculars.

## 2.2 Travel and its writing: observations on genre

An exploration of the link between European travel writing (particularly in English and German), translation and the nature of cultural mediation in that intersection depends on an awareness of the cultural “baggage”<sup>76</sup> that permeates travel and its writing for a target audience. The rendering of the new and unfamiliar into the idiom of the home reader necessarily draws on diverse ways of knowing and multiple branches of knowledge.<sup>77</sup>

It has been observed that travel writing, dealing primarily with encounters and observations, “is best placed to transmit cultural values under the guise of straightforward report or individual impression” (Youngs 166). The multitude of forms it takes—ranging from guidebooks, manuals, itineraries, reports, to autobiography, correspondence, and fiction—makes it a genre that is difficult to define. Jonathan Raban writes:

As a literary form, travel writing is a notoriously raffish open house [...] It accommodates the private diary, the essay, the short story, the prose poem, the rough note and polished table talk with indiscriminate hospitality. It freely mixes narrative and discursive writing. Much of its "factual" material, [...], is there to authenticate

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<sup>76</sup> For a detailed discussion of translation and intertextuality see Eleonora Federici, “The Translator's Intertextual Baggage.”

<sup>77</sup> As I seek to demonstrate in this research, such variety was also underpinned by common discourses and rhetorical devices that often rendered porous the boundaries between bodies of knowledge especially from non-European sources.

what is really fiction; while its wildest fictions have the status of possible facts  
(quoted in Forsdick 2006, 20).

As a text type that hinges on employing a range of concepts of otherness (Chard 4), travel writing can perhaps be best understood as a hybrid genre that straddles categories and disciplines. For Jan Borm, it is a “collective term for a variety of texts both predominantly fictional and non-fictional whose main theme is travel” (Borm18-19). Joan-Pau Rubiés defines travel writing as a varied body of writing that takes travel as an essential condition for its production (Rubiés 244). Thouroude on the other hand observes that perhaps it is the “intergeneric features” (389) that can be understood to constitute travel writing’s identity. Peter Bishop, taking note of the hybridity that constitutes travel writing, compares it to “the art of collage”(Bishop 3), and while it is true that travelogues often rely extensively on the image of geography and landscape, he warns against a reading which might attempt to simplify the mixture of factual and fictional elements in a typical travel book: “the gross physicality, the geographical locability, of travel books should not blind us to their fictional nature” since travel writing “is not concerned only with the discovery of places, but also with their *creation*” (3, my emphasis). The “invention” of “realities” that the travel writer engages in can be understood as the arrangement of “semantically charged icons in such a way that an image of the foreign culture *as a whole* is in the grasp of the reader” (Schulz-Forberg 14, my emphasis), the meaningful world here being a *mise-en-scène* of representations (Chartier 1).

This points to travel and travel writing being distinct processes. Travel itself is a two-fold term: on the one hand it describes the physical movement of an individual or a group through a space of experience and discovery, on the other, the question as to *how* to travel is a crucial one, particularly within European culture. Commenting on the European tradition, Schulz-Forberg notes, “[t]ravel itself is a concept. From the Enlightenment art of travel to today’s Lonely Planet guidebooks the mode of travel was and is an important part of the

journey. Travel writing, however, relates to a different cultural context: the literary market and a European audience” (Schulz-Forberg 13). Its heterogeneity lies in weaving intertextual links with other works, people, and bodies of knowledge to create representations.

This attention to generic features of travel writing is warranted since genres “actively generate and shape knowledge of the world [and] create effects of reality and truth, authority and plausibility, which are central to the different ways the world is understood in the writing of history [...]”(Frow 2). In addition, generically shaped knowledges are bound up with the exercise of power, where power is understood as being exercised in discourse as well as elsewhere but is never simply external to discourse (2). Crucially, it is its generic indeterminacy and heterogeneity that open travel writing to a range of critical theories— notably postcolonialism, theories of gender and sexuality, structuralism, poststructuralism and deconstruction, although, as Youngs points out, there have been few sustained applications of theory to travel texts.

There have nevertheless been various attempts to examine the composite nature of travel writing in Europe in the eighteenth century (commonly referred to as the age of exploration)<sup>78</sup> and identify tropes and conventions that help trace its development from the Renaissance onwards. From a theoretical perspective, these have helped to identify and locate certain common modes of representing difference in travel writing. Such studies underscore the heterogeneity of the texts as well as the overlaps between tendencies attributed to historical periods and geographical regions. Additionally, these are useful references for

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<sup>78</sup> See, for instance, Paul Batten, *Pleasurable Instruction: Form and Convention in Eighteenth-Century Travel Literature*; Percy Adams, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel*; Dennis Porter, *Haunted Journeys: Desire and Transgression in European Travel Writing*; Nigel Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing, 1770-1840*.

Focusing on British travel writing, Mary Baines Campbell in *The Witness and the Other World* describes travel writing as a genre made up of other genres, as well as one that has contributed to the genesis of the modern novel (5-6). Crucially, she links it to various other genres such as letter writing, sacred histories, “wonder books,” etc. (17-20, 47-57).

describing reader expectations and the intellectual and socio-economic environment—factors that help understand the *writing* of travel.

Among notable studies that underscore the permeability of bodies of knowledge, voices, and genres that make up travel writing, several attend to the relation between overarching tropes and approaches to knowledge and how they actually figure in the writing of specific genres. Nigel Leask notes that the accounts of exotic sea voyages and explorations—one of the dominant modes of the time—were marked by an absence of any systematic science of geography or anthropology. “Linnaean taxonomy provided naturalists like George Forster with a ‘thread of Ariadne, by the help of which [the traveller] might guide his steps through the labyrinth of human knowledge’” (Leask 2019, 95-96 quoting Lamb). Discussing the characteristics of French travel writing in the same period, Charles Forsdick cites Antoine de Bougainville’s narrative of the first French circumnavigation of the globe in *Le voyage autour du monde* (1771), which brought together descriptions of the geography, fauna, flora, and anthropology of places visited in South America, Indonesia, and the Pacific (Forsdick 2019, 240). As Forsdick notes, Bougainville’s text elicited a direct response from Denis Diderot, whose philosophical dialogue, *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (1773), “illustrates not only the extent to which the travelogue had influenced intellectual, but also increasing anxiety regarding the potential limitations of travel and the intercultural communication it allows [...]” (241). In *New Approaches to Twentieth-Century Travel Literature in French* another study of twentieth-century French travel literature, the authors (Forsdick et al.) underscore the interdisciplinarity and transculturality *inherent* in travel writing, which, they suggest, can be best attended to by going beyond Anglophone texts and contexts. In such explorations, translation figures as a crucial way to think not only about exchanges between languages and cultures, but also between genres, insofar as genres guide interpretation and construction, and can be understood as communicative strategies that

connect experience and knowledge with the reader's "horizon of expectations" (Jauss 79). Forsdick et al. refer to the French "manifesto" *Pour une littérature voyageuse* (1992), which reflects on the nature of the *écrivain voyageur* or travel writer. Not surprisingly, a key question that emerges here is the relation between travelling and writing, particularly because the coexistence of the two is often seen to be an uneasy one (Forsdick et al. 15). Jacques Meunier has suggested that the two need to be understood as inseparable, "les deux moitiés d'un écrivain-voyageur" (the two halves of the travel writer, Meunier 148), while scholars like Adrien Pasquali have questioned any definition that stresses such complementarity, preferring instead to think in terms of different emphases: one needs to consider if the travel writer is a traveller who writes or a writer who travels (Forsdick et al. 15-16). The question is important because in each case the individual's primary activity might shape the textualization of the travel experience (15-16).

The above questions have also been addressed by scholars who have underscored the variety that has traditionally marked the traveller and travel writing. Percy Adams, for example, draws attention to the wealth of variety in travel writing 1600 and 1800 by noting the kinds of travel writers and the motives behind their journeys: traders, pilgrims, missionaries, explorers, scientists, warriors, colonizers and ambassadors. Travel writers between 1600 and 1800 "[...] represented almost every occupation imaginable no matter who paid them" (Adams 64). The seventeenth and eighteenth-century reader, Adams adds, had "access to and knew well the travel literature of many nations" (Adams 76). Translation was integral to such a process.<sup>79</sup> Nigel Leask, mainly concerned with aesthetic and archaeological [...] discourses of travel in European accounts of Ethiopia, Egypt, India, and Mexico between 1770 and 1840, notes the "uninhibited energy with which [travel writing during this period]

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<sup>79</sup> Adams also notes that alongside translation, knowledge of European languages other than their own enabled the European public to read travel books from across the continent (76).

ranges across modern disciplinary boundaries” (Leask 2002, 1). Dennis Porter on the other hand has discussed textual hybridization as a constitutive element of travel writing, calling European travel writing “a heterogeneous corpus of works” (Porter 1991, 3).<sup>80</sup> Also noteworthy is David Spurr’s *The Rhetoric of Empire*, a study of nineteenth and twentieth-century British, French and American writings in literary and popular journalism and “related genres such as exploration narratives, travel writing, and the memoirs of colonial officials” (Spurr 2). Focusing on colonial contexts, he explores the ways in which the Western writer constructs a coherent representation out of the “incomprehensible realities confronted in the non-Western world” (2). Spurr’s focus on non-fiction is interesting given that the generic indeterminacy that marks travel writing also problematizes this distinction. For Spurr, non-fiction offers the potential for revealing colonial discourse “in a form unmediated by the consciously aesthetic requirements of imaginative literature” (2). Although, despite attempts to distinguish between fiction and non-fiction based on the latter’s expected grounding in “an historical actuality,” Spurr admits that such distinction is not clear cut.<sup>81</sup> Even non-fictional texts depend on the use of myths, symbols, metaphors more often associated with fiction or poetry. The text, therefore, speaks ambiguously. In it, the voice of the author, cultural ideology and institutional authority find expression. This ambiguity joins with the “logical incoherence” (11) of colonial discourse to produce a rhetoric characterized by constant crisis—one that gets suppressed so that coherence and homogeneity dominate in Western discourses of the other, ignoring much that is at odds with it.

It is worth pointing out that despite its shape-shifting character, Western travel writing has been marked by a certain resilience of form and an inherent conservativeness, which

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<sup>80</sup> Focusing on Marco Polo’s *Milione* and T. E. Lawrence’s *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Porter argues that the characteristic heterogeneity of the texts derives at least in part from the authors’ mixing of different genres.

<sup>81</sup> Spurr describes the non-fictional as one whose “relation to this actuality is primarily metonymic and historically referential rather than metaphoric and self-referential” (2).

explains its capacity to transmit, circulate and perpetuate ideas. If it is classifiable as a genre, this is also because of a basic set of rules, perhaps the most characteristic of which is a balance between *utile* and *dulce*, that is able to accommodate changes of meaning and interpretation due to a change in what is regarded as useful and/or entertaining in a readership (Schulz-Forberg 14), and at the same time create the appearance of breaking the rules and positing a truly individual perspective. “Subjective perception enhances credibility, and writers are almost forced to go against the grain in order to provide an interesting and informative read. The subversion of the genre is thus part of its fundamental characteristics” (14-15).

The claim to credibility and difference is one of having witnessed and understood the unfamiliar. It raises questions about the “seen” and its recasting into the idiom and “horizon of expectations” (Jauss) of the reader at a place and time.<sup>82</sup> Here it helps to dwell on Jan Borm’s discussion of the hybrid nature of travel writing and the challenges that this particularity poses to understanding these texts in generic terms. He posits travel writing as a “useful heading under which to consider and to compare the multiple crossings from one form of writing into another and, given the case, from one genre to another” (Borm 26). His approach is useful for reading texts where the empirical and the mythical are entangled in a discursive terrain (Kuehn and Smethurst 13) and also interact with the pragmatic, drawing attention to the travel writing’s openness to individual and social mediation. Borm makes a distinction—following the French one separating *récit de voyage* and *littérature de voyage*—between the travel book or travelogue and travel literature or travel writing, describing the first predominantly as non-fiction and the second as “an overall heading for texts whose main

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<sup>82</sup> See Loredana Polezzi’s discussion of Jauss’ formulation of the concept of genre in *Translating Travel: Contemporary Italian travel writing in English Translation*.

As Polezzi points out, Jauss treats genres as dynamic categories, “as groups of historical families” which can only be “historically determined, delimited and described (Jauss 80).

theme is travel” (19). One way to distinguish between the two might be by “looking for *dominant aspects* in a given work or genre” (Borm 17, citing Jauss’s approach, emphasis in original). To understand a complex work in terms of a *dominant* around which it may be organized allows one to transform into a methodically productive category what has been described as “mixed genres” (17). Thus, while certain genres consist of a mix of different genres and forms of writing, their identity can be understood in terms of *dominant aspects*.

Following this understanding, the travel book can be understood as:

“[...] any narrative characterized by a non-fiction dominant that relates (almost always) in the first person a journey or journeys that the reader supposes to have taken place in reality while assuming or presupposing that author, narrator and principal character are but one or identical” (Borm 17).

The issue of representation of the other that is at the heart of travel writing makes this point worth exploring. Jauss observes that any work, no matter how original, “supposes prior information or orientation of expectations against which originality will be measured” (Borm 17). The reader of a travelogue, having their “horizon of expectations,” will presume that the author is primarily concerned with the journey they actually made. Given that travel writing even as a mixed genre underwent changes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, throughout the history of the genre the reader’s “horizon of expectations” varied: the travelogue at different times has been berated for “lacking literary energy” as well as for having too much of it. In the seventeenth century the travel book was so commonly seen as a repository of wonderful lies that in 1630 Captain John Smith felt obliged to modify the word “travels” with “true” when he published *The True Travels, Adventures and Observations of Captain John Smith* (Borm quoting Fussell 17-18). It is this above definition of the travelogue that allows one to read certain texts as accounts of voyages actually undertaken by

the writer in question, while being aware of certain exaggerations and omissions as part of the strategies of representation at play.

What is at stake here is an understanding of the mimetic processes at work in travel narratives: in Borm's elaboration, representation stands as a translation for mimesis,<sup>83</sup> the latter applying to both fiction and non-fiction. At the same time, since texts of pure fiction or pure non-fiction are theoretical constructs that do not correspond to any given text (Genette cited in Borm 22),<sup>84</sup> the "literary" in this context should not lead us to exclude non-fictional travel texts. In other words, mimesis is inevitable in narratives (22), and it is at work in travel writing in general.

It helps to recall here that "literature" in the eighteenth century encompassed all forms of knowledge excluding only the mathematical and physical sciences (Debaene and Izzo 13). If we understand "the literary [as] invariably an expression of the dynamic role of individual style (Borm 22 citing Michel Morel),<sup>85</sup> travel writing in most cases has a literary dimension. Style, being individual, can therefore be seen to be somewhat at odds with generic norms (Borm 22). And since generic affiliation does not guarantee or preclude the literary in any other kind of text, it is possible to conclude that the travel book is no more and no less a literary genre than any other. The transforming act of mimesis as representation is present in

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<sup>83</sup> Marko Juvan, in *History and poetics of intertextuality*, traces the evolution of the concept of intertextuality in critical theory, and notes that intertextuality underscored that "texts cocreate the social construction of reality and that they do not represent the so-called extra-textual world directly (via mimesis), but only through an unobtrusive filter of clichés, of previous textualizations (semiosis)" (4).

Jovan also notes, intertextuality is "essentially a cross-cultural phenomenon linking together not only one national literature with other [...] literatures and cultures, but also, within a given semiosphere, mainstream literary production with its past, forgotten forms, and marginal, subaltern, or emergent subsystems; finally, intertextuality structures the texts affiliation and response to its cultural contexts—of other arts, social discourses (from politics to science), sociolects, ideologies, ways of living, and media (7).

<sup>84</sup> One can recall that Gérard Genette has noted that "one may include, without any harm in the notion of the narrative, all forms of literary representation" (Genette 61, quoted in Borm 21).

<sup>85</sup> Morel here refers to the "dynamic effect of linguistic invention" (Borm 22).

all stages of travel and its writing (23). This is what makes purportedly non-fictional travel accounts at once susceptible and immune to criticism based on its “factual content.”

So what should the reader / researcher be attending to when examining the makeup of a travel text? Borm’s discussion of the French series *Terre Humaine*’s policy (24) is worth a look: in a travel book that is also a book of natural history, as several of the eighteenth-century European accounts of the non-European other claimed to be, instead of opposing fiction and discursive writing, one could perhaps think of the *mechanisms* that reconcile “empirical” information with the readers’ expectations, taking note of the inflections that are shaped by the intertwining of the personal and the public. This awareness mitigates the assumption of clear distinctions between texts, such as ethnographic, sociological or historical in a narrative, since each of these bears the signs of its observer and is marked by the discursive communities of which s/he is part. So the elements making up a mixed genre like the travel book may themselves be shaped by surrounding texts. It makes sense, therefore, to approach travel writing in terms of “numerous intertexts between various narratives whose principal narrative modes may not be of the same order, but which share the same archetype of the journey as a form of quest (Borm 25, citing Northrop Frye).

The above understanding of travel writing is consistent with the view that rather than seeking to codify a genre such as travel writing, one should highlight where and how it interacts with other kinds of texts.<sup>86</sup> In other words, it seems more worthwhile to take note of the mediating factors—agents, ideologies, knowledge categories, affiliations, interests—shaping specific travel accounts. Eighteenth-century European travel accounts of India include many examples that have been traditionally grouped with scientific texts based on the author’s affiliation and patronage, but the content and reach of the accounts call for

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<sup>86</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, for example, explores the use of tropes in travel writing “as much as much to disunify as to unify the rhetoric of travel writing” (1992, 11). Her goal here is to underscore travel writing’s “interactions with other kinds of expressions” (11).

expanding the analytical parameters of these texts. Pierre Sonnerat's *Voyage* is a case in point. At the same time, it is equally limiting to regard it simply as a typically heterogeneous travel text without identifying the dominant aspects that are its points of contact with other texts at a given time and place. We can recall here Jauss's definition of genre in a historicized fashion, suggesting its potential to encourage a specific type of reading having to do with the socio-cultural knowledge and sensibility of the reader at a given moment in history.

### 2.3 Translation and / in travel

The perspectives recognizing the historicity and flexibility of travel writing can be related to those theories in translation studies that examine translation as a form of transfer and rewriting. These draw attention to both the translating agent's ongoing negotiations with knowledge networks in which s/he is embedded and the expectations of the reader in the target culture. For example, approaches to translation proposed by André Lefevere, Theo Hermans, Michael Cronin, Lawrence Venuti and Loredana Polezzi corroborate, from distinct vantage points, the need to explore the practice as a form of manipulation that is part of the complex system of cultures, and therefore connected to intersecting socio-economic and cultural discourses.<sup>87</sup>

Perspectives that connect issues of intercultural exchange, power, and metaphors with the figure of the translator and their role in the production and circulation of knowledge provide another link between travel writing and current translation theory—here it is translation that implies travel. The much-discussed etymological link between travel and translation through Latin does not need elaboration here but is worth keeping in mind when

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<sup>87</sup>See in particular: Itamar Even-Zohar *Polysystem Studies*; Gideon Toury, "Translated Literature: System, Norm, Performance - Toward a TT-Oriented Approach to Literary Translation"; André Lefevere. *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (1992); Hermans, "Cross-cultural translation studies as thick translation"; Judy Wakabayashi and Rita Kothari, *Decentering Translation Studies: India and Beyond*.

dealing with historical texts in relation to Europe. The connection between the two, in terms of movement, transportation, displacement, is implied both on a physical and a metaphorical level. The translator for centuries has been seen as an explorer, a traveller engaged in a journey from one source to another, or even a smuggler of riches across borders. Both the traveller and the translator are ambiguous figures, both objects of suspicion who ask to be trusted in their reading and rendering of people, places, and texts:

Paradoxically, although for his own purposes he has decided that frontiers do not exist, and although he works in a sense to eliminate boundaries, he depends on them absolutely; he trades on the existence of them. He is by necessity a man of divided allegiances, neither flesh nor fowl, a lonely, shadowy character, mistrusted by everyone. And probably envied a little in a covert way, too, for, more positively, he stands for freedom, risk, excitement and adventure. An aura of envy has always hung over the smuggler, and a lot of this is also due the translator. (Stratford 10)

Such portraits raise the essential (and connected) issues of authenticity, veracity and faithfulness. As both historical and theoretical discourses suggest, translators and travellers are suspect mediators who must prove their own trustworthiness to an audience who can only access “the original” through them. Yet ambiguity here marks not just the traveller’s relation to cultures, but also the reading public’s attitude to them: one of the crucial factors determining the traveller’s rendering of the other is the expectation of the home audience, which is not a homogenous entity. What really matters is the ability to exploit the mechanisms of authority acceptable to one’s readership and construct a version. This requires negotiations that are varying and discontinuous, mixing authority with uncertainty and even

self-doubt, and therefore creating texts that carry within themselves mediated meanings subject to multiple interpretations.<sup>88</sup>

The ambiguities in the traveller's relation to languages of the places visited is an integral part of travel writing, whether explicitly or as subtexts that need to be drawn out and unpacked. As Polezzi points out, the traveller who learns the local language is not necessarily doing so from a position of weakness in relation to the people or culture they are addressing, nor is their decision to do so a sign of openness to difference (Polezzi 2001, 80). Nor are liberal enlightened attitudes to be understood as immune to the use of colonial tropes and stereotypes to describe the other. An element of paternalism and an appropriative attitude may well be what really underlies such communicative strategies (142). "The 'orientalist' who asserts his superior mastery of exotic languages and cultures does so from a position of strength which allows him to displace local knowledge and to create 'the Orient, the Oriental and his world', perceived as being 'in need of corrective study by the West'" (Said 1978, 40-41). The traveller, steeped in Western liberal education, can manifest deep rooted assumptions about the nature of difference that separates foreign cultures and languages from their own, betraying an inability to think beyond certain taxonomies of language and culture. The "learned and liberal" tourists who "can both afford and enjoy the 'exoticizing' process of learning a foreign language," but does not expect to find in the travellee one who is capable of the same achievements (Polezzi 2001, 80) has been discussed in Fussell's *Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars* (1982) and Buzard's *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture* (2001). Their observations mostly implicate

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<sup>88</sup> On relationships of power see Michel Foucault's ideas in *Discipline and Punish: Birth of the Prison* (75) and *Power/ Knowledge*. Edward Said discusses power, resistance and opposition in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). And Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* has proposed the notion of mimicry as a strategy for the defiance and reappropriation of power. See Spurr's *The Rhetoric of Empire* for a discussion of certain basic rhetorical features of European colonial discourse and the way in which such discourse has been deployed (1).

modern tourism, but there are precursors to such selective openness to similarity (or difference) in early-colonial-era travel writing as well. At the same time, clearly the travellee need not be thought of as a victim condemned to a life of stasis, the polar opposite of the Western traveller. And the communication strategies shaping their collaboration with the foreigner involve forms of strategic resistance, control over one's own modes of knowledge transfer, mixed with collaboration. It is this awareness of their power that can be perhaps be read in the traveller's suspicion of having been deceived.<sup>89</sup>

The traveller's dependence on the native translator /interpreter is one of the major issues shaping inquiry into the connections between travel writing and translation studies particularly in colonial contexts. It has been considered by Michael Cronin as part of the problems posed to the traveller by "language heteronomy" (Cronin 2000). This articulates the tension between the traveller's need to assert (linguistic) autonomy and the almost inevitable "recourse to a heteronymous mode of translation" (Cronin 2000, 76), particularly in multilingual destinations. If it is possible to travel through foreign countries without contact with the locals, it usually implies the latter's total absence, the presence of an infrastructure in the form of colonial institutions<sup>90</sup> or/and fellow Europeans who are expatriate residents. In most cases however, travellers, if they need to exchange meaning, goods or experience, would have to establish some sort of contact with the local people, and/or learn the local

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<sup>89</sup> A vivid example of the fraught relation between the traveller and the travellee is found in French traveller Anquetil-Duperron's account of India. Anquetil's purpose for travel to India was the translation of the Zend-Avesta and the Vedas. In *Voyage en Inde 1754–62* (1997), he writes about the intrigues of his Parsi associates in Surat, where he arrived in search of the Avesta.

<sup>90</sup> For the European, particularly British travellers in India, especially in the presidency towns, such an infrastructure may have existed in the form of colonial offices staffed by personnel conversant with a few of the local languages. But given India's complex multilinguality, such autonomy was always partial.

language, and in some cases claim fluency in it.<sup>91</sup> The choice between stating the need to learn the local language and claiming expertise is to be seen in terms of strategies often marked by asymmetrical relationships of power.

The relationship between travel writing and translation emerges as particularly complex if we consider the many types and stages of translation involved in the writing of travel. Translation is constitutive of the text that testifies to the travel experience. As noted earlier in this chapter, Western travel writing in its most inclusive definition is written for a home audience:<sup>92</sup> the academic community which is going to judge the standard of a learned monograph, the institutions that will lend support to a voyage and its report based on the prestige they might bring to the nation, the potential buyer of a travel book (Polezzi 2001, 82). While effective understanding and translation requires extensive travelling into the other culture and even long periods of residence, the paradoxical nature of travel writing also dictates that “travel must not, however, become exile” (Cronin 2000, 99). Here travel writing

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<sup>91</sup> As already indicated, colonial travel accounts however are (mostly) devoid of any details of such contacts with the local translators /interpreters, although some standard references to the dubash, munshi, or pandit are ubiquitous in both English and French accounts of India. See Susan Neild-Basu, “The Dubashes of Madras.” for a comparative study of the local intermediaries, including translators and interpreters, in late eighteenth and early nineteenth -century colonial India. On the relation between the indigenous scholars and the British, see Brian Hatcher, “Indigent Brahmans, Industrious Pandits: Bourgeois Ideology and Sanskrit Pandits in Colonial Calcutta” and “What's Become of the Pandit? Rethinking the History of Sanskrit Scholars in Colonial Bengal”; On the dialogic yet asymmetrical nature of interactions between William Jones and the indigenous Hindu scholars see Gallien, “From Tension to Cooperation: Complex Interactions between British Orientalists and Indian Scholars in Calcutta, 1784-1794.”

<sup>92</sup> As Polezzi notes, the distinction “between ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’ texts should not be construed as an essentialist assertion of the existence of a monolithic ‘Western culture’.” Issues of identity, otherness, centrality and marginality come up and are being addressed even within Europe. In addition, the Western traveller’s attitude to the language of the other can also be read as an expression of the internalized ideology that was deployed to separate minority languages in Europe. On this see Anthony Lodge, *French: From Dialect to Standard* for a discussion of language ideology in France in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. This point will also be discussed in Chapter 4.

once again resembles translation: in both cases there must be proximity without fusion, the journey must culminate in a safe return home.<sup>93</sup> The decision to write back:

testifies to the unbroken umbilical cord still linking him/her to the point of origin, of the unabandoned reassurance of a possible, if forever deferred, return—and, most of the time, also of a lingering hope and desire to make one’s name [...] in that home world which still measures the traveller's values and achievements [...]

Under these constraints, translation becomes a requirement for the intelligibility of the text: even the traveller who has successfully learnt the language of the Other must now perform a re-translation into the code s/he shares with the home readership. (Polezzi 2001, 82).

Therefore, a second level of translation is involved here, and the strategies for this vary according to the conventions applicable in the target culture. Here the translation implicit in travel writing can be understood to operate most closely since both practices are influenced by norms and expectations operating in the target culture and can tell us as much about it as about the source culture. The similarity of function is also seen in a shared range of choices: the travel writer, like the translator, can opt for what is known in translation studies as a “domesticating strategy”<sup>94</sup> to familiarize the foreign and render it in terms immediately intelligible to the home audience. At the other extreme, the travel writer or the translator may opt for “foreignizing” strategies, rendering visible rather than hiding features of the source culture and text.<sup>95</sup> Both are shaped and circumscribed by ideological constraints, personal motivations, generic conventions or text type norms that the target text—at least at the time

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<sup>93</sup> In *Haunted Journeys*, Dennis Porter notes that in the “colonial age ... to go native” [...] was the ultimate apostasy” (230).

<sup>94</sup> Or the use of “maximum fluency and apparent transparency.” See Polezzi (2001, 20).

<sup>95</sup> This strategy may involve leaving the highly culture-specific, or suitably exotic words or passages from the source text untranslated in the target one. See Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility* (1995) for a discussion.

of its writing—will be expected to fulfill. In any case, both the travel writer and the translator need to engage with language, and in the case of the former, especially in contexts of multilingual source cultures, the process can involve not only translation in its most expanded sense, but also various types of interlingual translation involving implicit use of either or both strategies (since there is no need to assume that the two cannot coexist in the same text).

Drawing a parallel between the travel writer and the translator (since both claim to convey versions of otherness to their readers, rewritten and presented in accessible language and form), Bassnett has noted the pains taken by travel writers to ensure that readers believe their story (2004). While her reflections here stem from the analysis of a fourteenth-century text, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (1356), they provide insight into certain enduring strategies adopted by travel writers to ensure that their accounts are believable. This is done by establishing the idea of an authoritative origin behind the text:

For travel writers need a source, and that source is generally presumed to be the journey that took place before the writing began. The journey is therefore the original text that is later inscribed in the written work that recounts what happened during the journey, and because travel writing is premised on the idea of a voyage that actually happened, it is essential to ensure that readers believe the author. (Bassnett 2004, 68)<sup>96</sup>

The need to believe the author here depends on the reader's interest in what the author offers, in this case a blend of different narratives with the occasional detail that rings true (Bassnett 2004, 70). Similarly, the assumption of an "authentic" source is fundamental for translators, and, as in the case of travel writers, there must be an original somewhere else before the translation can take place. If both raise questions of faithfulness, a look at the textual

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<sup>96</sup> As we see later in the discussion of translation's and travel writing's relation to ethnography and science, it is also the "host culture" that can stand for the "original."

strategies at work in the practices makes it apparent that both are processes of rewriting involving significant manipulation (70).

On the subject of translation strategies involved in contemporary travel writing, Bassnett has shown how these texts can often be patronizing towards the translated other, raising important issues around the travel writer's textualization of otherness. Bassnett underscores the need to attend to the norms and expectations of the target culture in studies of both travel writing and translation, suggesting that no general assumptions can be made about the intentions and effects of any specific strategy, and no value judgements can be attributed to different choices. One can add that the strategies themselves may need to be described or characterized differently to account for actions and features at work in a range of cultural and linguistic contexts. For example, in what would be described in translation studies as a "foreignizing" approach, a travel writer / translator can not only leave words of a text or a conversation untranslated, s/he can also include elaborate explanations (a domesticating move) to accompany the "non-translation." This kind of intervention can highlight the distance of the source culture from the home reader while using the domesticating approach of (over)explaining the foreign. At the same time, such a strategy can establish the traveller or the translator as an authoritative purveyor of the knowledge of the other, embedding her /him in the reader's eye in the discourse of the other. Such situations can lead the researcher to re-evaluate the intentions and effects of representational strategies based on the context at hand. "The temptation to attribute positive values to disruptive, foreignizing techniques and [...] to brand as negative the normalization operated by more fluent, transparent translations, has to be avoided in order not to impose an ideological, abstract model over the complex textual mechanisms at work in travel writing" (Polezzi 2001, 85). One needs to consider as well the cultural and intellectual<sup>97</sup> contexts in which theories originate and gain currency. For

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<sup>97</sup> See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the idea of translation implicit in scientific writing.

example, in translation studies, in the work of Venuti, influential concepts and words like “foreignization” and “domestication” cannot be detached from the American context and the socio-cultural, historical concerns informing intellectual inquiries into it.

This call for paying attention to the significance of specific approaches to representing others is related to the need to recognize reading as a strategic activity. If both the travel writer and the translator work in collusion<sup>98</sup> with the home readership, it is also possible to imagine a reading<sup>99</sup> that does not collude with the texts and seeks instead to bring to the fore the (hidden) mechanisms and circumstances surrounding their construction. It is in fact possible to think of such a reading as a kind of re-translation,<sup>100</sup> or “thick translation,” since “the cross-lingual and cross-cultural study of concepts and discursive practices, including concepts and practices of translation, involves recourse to translative operations (Hermans 2003, 384). In such cases, the effects of those translations can be felt in ways at different times and contexts that keep the meaning-making potential of translation alive.

The inherent potential of all texts to be reread (and retranslated) has been addressed in a particularly productive way by scholars connecting translation to semiotics. Ubaldo Stecconi observes that “translation is not something we do only with words but [...] also *to words and to other sign systems*” (18, my emphasis).<sup>101</sup> Following Peirce’s theory of signs, Stecconi analyzes objects as having two sides—the Immediate Object or the Object as the sign (or the interpretant) represents it, and the Dynamical Object, “a natural or cultural entity, that is unknowable in its totality” (Stecconi 19). This follows the notion that “nothing is an

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<sup>98</sup> For a discussion of the reader’s collusion, see Susan Bassnett, “When is a Translation not a Translation?” in Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, *Constructing Cultures*.

<sup>99</sup> See Polezzi (2001) for a discussion of the possibility of rereading travel texts at different historical moments from the ones in which they were produced.

<sup>100</sup> Here travel writing itself can be thought of as a prior translation of culture. The retranslation refers to the translation of an account which primarily stands as an “original”

<sup>101</sup> Translation can therefore be an act of constructing texts out of lived experiences—here it parallels travel writing.

original that is not translatable; nothing is a target text that is not interpretable as translating some original; and nothing is a target-receiver's interpretant that does not interpret some text as translating an original" (20). And since the sign that represents the target text is context-specific, there must be difference between the dynamical original in all its complexities and the immediate original. Therefore, a translation always leaves something for the next signs to use.

The need to (re)read stems partly from the question of authenticity that persists in both translation and travel writing, and from the increasing awareness of the receivedness of assumptions of textual authority as reliable representation. The presumption of faithfulness seems the lie at the core of both kinds of texts in the Western tradition: for translation it is faithfulness to the source text, for travel writing, it is faithfulness to the source culture as it is perceived to be. "The discourse of faithfulness that has so dogged translation studies and from which we are finally beginning to emerge is also a dominant discourse in travel writing," and in fact "travellers have pretensions towards faithfulness, insisting that we believe their accounts simply because they have been there and we have not" (Bassnett 1993, 103). And the conventions regulating the translation strategies in travel writing encompass both the transparency of supposed or implied translation and the use of textual signs to mark its presence as visible. Once again, it is the reader's collusion with the travel writer that establishes the validity of the text, raising questions about the validity of representations in travel writing and translation as *located* practices. As Bassnett observes:

Authenticity, the truthful account by a traveller of what he or she sees, is presented as a fundamental element of travel writing. Readers are invited to share an experience that has actually happened. When we read a travel account, we do not expect to read a novel; rather we assume that the author will be documenting his or her experiences in another culture. But the dialogues are so often patently invented that authenticity

begins to dissolve. We could say that one of the bases upon which travel writing rests, is the collusion of writer and reader in a notion of authenticity, that is the reader agrees to suspend disbelief and go along with the writer's pretence.” (1998, 35)

There is no doubt a general awareness that the notion of faithfulness in travel writing, as in translation, is considered illusory in theories and analyses, and any presumption of it is seen to distract the reader's attention from the discursive practices shaping travel texts. But much of the inquiry around the nature of the representation of the other in both areas does seem to come back to the question of *which version* of what was seen and read made it into written form and circulated, and what were the circumstances shaping it. The question of authenticity here is also related to the voice that speaks, particularly when a travel account also includes interlingual translation, as is often the case in European accounts of India. Knowing the “real” India seemed to depend on translating its ancient Sanskrit texts, which the traveller was ill-equipped to undertake. The travellers' location in a multilingual country like India often meant that they would have access to a vernacular translation of a pan-Indian text, the former inevitably marked by local characteristics.<sup>102</sup> This version was often recast by the traveller to stand for a direct translation from the Sanskrit “original,” making a local rewriting stand for the whole, framed through textual strategies (manifest in forewords, introductions, commentaries) to meet the expectations of the home reader. In most such cases, travel writing elided the role of the native translator /interpreter as the principal mediator between the traveller and languages/texts of India. An awareness of this elision can make the reader wonder whose voice is being heard and when; how an aura of authenticity is sought to be created and what mediating factors are involved in the process.

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<sup>102</sup> I address this question later in a discussion of the nature of the relationship between Sanskrit and vernacular languages that the European traveller encountered.

Admittedly, the broadening of the horizon of translation poses challenges to most of the disciplines in the humanities when translation is referred to as a category of practice, an analytical category, and also as a model for conducting cultural research (Bachmann-Medick 23). However, theories constantly travel within the humanities and social sciences since they respond “to a specific social and historical situation of which an intellectual occasion is part” (Said 1983, 237). What are accepted to be “bounded theories” are in fact “transculturally constituted, embedded and influenced fields of knowledge that constantly interact with one another” (Neumann and Nünning 5). This awareness of translation as both a “culturally bounded” and “travelling” concept points to how it is understood, interpreted and defined around the world. In short, it underscores the embeddedness of the idea of travel in translation.<sup>103</sup>

#### **2.4 Translating culture / culture as text**

The narrative devices used in travel writing and translation—use of voice, gaze, time, the exclusion of the traveller’s voice from the final account, the exploitation of autobiographical, and intertextual authority, raise questions about the interpretation and representation of experience, the relation of these processes to subjectivity, and indeed the definitions of “reality” and “subject” in the context. In this all-encompassing “translation,” travel writers “at once [establish] their cultural affinities with, and spatial, experiential difference from, their readers. Thus, travel writing, especially in imperial or colonial contexts, is an expression of identity based on sameness to and remoteness from the members of the home society”

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<sup>103</sup> See Tymoczko, *Reconceptualizing Translation Theory* for a discussion of the need to not only incorporate non-Western translation data into research but also analyze, understand and theorize them since they can help refurbish basic assumptions and structures of translation theory itself (14). Tymoczko counters theories that perceive linguistic and cultural translation caused by population movements as a completely new phenomenon (19), arguing that migration, cultural and linguistic contacts and the resulting cultural translation and hybridity are not altogether unique to current human society—an observation that informs my study.

(Youngs 3). This attribution of meaning to difference can be understood as what ethnographers have called “cultural translation,”<sup>104</sup> at the heart of which is the notion of “culture as text” pioneered by anthropologist Clifford Geertz. This is an expanded idea of text that includes social practice, as well as the recognition of the dependence of culture on representation in general. Doris Bachmann-Medic has observed that as a travelling concept, the notion of culture as text has “propagated the understanding of culture as both a constellation of texts and a semiotic fabric of symbols that becomes ‘readable’ in forms of cultural expression and representation” (Bachmann-Medic 99). It is, however, possible to keep such a concept from falling victim to “formulaic ossification” (102) by means of contextualization: to reveal the interplay between texts, forms of expression and cultural encounter at specific places and times. This is a view of culture as “a heterogeneous and open system of practical options” (Algazi 2000, quoted by Bachmann-Medick 2012, 104). And while it includes multiple levels of linguistic decoding and re-encoding, “cultural translation” is not limited to them. It involves “extracting ‘implicit meaning’ from the verbal as well as the non-verbal signs of a culture via a hermeneutic process carried out by an observer whose ultimate goal is to represent that culture to [the home reader] for whom the written text is produced and who will ultimately determine its success or failure” (Polezzi 2001, 97).

Cultural translation, like travel writing, can therefore be discussed as a complex process that includes the three types of translation proposed by Roman Jakobson in “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation”: intralingual (present in the wording and rewording of experience often undertaken by natives conversant in the traveller’s language), interlingual

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<sup>104</sup> See Talal Asad, “The Concept of Cultural Translation.” On the same subject also see James Clifford’s “On Ethnographic Authority,” which attributes the dominance of the idea of cultural translation to the prestige of “interpretive ethnography.”

For a translation-studies perspective on the notion and practices of “cultural translation” in ethnography, see Kate Sturge, “Translation Strategies in Ethnography.” A discussion of the importance of Asad’s article and of the concept of cultural translation for the development of Translation Studies can also be found in Douglas Robinson’s *Translation and Empire*.

and intersemiotic (the verbalization of non-verbal cultural practices and settings). This division, as is well known, can however be an over-simplification of the complexities of communication in travel, and is useful only insofar as it helps identify the different strands in the “continuum of the language phenomenon in travel” (Cronin 2000, 4). We find an even more comprehensive notion of translation in the one proposed by George Steiner whose definition of translation expands to include all modes of communication:

Any model of communication is at the same time a model of translation, of a vertical or horizontal transfer of significance. No two historical epochs, no two social classes, no two localities use words and syntax to signify exactly the same things, to send identical signals of valuation and interference. Neither do two human beings.”  
(Steiner 28-29)

Steiner’s elaboration seems useful for understanding translation as a practice that negotiates both spatial and temporal difference, but also profoundly problematic in its idealization of the practice as, on the one hand, “an exercise in ‘total reading’” (8) and on the other, “reciprocal” (416). His rhetoric of the (male) translator’s mastery of meaning has been rightly taken to task by feminist translation scholars. Lori Chamberlain has laid bare the “politics of originality” and “logic of violence” (Chamberlain 320) in Steiner’s translation model, where the “misogynist conceptions of gender roles” (von Flotow 81) seem complicit with the colonial compulsion of knowing the other. In her analysis of British colonial translations of India, Tejaswini Niranjana argues that Steiner is more concerned with an idealized image of translation as reciprocal than he is with a real world in which inequalities and asymmetries of power make the idea of “exchange without loss” distinctly utopian (Niranjana 59, 68). Moreover, in this apparent universalism, which can also be viewed as appropriatory, Steiner’s understanding of the past, which he considers expressible as a “verbal construct” through “a selective use of the past tense” (Steiner 30), elides those uses of the past that deny the

synchronicity of cultures.<sup>105</sup> The denial becomes manifest in the separation of the “advanced” from the “primitive” and describes entire societies as trapped at the beginning of civilization. This is a use of the past (in the grammatical sense and as memory) which is shared by travel writing and ethnography, and any expanded understanding of translation that does not address these formative ways of constructing difference can fall short as a theoretical approach.<sup>106</sup>

Therefore, it makes more sense to argue not for a universalist notion of translation but for one that stresses the culture-bound nature of its operation. Such boundedness often becomes apparent in the reading and translation of texts which are shaped by unequal relationships of power between source and target cultures. While it is difficult to “see how translation can be avoided in the context of cross-cultural understanding, especially if researchers have to report back on their fieldwork to their own communities,” it “matters that translation is governed by, and saturated with, norms and values” (Hermans 1998, 51). The notion of equivalence in translation therefore needs to be addressed exclusively as an ideological construct (51). Equivalence, based on commensurability, is ultimately founded on an assumption of difference and sameness that may be quite different from actual experience of the other:

Faced with the radically different, we construe commensurability by translating on and into our terms. And our terms are not neutral but conditioned. And they cannot be reduced to a matter of equivalence, linguistic or otherwise. When we engage in historical and cross-cultural studies of translation, we

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<sup>105</sup> This point is made by Polezzi (2001, 98-99). On the relationship between time and travel writing in (as well as anthropology) see Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other*; Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*; Edward Said *Orientalism*.

<sup>106</sup> Although Steiner’s description of “alternative translations” as “cumulative criticism” (438) would seem to posit translation also as a “corrective” operating over time, it is its ennoblement as ultimately reciprocal (381, 416) that dominates his view.

translate other people's concepts and practices of translation on the basis of our own, historical, concept of translation, including its normative aspect and the values it secures. We have no other choice. But having become conscious of the problem inherent in our descriptions we can devise strategies that acknowledge as much. (Hermans 1998, 69-70)

The construction of commensurability that Herman underscores has also been addressed by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, notably in their discussion of analogy in translation, which they describe as the “the most obvious form of negotiation between the different textual and conceptual grids” (Bassnett and Lefevere 7). Analogy regulates the production and reception of cultural capital, and also “leads, inevitably, to the obliteration of differences between cultures and the texts they produce” (7). Its appropriative technique (insofar as it slants the culture of origin toward the receiving culture) is often posited on an unequal relationship between source and target cultures. It authorizes the interpretive and representational practices of “cultural translation,” while marking them asymmetrical and suspect.

Therefore, if we accept that “cultural translation” is a form of translation, perhaps we need also to consider that all translation involves “cultural translation.” But rather than accepting the hermeneutic metaphor of “culture as text” in a facile manner, one needs to be aware of the imposition of meanings and values, the appropriations, omissions at play in each process of representation, in short, of the textual and discursive strategies at work in the such meaning-making practices. Edward Said drew attention to this in *Orientalism*:

Everyone who writes about the Orient must locate himself vis-a-vis the Orient; translated into his text, this location includes the kind of narrative voice he adopts, the type of structure he builds, the kind of images, themes, motifs that circulate in his text all of which add up to deliberate ways of addressing the reader, containing the Orient, and finally, representing it or speaking on its behalf. (20)<sup>107</sup>

This transposition of language (as in ethnography), and experience into the written can also be understood as “rewriting”—in the sense of the “manipulation of some sort of original according to (not necessarily in accordance with) the literary and ideological constraints operating in the system in which they are going to take up a place” (Polezzi 2001, 108). For Lefevere, “the same basic process of rewriting is at work in translation, historiography, anthologization, criticism, and editing [...]” (Lefevere 1992, 8-9). And all of these produce “refractions” that outlive the original through allusion or intertextuality (Lefevere 1982, 17).<sup>108</sup>

The enduring presence of such translation is worth our attention: in colonial contexts the effects of “rewriting” can be seen in the internalization by the natives (or indeed by the travellers) of versions of themselves, which circulate in global knowledge networks via travel writing, and continue into the postcolonial world.<sup>109</sup> The notions of rewriting and refraction therefore point to translation as a non-linear and an ongoing process, suggesting that if cultural translation (like all translation) in colonial contexts is a fact of the target culture (and skewed towards it), it is also not just that. Venuti has drawn attention to the “double-edged

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<sup>107</sup> While I subscribe to the view that orientalism needs to be understood as a more heterogenous discourse than presented by Said, it is the interplay of the dominant and the muted tendencies in the texts that interests me. At the same time, I recognize that not all European travel writers were orientalists in the Saidian sense.

<sup>108</sup> Lefevere does not discuss translation in ethnographic accounts, nor does he make overt references to colonial contexts, but his discussion clearly includes contexts of asymmetrical power relations between languages.

<sup>109</sup> See Niranjana, *Siting Translation* for a discussion of translation’s relation to historicity as “effective history”—that part of history which is still operative at the present.

power of translation, which “constructs a domestic representation for a foreign text and culture” and “simultaneously constructs a domestic subject, a position of intelligibility that is also an ideological position, shaped by the codes and canons, interests and agendas of certain domestic social groups” (Venuti 1995, 10). A domesticated ethnographic representation of the source culture, privileged as a scientific text, can also become part of the historical memory of the source culture.<sup>110</sup> Therefore, a comprehensive view of translation helps understand its effects on both the source and the target cultures, and help recognize that the politics of identity cannot be reduced to a set of structural oppositions between the “self” and the “other.” The refractions that translation enables continue to operate across such boundaries, and always in relation to power.

## 2.5 On ethnography

Much of the preoccupation around the concept of “cultural translation” discussed so far has been at the heart of the study of ethnographic accounts of the other. Indeed, besides history, literary studies, and gender studies, the discipline that has engaged most with travel writing is arguably anthropology. Of particular importance for travel writing and translation studies has been the turn in anthropology towards a critique of ethnography, elements of which have been adopted by literary and cultural studies.<sup>111</sup> Among the points made in these is the double elision of the voice of the other in the ethnographic text (as in travel writing): first in ignoring or degrading the role of the interpreter and subsequently in denying the difficulties involved in the process of translation and thus encouraging the assumption of a transparency of voices that belie the complexity of representation.

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<sup>110</sup> Asad discusses such a possibility in relation to an “illiterate” society. But, as I discuss later in this chapter, his point is relevant in terms of the authority some representations enjoy in the guise of “scientific” texts.

<sup>111</sup> See, for example, James Clifford, *The predicament of culture; Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*.

It helps to note that while the late nineteenth century—with the advent of anthropology as a discipline—saw a movement towards greater specialization and a separation between various functions of the travelogue, texts written in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are remarkable in combining ethnographic, geographical and linguistic information with personal narratives. Yet, attention to questions posed by anthropology is important to consider in pre-nineteenth-century contexts as well since the history of ethnography in travel can also be explored as the history of the emergence of a basic set of analytical categories (such as political order, national and/or racial temperaments, customs and rituals, social and economic activities, sexuality, dress habits, hygiene, technology, the arts)—the presence of which, to a greater or lesser degree and in different languages, marked travel writings from the Middle Ages until the twentieth century (Rubiés 251). Moreover, the now established theoretical approaches that analyze travellers as translators and interpreters are those that help establish links between the eras of seventeenth and eighteenth-century European explorers and the production of (systematic) knowledge about the world outside. Ethnographic accounts demonstrate representational strategies similar to those found in travel texts, particularly in colonial contexts: anthropologist Johannes Fabian has noted the connection between the circulation of narrative accounts of travels to distant lands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the emergence of scientific accounts of the other. A similar point has been made by Mary Louise Pratt, who has examined travel writing as key for unraveling links between “experiential claims of the travel writer and the scientific ones of the ethnographer when attempting to justify their respective representations of the Other” (Polezzi 2001, 68).<sup>112</sup> Michel de Certeau on the other hand has pointed out how the structure of the voyage, the departure and the return home, frames the “rhetoric of distance” (de Certeau 69) in ethnographic accounts, to support its representation of the other both by

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<sup>112</sup> Also see Pratt, “Fieldwork in common places.”

assuring “the strangeness of the picture,” and by positing the traveller as a “faithful witness” (de Certeau 69). James Clifford, combining current anthropological perspectives and post-modern theory, has brought into the discussion of travel such conditions as emigration, exile, and nomadism to present a hybrid and expanded vision of travel as a “‘chronotope’ of culture.”<sup>113</sup> He argues that new representational strategies are needed for ways of looking at culture so that scholarly inquiries include “any culture’s farthest range of travel while *also* looking at its centre” (Clifford 1997, 25).

We have already noted Talal Asad’s notion of “cultural translation”—among the first attempts to draw attention to the importance of inequalities in translation processes—which have proved fundamental to the elaboration of an expanded idea of translation in postcolonial scholarship. The process of cultural translation, Asad observes, is inevitably enmeshed in condition of power: professional, national, international. It is an historically situated practice, and the ethnographer’s translation of a particular culture is inevitably a textual construct—s/he has the power to create new meanings. However, the fundamental difference between the ethnographic and the linguistic translator is that the ethnographer does not translate texts the way the translator does. S/he must first *produce* them. “The final account of the ethnographer is a multiple translation” (Guldin 84, quoting Bachmann-Medic), of experience, oral discourses, actions witnessed, into a textual form.

As one of the most frequently occurring tropes in ethnographic writing, “translation” has two variants, iconic and symbolic (Tyler 89). The former consists in the actual translation of “real” texts (typical in India given the interest of a number of European travellers in ancient Indian texts), which are written transcriptions of various kinds of spoken native [...]

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<sup>113</sup> Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin’s formulation of the concept. See *The Dialogic Imagination*. It is worth mentioning here that the formulation of chronotope in Bakhtin, although elaborated in relation to literature, is useful for the current context insofar as literature “is an integral part of the realm of culture” (253).

myths, tales, etc. (Tyler 89). Here the ethnographer not only textualizes the oral to written word but may also play the “relatively humble role of the scribe” (89). His/her authoritative move however lies in the translation and commentary, “which relativizes the text to the intertextual discourse of ethnology, [...] becomes an instance of a "myth of origin" to be compared with other myths, to be dissected, classified, and filed away in the great encyclopedia of exotic customs [...]” (89). More common, however, is translation in the symbolic mode, achieved by separating language from culture, making culture or “modes of thought,” rather than text, the object of translation. (Tyler 89 citing Asad).<sup>114</sup>

One might reiterate that while the leading critics of ethnography like Pratt and Clifford have noted the suppression of other voices by the individual authority of the ethnographer or travel writer, neither of them have discussed the specific role of languages in encounters between the native and the foreign. This has been an ongoing concern in translation studies’ engagement with travel writing.<sup>115</sup> Issues at the core of inquiries into the role of language and translation in ethnography are underpinned by the relationship between oral and written communication and their respective status in the Western intellectual tradition. Three key factors in the casting of the oral into the written at work in both travel writing and ethnography are worth a look: use of time, narrative voice, and gaze. Time, used in the present tense, reinforces the illusion of realism while “conferring a sense of eternal validity.”<sup>116</sup> This dual function, seemingly contradictory, creates the general impression of invitation for the reader to become a participant in the scene or the narrative conveyed by the authoritative text. This is one facet of the collusion between the author and the reader that connects travel writing and translation. The illusion of participation is strengthened by a strong narrative voice. The presence in the text of visual elements, filtered through the gaze

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<sup>114</sup>See Talal Asad, “The concept of cultural translation in British social anthropology.”

<sup>115</sup> Clifford, however, points to the process of transposition of oral communication to the written page.

<sup>116</sup> In ethnography this device came to be known as the “ethnographic present.”

of the narrator, gives the reader the impression of immediate and first-hand experience of the alien while precluding, due to the narrator's decisive tone and perspective, the possibility of alternative interpretations. Here it is the narrator's strategic use of expressions of subjectivity that shapes the reassuring authoritative voice that the reader agrees to collude with. Such authority in travel writing combines with autobiographical information of the narrator to bolster the sense of authenticity. But the illusion of realism on which the process depends needs to contend with possible accusations of distortion of the "real" precisely because translation is ineluctably subjective. One might re-state here the well-known: that travel writing and ethnography are also distinct from translation insofar as the first two practices do not *usually* fear being challenged by an original.<sup>117</sup> But they can, like translation, posit themselves as the voice of authority in the logocentric tradition of the West—the validity of travel writing as "real" rests on its relation to the spoken word (that is taken to be the truth) as the "original." Therefore, in the movement from experience to writing, the myth of faithfulness to the former is revealed to be impossible yet indispensable. It validates translation / transcription as purveying the "real" only insofar as it claims to be anchored in speech. Yet the process of writing, the subjective voice of the travel writer / translator / ethnographer belies this myth, and it is the mimetic, intertextual devices that sustain the fiction of realism.

The absolute authority of the ethnographer is at the same time premised on the notion of authorship restricted to written texts, and the bestowal of superiority on writing over speech in the Western literary and scientific traditions. If the *logos* signifies unmediated experience, the written text stands for permanence. It can, moreover, corroborate and be corroborated by other texts, and be read and translated by others. Here again ethnography

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<sup>117</sup> A travel account however can include translations of known texts or fables/stories from the source culture. This is often the case in French travel accounts of India. However, the "originals" in such cases may exist in many versions and often are not attributed to specific authors.

shares ground with travel writing—most widely read travel accounts, especially, although not exclusively, in colonial contexts, insist on other sources of authority: testimonies of predecessors, first-hand experience, precedence set by previous popular travelogues—all of which also evoke the idea of translation in the sense of following in someone’s tracks. In addition, in the case of travel writing, somewhat paradoxically, the ethnographic authority of the traveller also becomes a claim of the ability to understand and present the only version of the other, the “universal truth.”<sup>118</sup> So even if both ethnography and travel writing are premised on an encounter with the other, both practices until recently have been marked by the fixity of a single viewpoint and a general absence of reciprocity. Here the social is privileged over the subjective, disciplinary affiliation over personal experience. Talal Asad explains the ethnographer’s authority in the following manner: “In the long run, [...], it is not the personal authority of the ethnographer, but the social authority of his ethnography that matters [...] This is not to say that there are no resistances to this tendency. But “resistance” in itself indicates the presence of a dominant force” (Asad 163). For a travel writer hailing from eighteenth-century France or Britain, the authority of the travel book was premised on scientific authority attributed to Enlightenment discourses of knowledge and modes of knowledge construction, of which the travel writing was part.<sup>119</sup> As already suggested, both travel writing and ethnography rest on the crucial assumption of the reader’s identification with the narrator’s point of view. While presenting the other to the home audience, the travel

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<sup>118</sup> This point is discussed in the analysis of French traveller Pierre Sonnerat’s account of India’s languages.

<sup>119</sup> One must also note that “primitivity” was a trope frequently used by the European traveller to describe a range of societies, mainly to set them apart from the “now” of the traveller. See Chapter 1 for a discussion of the conflation of the three geographical areas of colonial expansion, India, Africa, and the Americas, in some French accounts, resulting in a “slippage of meaning between all non-European people” (Marsh 64-65).

Interestingly, where linguistic or translation encounter is involved, the travellee’s linguistic universe, if it does not meet certain preconceived notions of the traveller, is construed as proof of linguistic incompetence.

writer, like the ethnographer, privileges this second relationship, rendering the other into an object (often as a collective, an undifferentiated “they”) of general descriptions. Once the authenticity of the experience is stated, typically in the introduction, their authority as the sole creator of the text can go unchallenged and is supported by their invisibility (often seen in the absence of the anecdotal in the narrative), which is the “condition for the deployment of a further type of authority: the one guaranteed by the ‘objectivity’ of science and the ‘unbiased nature’ of universalist hermeneutics” (Polezzi 2001, 93).

But if ethnography shares with travel writing the absence of a “source text,” it is distinguishable from the latter by virtue of its methodological rigour. Travel writing, like translation, has no claim to scientificity (Buzelin 2007, 40). The travel writer has to rely on the authority of experience. At the same time, eighteenth-century accounts of voyages by explorers straddled the line between the “objective” discourse of science (akin to what supposedly constitutes ethnography), and the autobiographical narrative. Ethnography shares with travel writing a “sense of a personal archaeology” (Polezzi 2001, 94 quoting Pasquali 75), which re-constructs experience bolstered with discourse retrospectively. In general, however, the author, the narrator, and the protagonist become one monologic voice, underscoring the constructedness of the representation in question. The gap between experience and its textualization is further complicated by the necessary “translation” of contextual experience into a representation that can be read at other times and places and brings to mind much of the dilemmas and doubts that surround the translator’s activity.

## **2.6 On intertextuality**

Travel writers, unencumbered by the authority of an “original,” can however refer to a different kind of source text contained in the voice of predecessors, on whose authority relies their own. All travel accounts, to a lesser or greater degree, use mechanisms of intertextual

reference, in part by quoting other travellers and or by invoking the idea of following in someone else's tracks. The traveller's intertextual "luggage" consists of "stereotypes through which [they] perceive both co-passengers and the local people, sentiments that [they] bestow upon them" (Sztachelska 5).<sup>120</sup> Here intertextual references work in at least two ways: on the one hand they add testimony of other witnesses to reinforce the trustworthiness of the current one, and on the other they embed the text in the tradition of the target culture. The authoritative power of this kind of intertextuality for travel writers has been noted by Edward Said:

Travel books or guidebooks are about as "natural" a kind of text, as logical in their composition and in their use, as any book one can think of, precisely because of this human tendency to fall back on a text when the uncertainties of travel in strange parts seem to threaten one's equanimity. Many travelers find themselves saying of an experience in a new country that it wasn't what they expected, meaning that it wasn't what a book said it would be. The idea in either case is that people, places, experiences can always be described by a book, so much so that the book (or text) acquires a greater authority, and use, even than the actuality it describes (1978, 93).

Although an apparently indispensable and a highly effective validation strategy, intertextuality sometimes also results in a sense of belatedness or even redundancy. It is therefore a direct challenge to ideas of originality, uniqueness and the very *raison d'être* of the current text. The writing of yet another travel book has to be justified by setting it apart. This can be done in a number of ways: by stressing the novelty of the journey, stating the specific objective of the account, or by its style of delivery (often by claiming to eschew rhetorical language to privilege facts). This is how the image of following in someone else's tracks is exploited by travel writing in ways markedly similar to its use as an ambiguous

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<sup>120</sup> Moroz and Sztachelska, *Metamorphoses of Travel Writing*.

metaphor in translation encapsulating ideas ranging from imitation, emulation, to appropriation and usurpation of authority.<sup>121</sup> In both practices, the meaning and value attached to the idea of following in someone's footsteps ultimately depends on the relative status of texts and figures involved. However, this relationship may be more complex than it appears when we compare individual travel writers or translators. This is because while travellers and translators may take recourse to common intertextual networks, they also refer to sources specific to their disciplinary, ideological and political affiliations. Therefore texts, whether literary or non-literary, need to be located in the network of textual relations that shape them in order to be understood. An act of reading is a process of moving between texts, since meaning is something which exists between a text and all other texts to which the former refers or relates. Graham Allen notes:

A concept such as [intertextuality] can be employed to make comments on, or even capture the characteristics of, a section of society or even a period of history. As a cultural and historical term, this is often associated with notions of pastiche, imitation and the mixing of already established styles and practices. Intertextuality seems such a useful term because it foregrounds notions of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence in modern cultural life. (Allen 5).

The idea of intertextuality derives from the figure of the web<sup>122</sup> woven from texts already read and already written. This relationality can involve the "radical plurality of the sign, the relation between signs and texts and the cultural text, the relation between a text and the literary system, or the transformative relation between one text and another text" (Allen 6). However used, it suggests the possibility of questioning of ingrained notions of originality

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<sup>121</sup> On this see Theo Hermans, "Images of Translation: Metaphor and Imagery in the Renaissance Discourse on Translation."

<sup>122</sup> See Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*. trans. by Stephen Heath.

and autonomy. It gestures to a connectedness not as simple equivalence, but rather in terms of residual meaning and reinterpretability of texts:

[...] a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture ... the writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. Did he wish to express himself, he ought at least to know that the inner ‘thing’ he thinks to ‘translate’ is only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely (Barthes 146-7).

It is therefore not *necessarily* a question of “who influenced whom,” along the lines of “which one is the original.”<sup>123</sup> As Bassnett notes in the context of literary and translation studies, “[t]he creative role of the reader in making connections takes us from influence studies in the old-fashioned sense to intertextuality, to the idea that texts exist in an endlessly interwoven relationship with one another” (Bassnett 2007, 138). It offers the possibility of discerning “traces and patterns of connection” (139) crucial to the flow of themes, tropes, images, and ideas across boundaries through and as translation. And when studying connections and relationships, it is important not only to look at what may be traceable but also what has been left implicit or left out. As Venuti points out, “[...] intertextual relations may take well-defined forms such as quotation, allusion, and parody. But they may also be more subtle, [...] and generalized, such that speech act can be said to refer to previous patterns of linguistic use and a literary work to previous works written in the same genre” (2009, 157). Venuti enumerates three sets of intertextual relations in translation, which are

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<sup>123</sup> See Chapter 3 for a discussion of Barthes’ notion of travel as movement within an “orbit of signs”

relevant to reading intertextuality in travel writing as well: first, between the foreign text and other texts. This set of intertextual relations, “established by and within the foreign text, is rarely recreated in the translation with any completeness or precision because translating is fundamentally a decontextualizing process” (158).<sup>124</sup> Second, between the foreign text and the translation, and third, between the translation and other texts (158). These sets of relations, when considered from a translator’s or a translation researcher’s point of view, are however connected with each other in complex, uneven ways, and reflect the losses and gains, including discursive ones, which the foreign “text” undergoes during the translation process. In general, intertextuality is considered here not merely as a “verbal relation, but as an interpretation that plays havoc with equivalence and leaves unaltered neither the foreign text nor the translating culture” (Venuti 2009, 158).

It is therefore useful to consider the intertextual relationship between travel (writing) and translation as well, not in terms of absolute, fixed links but rather as responding to similar imageries and evoking common metaphors. Indeed, travel and discovery are perhaps the most frequently used metaphors to describe translation, “as an exciting journey,” emphasizing the necessity for translators to “cross boundaries and enter into new territory” (Federici 148, quoting Bassnett). Michael Cronin has envisioned the metaphor of the return ticket in translation where the “voyage” is inseparable from the journey home (Cronin 2003, 126).<sup>125</sup> As an act primarily undertaken in a specific historical, geographical, social and cultural context and from a personal position defined as “location,” translation creates a dialogue between the language and culture of the traveller and that of the travellee, between

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<sup>124</sup> One might note here, recalling the analogy between translation and travel writing, that if we consider a travel account to be already a “translation” of an original (the culture written about), it is the culture of the other that can be considered the foreign “text.” At the same time, the traveller can include actual translations from that culture in the account. In that case the travel writing as an all-encompassing translation of the other culture contains within it translations of textual originals.

<sup>125</sup> Cronin’s view of translation’s connection to travel is also significant for the present research because of its attention to language as a particularity of the local.

the source and the target of translation. The reader can understand the text through the translator's work of "rewriting." In this understanding the focus is on the translator's creativity, linguistic expertise and cultural knowledge.

Translated texts and travel books, by virtue of their intertextuality, can be seen as cultural archives: they are a way "to remember what has been done and thought in other languages and in our own" (Cronin 2003, 74). In referring to translation as an archive of linguistic and cultural memories, we turn to debates that connect translation and travel writing to issues of ideology and formation of literary canons. The transmission of literary and cultural values as an ideological practice and the notion of translation as a mode of engagement with literature have been taken up in postcolonial debates that intersect with translation studies. In the context of India, Tejaswini Niranjana has examined the notion of the intertextuality of translations<sup>126</sup> and the participation of some canonical translated texts in the process of the subjectification of the colonized. Her aim here is to think through the gap between cultures, "to describe the economies within which the sign of translation circulates" (Niranjana 9). Translation here emerges as a repository of an intertextual web of cultural practices which constructs images of otherness as well as counter-discourses that can deconstruct them. These constructions are achieved also through the use of language, and through mechanisms of authority discussed earlier in relation to both translation and travel writing. The approach to deconstructing such mechanisms depends on decoding the complicity of travel texts and translations with the narratives and tropes surrounding their writing. In this corrective, "translation, far from being a 'containing' force, is transformed into a disruptive [...] one. The deconstruction initiated by re-translation opens up a post-colonial space as it brings 'history' to legibility" (Niranjana 186).

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<sup>126</sup> And of travel texts, if we subscribe, as I do in this research, to the expanded understanding of translation. In addition, as I have discussed, travel writing often involves inclusion of translated texts from the source culture.

The intertextuality implicated in the notion of translation as a journey explains how specific combinations of the personal and social can lead to different translations and travel accounts dealing with the same source. All travellers, however similar their objectives for travel, do not experience travelling in the same way—they perceive their journeys differently, take different routes to the destinations, follow different itineraries. The traveller's (and translator's) process of mediation between cultures is an act of reading the culture of the other through their own historical, social and cultural lens, which is part of their “acquired linguistic and cultural archive through which [they convey] meanings to the text” (Federici 152). In the process of decoding the source text (or culture) and re-encoding the target text, the crucial choices the translator or the travel writer makes are dependent on their baggage of literary, linguistic and cultural archives, which are shaped by both long processes such as norms and conventions, and the contingencies of a precise place and time. If “texts are part of a great intertextual tapestry” (Bassnett 1993, 42) woven with old and new threads by many authors, generally speaking, the direct appeal, the clear and specific allusion to a previous text, is one of the various “markers” of intertextuality that we can identify when reading a literary and cultural text. The many subtle intertextual networks left on the pages by the author need to be recognized by the translator. Intertextuality as an analytical approach (and as a postmodern concept) can also be “self-consciously foregrounded” (Federici 153). In this case, the author / translator, through references to traditions and tropes related to a specific cultural, historical and aesthetic point of view produces in their renewal of these elements a sort of recodification of them (153). The process therefore makes it possible to increase the network of intertextuality—both reflecting and refracting the “original.” What is at stake here is not only the incommensurability of cultural elements but also the different possible interpretations of translatable elements in a new context—if translation of intertextual

references transmits cultural-bound knowledge, in the passage from one language/culture to another, the same quotation can acquire a very different value (Federici 154).

The question of fidelity and equivalence in translation (or trustworthiness in travel writing) can have curious, rarely considered implications in this context: on the one hand, the translator tries to reproduce the intertextual layers of the source text. On the other hand, in the passage from one language/culture to another s/he integrates them into a new web of intertextual references. Moreover, various translations of the same text become emmeshed in the historical and social contexts where they are published and can therefore greatly differ from the source as well as from each other (155).<sup>127</sup>

Translation is thus a discursive process where the translator's rendering of the author's world must happen but through the former's own linguistic and cultural encyclopaedia to which the target audience has to be oriented.<sup>128</sup> The receiving context affects in some way the translator's choices and strategies, primarily because the audience also interprets the intertextual references according to their own literary, historical and cultural archive. This has important implications for the idea of translation as rewriting discussed earlier. The "very looseness of the "translational" relation implied between "original" and "translation" [...] in the notion of translation as "rewriting" postulated by Lefevere means that it might equally well be defined alternatively as a form of 'intertextuality'" (D'haen 108).<sup>129</sup> In translation, D'haen suggests "bound intertextuality" as a term to posit "a stricter link between two (or more) texts than is necessarily the case in an intertextual relation" (108). At the same time, as he adds, the relation suggested here is always less strict than that which usually associated with a "real" translation. As a concept,

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<sup>127</sup> The issue takes on more complexities when one considers the differing values attached to authorship and translation across cultures and at different times.

<sup>128</sup> See section on "thick translation" in Chapter 3.

<sup>129</sup> Intertextuality is however discussed by Lefevere in relation to the refractive nature of translation.

“bound intertextuality” can be expanded to include the construction of cultures through and in travel writing. Mary Louise Pratt’s observations speak to the issue at hand:

[W]hile the imperial metropolis tends to understand itself as determining the periphery (in the emanating flow of the civilizing mission or the cash flow of development, for example), it habitually blinds itself to the ways in which the periphery determines the metropolis – beginning, perhaps, with the latter’s obsessive need to present and re-present its peripheries and its others continually to itself. [T]ravel writing, among other institutions, is heavily organized in the service of that imperative [. . .]. [S]o, one might add, is much of European literary history. (1992, 6)

The classics of European literature heavily invested in “writing travel” generally owe their canonical status precisely to the conjunction between their own narrative economy and that of their world (D’haen 109). “Such works explicitly capture their periods’ and societies’ ‘set’ towards Europe’s ‘Others,’ and implicitly also towards its ‘Self’” (110).<sup>130</sup> In fact, the narrative structure of these texts clearly parallels the cultural bias in Western scholarship towards the non-Western world.

Here ethnography, as the scholarly or “scientific” discipline specifically authorized to “describe” the West’s “Others,” emerges as a crucial discursive site. I reinvokethat ethnography not only because “every text participates in one or several genres” (Derrida 1980, 230) and a complex work can be read in terms of a dominant (for instance ethnographic elements) around which it may be organized (a point related to the generic characteristics of travel writing discussed earlier in this chapter), but also because attention to the ethnographic in

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<sup>130</sup> Edward Said in *Orientalism* argued that Western scholarship about the Orient significantly contributed towards this legitimating process. Specifically, it increasingly recast the Orient, and particularly the world of Islam, as devoid of, or lagging behind, in the features of modernity, and therefore as inferior to the West. In the process, Western scholarship disqualified all non-Western forms of knowledge, reducing them to superstition, myth, legend. Said here draws on Michel Foucault’s notion of discourse as elaborated in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, and *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.

travel writing underscores yet other intertextual connections, including the relation of eighteenth-century travel writing in Europe to Enlightenment science. Tyler argues that while ethnographic representations of the other may give the appearance “of clear referential meaning” and thereby “seem [...] to deny intertextuality” (Tyler 83), it is that very “denial that signifies the intertextuality of ethnography, for it indexes an ideological interest in setting literature aside by concealing the artifice that produces the appearance of objectivity” (83). This ideological interest derives from the discourse of science, which, although undeniably textual, claims to be more than “merely” textual (Tyler).

Intertextual practice in ethnography is mostly seen in its relation to ethnological theory and the comparative method, related to the development of anthropology as a discipline in the nineteenth century. However, such approaches are ubiquitous in seventeenth and eighteenth-century travel writing, particularly in works of naturalists and explorers. Here ethnography’s ability to obscure textual practices in order to present itself as a description of “the way things are” (Tyler 84) is what connects it to science:

Despite its ideology of description, its pose of being a writing about something that is fully external to other texts, ethnography is actually a complex intertextual practice, ranging from overt citation of other texts to allusion by failure to mention what ought to be mentioned, or noting in the first instance by presence and in the second by absence. In between these two extremes are numerous means of implicating other texts and textual traditions, either by direct comparison or indirectly through presuppositions, genre conventions, common tropes, key concepts, and the set of commonplaces that constitute the so-called theory and method of a community of discourse (84).

A “guiding dogma” consistent with the rhetoric of “objective description” in ethnography is the “fable of the ethnographer as ‘participant observer’” (Tyler 85). The rhetoric of having

observed the other “first-hand” is one that dogs travel writing as well, and has been related in translation studies to the persistent issue of faithfulness, even if only in order to draw attention to its illusory nature.<sup>131</sup> What is worth noting is that the traveller’s rhetoric often rests on claims on not only “having been there” but also having gained the kind of proximity to the other, perhaps through extended stay in the country, that lends itself to a “real” understanding of the foreign. In travel writing this claim is often encoded in claims of having access to the other’s language.

Tyler describes the “the arrival scene” that founds the description of the ethnographer’s first-hand experience (90 citing Pratt 1986) and establishes her/his authority as one that “not only reveals intertextuality but indexes the troublesome nature of that intertextuality” (90). This “I was there” trope, already in vogue in travel literature from at least the sixteenth century, was borrowed by ethnographers. Interestingly, it was also relegated to the function of “setting the scene,” lest its potential to betray the subjective jeopardized the ethnographer’s claim to scientificity and representational hegemony.

The empiricism of having witnessed betrays the visualist bias of science. But if the rhetoric of referential discourse and of description appear to connect the ethnographer’s (and the travel writer’s) words to a world beyond their text, that world itself is made up of textual conventions that govern the writing of an ethnography and travel account. These in turn are dependent, as I have noted, on the complicity of the reader. Ultimately, “readers must take the ethnographer’s word for that external reality or judge it by comparison with other texts of other realities whose externality is determined by yet other texts in an infinite, cyclical profusion of texts” (Pratt and Thornton cited in Tyler).<sup>132</sup> Here we are reminded that

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<sup>131</sup> See discussion earlier in this chapter. As Susan Bassnett observes, as in translation, faithfulness is a dominant discourse in travel writing: “travellers have pretensions towards faithfulness, insisting that we believe their accounts simply because they have been there and we have not” (1993, 103).

<sup>132</sup> Tyler also mentions other subordinate rhetorics in ethnography hidden behind the dominant rhetoric. These include “the rhetorics of power and poetry, of provocation and evocation, [...]”

ethnography or ethnographic accounts are enabled not only by the ideology of science, they are also underpinned by the philosophical, political, and economic hegemony of the culture that “establishes the conditions for their reduction to objects of scientific scrutiny”(Tyler 85 citing Said 1978).

Ethnography as a genre discredits narrative as a “story in time”—the subjectivity, personal anecdotes, account of the ethnographer’s experience and so on. This is also a characteristic of the kind of travel account this research examines, that of a naturalist. Here the objectivity of the text ensures and is ensured by its intertextual connection to other texts, a connection that also works to render abstract the representation of the other in the account, leading it away from the reader’s own experience.<sup>133</sup> The tropes in ethnography (for example in chapters with titles such as “religion and ritual” “art and dance” “language”), function “synecdochically as indexical particulars” relying on the “presupposition of an intertextual practice that constitutes an imagined community of discourse” (Tyler 86). There are also other, more implicit, tropological conventions based in Western literary traditions or canonical texts in that tradition which inform the organization of the discourse.<sup>134</sup> By suppressing parallel, multiple perspectives, the narrative sequence (not as a story *in time*) takes on a univocal character. The duality of this approach, pointed out earlier in this chapter, is worth revisiting: it is the reader’s prior exposure to the tropes invoked by the ethnographer or travel writer that establishes the latter’s individual authority to represent the other in a coherent manner in the reader’s eye. The other texts that the present account refers to also conversely make the specific “other” join the universal one, suggesting the oneness of all

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message to the world, an ill-disguised tract for social reform and culture criticism, or the romanticized evocation of the exotic and the libidinal, a pre-industrial past, noble savages in a pastoral Eden, a kind of escapist fiction” (85).

<sup>133</sup> See the annotated translation of excerpts from Pierre Sonnerat’s account of India in Chapter 4 for a discussion of this point.

<sup>134</sup>Tyler points out that “the order of chapters in a typical ethnographic study recapitulates the evolution of man from nature to culture” (87).

human experience.<sup>135</sup> In light of the ethnographer's and the naturalist travel writer's effort to establish the "uninterested"<sup>136</sup> scientific authority of their accounts, it helps to take note of the "invocation of theory (signifying both Word and Reason) as a rhetorical strategy and as the ultimate intertextual move that establishes textual authority.

## 2.7 On science

A discussion of representational strategies at work in eighteenth-century travel writing's ethnographic authority calls for an examination of the place of science in European travel writing, particularly given the privilege accorded to a "scientific" approach to knowledge in accounts where the historical, religious, philosophical and linguistic combined to represent the other. Generally, the claim of authenticity is sought to be maintained by a double claim: the experiential one of the witness, and the scientific one of the expert (Polezzi 2001, 87).<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> The "anesthetization" of the reader to the other's difference is described by Tyler as a process of "double occultation" (95) — "for the ethnographic text can represent the other as difference only inasmuch as it makes itself occult, and can only reveal itself inasmuch as it makes the other occult" (95).

<sup>136</sup> In the case of the French travellers in eighteenth-century India, whether orientalist, naturalist or both, any claim to such objectivity was often belied by their close association with the French or English colonial administration.

<sup>137</sup> In the case of the ethnographer, the claim is "embodied in statements about personal knowledge and methodological rigour, while travellers tend to invoke either past-experience or special individual skills" (Polezzi 2001, 87) to establish their authority.

In both cases, knowledge and experience are integral to the construction of an authoritative voice which support the claim of trustworthiness of the text on which the writer's pact with the reader is based. Here the ethnographer's and the travel writer's claim is based on another implicit claim, that of fluency in the native's language, which is seldom documented in the account.

This absence hides the exchange that ethnographers and travel writers must engage in to make their observation possible. So, the hidden exchange and the awareness of it point to another unacknowledged text that the researcher may try to reconstruct. In colonial contexts this absence aligns with the absence of names in colonial archives. The issue has been addressed notably by Natalie Zemon Davis in *Fiction in the Archives*.

In his exploration of travel writing's links with the study of the natural world, Paul Smethhurst examines how ideology combined with practice in late eighteenth-century Europe to produce "nature as a cultural construction" (Introduction), laying the ground for modern attitudes to nature. Enlightenment science, since the late sixteenth century, had begun to change human perception of nature: the idea of society progressing through dominance of nature grew as the sciences, especially mechanical and mathematical, evolved. But, as Smethhurst points out, it was the latter half of the eighteenth century that saw dramatic changes to attitudes to nature brought on by the "related practices of natural history and global exploration" (Smethurst 2-3): natural history relied on the knowledge collected on circumnavigations of the kind undertaken by Cook and Bougainville, and the study of nature "demanded systems and taxonomies to produce a global vision of nature, while the science of optics enabled a whole new scale of microscopic and macroscopic scrutiny" (2-3). These changes, however, were not limited to the world of naturalists and explorers, nor was this "global vision" directed solely at the natural world. They extended into society at large and shaped the European reading public's perceptions of the utility of nature. "Nature acquired symbolic weight in the politics of trade and empire, where it reinforced racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual prejudices by defining what was 'natural' and 'unnatural,' and by extension 'primitive' or 'civilized'" (Smethurst 3). No longer an absolute or a transcendent place, it could be manipulated to "define cultural codes derived from it through circular logic: what was deemed 'natural' in society would be based more on prevailing ideology than on what actually occurred in nature" (3). But since nature also retained its status as the thing-in-itself—an independent existence outside human consciousness—it could now accommodate "a basic contradiction in being both what we are and what we are not" (3). This recasting of "nature as a construct," both locally and globally, was driven by Britain and France as the dominant colonial powers of the eighteenth century. The recording of natural phenomena was

an integral part of the projects to construct a global history of nature that was intertwined with an imperial vision. While older ties between humanity and the natural world weakened, “an opposition between the natural and the human [...] remain[ed] a supposition of all [...] philosophical, scientific, moral, and aesthetic discourses” (Smethurst 4-5 citing Soper) of Western thought. European travel and exploration accounts from the period bear witness to this general shift in attitudes to nature resulting from cultural and political forces of Enlightenment science, romanticism, imperialism and reveal themselves as a practice “instrumental in producing [...] topographies of nature” (5).

Always marked by heterogeneity, travel writing in the eighteenth century appeared in many forms: exploration journal, guidebook, memoir, romantic narrative, topographical essay, and so on. But despite considerable stylistic and formalistic variety, there were those that shared a “consuming interest in the natural world” (Smethurst 5) and deployed an ideology of global vision dependent on rendering visible order and structure and on “projecting taxonomies and museum order on nature” (4-5). Exploration, natural history, the picturesque and romanticism—all provided insight into attitudes to nature and to culture. A look at these texts reveals ideology-based structures and orders underpinning both scientific and aesthetic representations of nature. Different forms of travel writing used common *techniques* of observation and representation based on the belief that the natural world existed as a system of interrelated observable phenomena, which could only be conveyed to the reader by means of aesthetics to construct nature as an abstract space. In colonial-era European accounts of India, such an orientation is present in cartographic and enumerative approaches to organizing knowledge of diverse categories.<sup>138</sup> Also shared were new metaphorical associations with nature, for example the bifurcation between cultivated nature and wild nature, the former signifying human progress through the harnessing of nature, and

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<sup>138</sup> See discussion section “On cartography” in Chapter 4.

the latter signifying passive fecundity and debasement. Theoretical models of the natural world could sometimes reflect contemporary worldviews, which might infer a link between natural order and “civilized society” (Smethurst 16-17)—a paradoxical position given the general othering of nature by civilized society. Scientific representations in travel writing however need not be seen as opposed to other kinds of responses to nature, such as the aesthetic convention of the picturesque, which was also an eighteenth-century development common to French<sup>139</sup> and English travel writing: rhetorical strategies such as the “aesthetic of the marvelous”<sup>140</sup> in fact merged with purportedly order-driven projects. Scientific authority did not preclude the need to cater to the reader’s appetite for the sensational and the exotic.

The naturalists and the explorers were as invested as the orientalist and the romantic travel writer in colluding with the reader at home. As Smethurst reminds us, “all forms of travel writing were required reading in scientific, artistic and intellectual circles” (8) and enjoyed considerable popular appeal; therefore common techniques of representation were consistent with this demand. “Scientific” study of religions and languages of the Orient was a common objective in eighteenth-century French travel writing:<sup>141</sup> it gained systematicity through mapping and enumerating, which emerged as reliable methods for collecting and organizing knowledge in general, including of religion and language. This is discernible in mapping and enumerative practices in French descriptions of India’s languages. For Britain and France, science was also a matter of national and international significance: both countries maintained plantation colonies, which depended on the sharing and redistribution of plant specimens. If naturalists in France, Britain, Germany, and Holland advocated a

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<sup>139</sup> For a general look at the picturesque in European travel writing. see Christopher Thompson, *French Romantic Travel Writing*; Nigel Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing*.

<sup>140</sup> See Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*; Pramod Nayar, “Marvelous Excesses: English Travel Writing and India.”

<sup>141</sup> For an in-depth study, see Urs App, *The Birth of Orientalism*.

“disinterested”<sup>142</sup> approach to nature, governmental interest in those countries turned the study of nature to prevailing national interests. Domestically, in France and Britain, a connected discourse on nature emerged and circulated through travel writing, much of it shaped by mercantile capitalism and imperialism.<sup>143</sup>

The scientification of nature in the era has been described as the organization of “nature-as-construct” in cultural production (Smethurst 14).<sup>144</sup> Rather than setting nature against the socio-cultural, this view helps see them as intertwined, and subject to the same practices. Therefore, the nature culture dichotomy referred to earlier could not be maintained in practice. In addition, the scientific gaze (underpinned by the colonial one) was not necessarily accompanied by imperial success nor by any unobstructed access to information. As in the case of India, radical cultural and linguistic difference often stood in the way of ordered knowledge. For the French in India, the problem was compounded by a mostly unsuccessful colonial presence,<sup>145</sup> as well as the uncertainties of navigating a foreign land. The apparent coherence in their observations was the result of systematic arrangement of limited and often random representations.

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<sup>142</sup> There were of course naturalist-entrepreneurs, like Pierre Poivre and Pierre Sonnerat, who were interested in harnessing nature for trade.

<sup>143</sup> At the same time, as already mentioned in Chapter 1, European perspectives at times diverged in response to specific socio-economic and political developments at home and abroad. A case in point would be the anticolonial sentiment in France in the aftermath of the Seven Years War, a sentiment that could not be separated from the intellectual climate in late eighteenth-century France marked by the oppositions of the physiocrats or *économistes* to overseas expansion, or from the falling fortunes of the French in India.

<sup>144</sup> The concept of nature-as-construct can be thought of as an abstract spatiality, “a dynamic space [containing] “images, texts, and simulacra of nature” (Smethurst 14) that is akin to Henri Lefebvre’s “production of ‘social space’” (Smethurst 14, see Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith).

<sup>145</sup> Maya Jasanoff in *Edge of Empire* presents an “inside out” view of empire by focusing on the role of mobile collectors and their collections in representing foreign cultures to a European audience, and also revealing the piecemeal and uncertain nature of empire, at least in the British case.

### 2.7.1 *The scientific gaze*

The orientalist traveller sought to promote the “scientific study” of the religions and languages of the Orient.<sup>146</sup> The dominant ethos of order and structure made itself felt in the social and political forces of the time and was imposed on nature (Smethurst 38-39). The scientific gaze, however, was interested primarily in the vertical, in revealing the unseen beneath the surface, and the eye of traveller “needed to work both into objects and across the world as a whole” (38).<sup>147</sup> In eighteenth-century travel narratives one therefore often finds a tension between the “seen” and its explanation—the latter seeking to reveal inner structures. And such a process was at work in areas outside science. If, as Yi-Fu Tuan suggests, there has been since the eighteenth century “a bias towards depth in Western societies despite the fact that most human experiences occur on the surface” (Smethurst 40 citing Tuan), in travel writing this bias could sometimes be undermined by expressions of failure to interpret signs “before the eyes.” But the traveller’s subjectivity always intervened, as did considerations of readership, moving the traveller-scientist “from the scientific ‘eye’ to the scientific ‘I’” (Smethurst 52). The proclamation of the individual depended on citing the network in which their texts circulated.

### 2.7.2 *Science and translation*

While the notion of translation occurs, albeit sporadically, in the discourse of the philosophy of science, the issue of translation there is not addressed adequately.<sup>148</sup> Sundar

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<sup>146</sup> For example, see Urs App, *The Birth of Orientalism*.

<sup>147</sup> Smethurst argues that while, according to Foucault, the penetrative quality of the scientific gaze originated in the nineteenth century, it was already widely used in the eighteenth century (39).

<sup>148</sup> Research in history of science, especially in India, by historians such as Kapil Raj (2009, 2011), Gyan Prakash, *Another reason: Science and the imagination of modern India* (1999) refer to translation but do not sufficiently discuss it.

In translation studies Maeve Olohan has examined the relation between history of science and history of translation. See for example "History of science and history of translation: disciplinary commensurability?"

Sarukkai observes that science's suspicion of language is comparable to language's own suspicion of translation (Sarukkai 657).<sup>149</sup> If scientific discourse likes to believe that its ideas can exist better outside the trappings of language, that view stems from the notion that texts maintain their "essence" in spite of their translation from one language into another. This is the understanding behind the naturalist travel writer's disavowal of rhetorical language.

"Science attempts to write the 'original' world. It is the response to the 'call' of the original that creates the discursive nature of science." (Sarukkai 648). Even the philosophy of science, placed between two distinct discourses, philosophy and science, is a discourse that has to constantly engage with issues of translation, although here translation is intralingual in the sense of translation between non-philosopheme and philosopheme (Derrida), and provincial, insofar as it is marked by the local. The erasure of the presence of translation in science is based on a meta-discourse on translation within scientific discourse (Sarukkai 649):<sup>150</sup>

[T]here is always the 'presence' of translation in the way we continuously interpolate from symbols to natural language. The semiotic system of mathematics does not derive any meaning without prior reference to natural language. There is no other mechanism, other than translation, that can effectively explain how it is possible for us to generate 'coherent' meaning of such texts. This will then imply that a scientific text, which glosses over the issue of translation in order to present a "unified" text as

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<sup>149</sup> The suspicion of translation, which has a long history in western philosophy, is partially based on the understanding of poetry as expressing ambiguity (because of its dependence on the figural at the expense of the literal). This binary between the figural and the literal stems from a view of language where the literal precedes the figural and is therefore prior to it. (Benjamin 1989, 10). It suggests the possibility of access to the "real" by "stripping away" that which is supposedly added to the literal. But in fact, metaphoric utterances are all that are possible. Metaphors constitute the language of philosophy and it is impossible to remove metaphoricity in order to exhibit the literal "behind" it (Derrida, 1982).

<sup>150</sup> This is clear if we consider, for example, the case of mathematics. Even if the present study is not concerned with the sciences based on non-phonetic writing, the connection is relevant because the disavowal of the rhetorical points in this direction, therefore to the readability of "truth" across space and time.

if the problems of translation across different semiotic systems are absent, is only one translation among many other possible translations. (Sarukkai 650)<sup>151</sup>

The above observation is important to consider for understanding the genealogy of the meta-discourse of modern science, how it manifests itself in certain eighteenth-century travel texts heavily influenced by the idea of an autonomous scientific language, and the entanglements of that discourse with translation. Here we are reminded of the overlaps readable between scientific and literary discourse, the former having its own stylistics, aesthetics and metaphors, etc.<sup>152</sup> The crucial role of the idea of the “original” as the first defining moment of translation is important to remember here. Simply put, translation gives the original its meaning. The possibility of reading a text and concurrently writing about what is read makes this clear. This constant reading/writing creates an original that is not the mirror image of the original as “mere” object” (656). It is marked by a paradox: it is expected to be stable enough to be available through the length of the translation, but can be made accessible only through translation, whether the original is the world or a book (657). Stecconi’s semiotic analysis of the relation between a translation and its original suggests a similar view when it posits that since “translation-sign can never be a full representation of the [ Dynamical ‘original’], there

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<sup>151</sup> Sarukkai invokes Popovič (1976) to further explain this connection: “Popovič distinguishes between four types of equivalence arising in translation—Linguistic, Paradigmatic, Stylistic and Syntagmatic. Related to this is his emphasis on the ‘invariant core’ in each text, suggesting that translation function to transmit and transfer this core. Invariance is, specifically linked to an act as also to that element, in part or in full, which remains invariant. In the case of translation, the specific dynamic act is that of translation. Under this action, it may be believed that ‘something’ remains invariant, perhaps the meaning of the text. The text by itself cannot be invariant, nor can the number of words or pages. This idea of invariance has striking philosophical similarities to the notion of invariance as it occurs in science. As is well known, the idea of symmetry in science is deeply implicated in the idea of invariance” (651).

<sup>152</sup> In translation studies Susan Bassnett hints at this overlap when she notes “If the text is perceived as an object that should only produce a single invariant reading, any ‘deviation’ on the part of the reader/translator will be judged as transgression. Such a judgement might be made regarding scientific documents” (1991), but does not elaborate on the point.

must always be a residue left for the next sign to use” (Stecconi 21), and it is precisely the resistance of the original that makes translation possible (22).<sup>153</sup>

Therefore, what is in doubt is not the “transcendence” of the original but its self-identity (Sarukkai 657). The fact that the original itself is “not absolutely self-identical” (Benjamin 172)—creates a space unique to translation. The discursive strategies in science requires the world to be first presented as the original before it can be presented as the real. This positing of access to the world enables the use of the categories of approximation (both scientific and imprecise) and verification, and of global and local discourses. A scientific text attains its status by being read as such—if translators are readers of the source text that they translate, scientists are readers of the “book of nature” which they then translate. A symptomatic reading of such texts can reveal the presuppositions on which the text is founded: one being that scientific discourse only makes legible the text of the world, one that is *already* “written.” One might add here that as in literary genres, boundaries defining the scientific genre have always undergone shifts. Even if texts are identified as belonging to the scientific—as does Pierre Sonnerat’s in terms of its formal features, its readership among the scientific elite in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe and the importance attached to its drawings and descriptions—in fact it is the structural similarities between scientific and literary texts (chapters, sections, paragraphs) that, in part, enable the former’s crossing across readerships.

In his call for addressing translation’s formative role in the writing and reading of scientific texts, Sarukkai looks at the “sociological” aspect of all texts to establish a connection between “minor” and “natural language” (distinct from scientific or “plain” language).<sup>154</sup> This is significant for the present analysis especially in light of the gap between

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<sup>153</sup> See a discussion of Stecconi’s point in Chapter 2.

<sup>154</sup> Here he draws on Venuti’s elaboration of “minor literature” in *The Scandals of Translation*.

“experience” and “writing,”<sup>155</sup> and the manipulation of language that travel writing betrays and insofar as “natural language” in science is considered not to have substantial content (Sarukkai 650). The emphasis on the “minor”<sup>156</sup> forms of language and culture calls attention to “the tendency present in writing to gather around the domineering presence of the ‘majority’ and a concomitant subjugation of the minor voices” (650), the latter often related to vernacular language and its practitioner.

This attempt to release the remainder and let the “minor” exhibit itself is part of an “ethics” of translation, insofar as discourse seeks to attain and maintain discursive homogeneity and repress the problematic presence of the foreign even within a language. This discussion is also a rationale for an intertextual, interdisciplinary reading, since discourses of history, philosophy—heavily dependent on myths and fables—can also constitute the foreign in scientific culture. Therefore the suspicion of science towards natural language can also be read as a suspicion towards the heterogeneity of language.<sup>157</sup> This is suggested by the persistent suspicion of scientists towards the relevance of these fields, in the context of scientific practice. Literary elements are seen to be the place of jargons, clichés, dialects and so on, even though this very argument is based on the *trope* of science’s access to the unmitigated *naked* truth. It is interesting to compare this with the case of a domesticating ethnographic representation—privileged as a scientific text—of the source culture. In ethnographic texts domestication can be discerned when the cultural situatedness of ethnographic description shares space with the description of flora and fauna. The

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<sup>155</sup> See Chapter 2 for this discussion.

<sup>156</sup> The definition of “minor” here is relational and the same language can be simultaneously “minor” and “major” in relation to languages around it.

<sup>157</sup> Sarukkai’s analysis takes as its subject the discourse of science in our time, but his look at the genealogy of the current discourse takes us back to the Enlightenment attitude to scientific knowledge and its relation to language.

specificity of the other in such situations cannot be evoked unless it is subsumed under the logic of “nature as text.”

## 2.8 Travel writing, translation, and ethics

Since the late 1970s, there has been considerable scholarly engagement with issues of ethics in travel writing within and across the disciplines of anthropology, linguistics, and literary studies. Among major studies that foreground the ethical in travel writing are Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), James Clifford and George E. Marcus’s *Writing Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Ethnography* (1986), Mary Louise Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes* (1992), and Syed Manzurul Islam’s *The Ethics of Travel: From Marco Polo to Kafka* (1996).

Ethical concerns in travel writing have informed shifts in humanities scholarship in the post-war period away from texts enjoying generic and hegemonic canonicity and archival authority toward non-fictional, journalistic ones (Fowler et al. 1). The text that triggered this process was Edward Said’s *Orientalism*—which, through its attention to colonial discourse studies, brought to the fore travel writing as a genre worthy of attention in its own right. Said analysed orientalism as form of thought for dealing with the foreign, typically channelling thought into an East or a West compartment, central to the idea of Western power over its oriental other as having the status of scientific truth (1978, 46). Notwithstanding its detractors, Said’s work helped bring together intellectual currents from anthropology to postcolonial criticism to bear on analyses of travel writing. Said does not address some of the major distinctions within oriental representations,<sup>158</sup> and his theoretical approach, when not supplemented by specificities of colonial encounters, can seem reductive. The humanistic critique of representation elaborated in *Orientalism* has, however, proven to be necessary and extremely generative. One of the more interesting critical responses to Said comes from

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<sup>158</sup> See note on scholarship on *Orientalism* in Chapter 1.

Dennis Porter, who points out that Said seems to ignore any counter-hegemonic thought within Western scholarly and creative writing, and therefore does not reflect on the significance of hegemony as a process (1983, 152). This, Porter argues, opens Said to the charge of promoting Occidentalism (152), and contributes to the perpetuation of the same tendencies that *Orientalism* set out to unmask.<sup>159</sup>

The expansion and evolution of studies in travel writing in the Anglophone academy led to a move away from focus on colonial discourses in the 1980s towards a nuanced engagement in the 1990s with the complexities of the wider discourse of culture and travel. This salutary shift in the field has drawn attention to non-Anglophone texts, notably French, which, because of their proximity to and construction within contexts of empire, provide an alternate view of it. At the same time, while French studies in travel writing focused on issues such as genericity and intertextuality (Fowler et al. 2), Anglophone research (for example

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<sup>159</sup> Suggesting ways of locating alternatives to the orientalist discourse elaborated by Said, Porter makes three interesting points: “First, the very heterogeneity of the corpus of texts among which Said discovers hegemonic unity raises the question of the specificity of the literary instance within the superstructure. Yet no consideration is given to the possibility that literary works as such have the capacity for internal ideological distancing that is usually absent from political tracts or statements’ memoirs. Second, Said does not seem to envisage the possibility that more directly counter-hegemonic writings and canons may exist within the western tradition. Third, the feasibility of a textual dialogue between the Western and non-Western cultures needs to be considered, a dialogue that would cause subject/object relations to alternate, so that we might read ourselves as the others of our others and replace the notion of a place of truth with that of a knowledge which is always relative and provisional” (153).

It is important to note that in “Orientalism reconsidered” (1985) Said responded to his critics, including those who accuse his work of positing a monolithic view of Western discourse: “[W]e note a plurality of audiences and constituencies; none of the works and workers I have cited claims to be working on behalf of One audience which is the only one that counts, or for one supervening, overcoming Truth, a truth allied to Western (or for that matter Eastern) reason, objectivity, science. On the contrary, we note here a plurality of terrains, multiple experiences, and different constituencies, each with its admitted (as opposed to denied) interest, political desiderata, disciplinary goals. All these efforts work out of what might be called a decentered consciousness, not less reflective and critical for being decentered, for the most part non- and in cases anti-totalizing and anti-systematic. The result is that instead seeking common unity by appeals to a center of sovereign authority, methodological consistency, canonicity, and science, they offer possibility of common grounds of assembly between them” (14).

Pratt's *Imperial Eyes*) has delved into issues of identity and voice to foreground the need to "loosen imperialism's grip on imagination and knowledge" (Pratt 1992, Preface). Pratt's research into the codes by which travel and exploration produced the rest of the world, and her approach to colonial sites as contact zones "where disparate cultures "meet, clash and grapple with each other" (Pratt 1992, 4) have helped foreground the instability of identity. They have also drawn attention to the codependence of epistemologies and agents in European constructions of its colonial other (Pratt 1992). James Clifford's notion of "travelling cultures" has further developed Pratt's insight to posit a notion of culture as constituted by both dwelling and travelling, and thereby questioned the possibility of any clear distinction between the traveller and the travellee.

Works such as Pratt's and Clifford's clearly stem from ethical concerns: in Pratt's work, ideas behind coinages such as "contact zone," "travellee," "planetary consciousness" have drawn on specific contexts of colonial encounter and have added to an awareness of the need to directly address questions of ethics in travel writing studies. One notable inquiry into the ethical dimension of travel writing that informs the current study is Syed Manzurul Islam's *The Ethics of Travel*. Islam draws attention to the dominant practice of representation in European travel writing "that scarcely registers an encounter with the other" (Preface viii) and is complicit with a "mode of othering" (Islam) based on a clear line between the traveller and the travellee. His foregrounding of this distinction as travel writing's most unethical and enduring feature helps see it as a process that is more often than not informed by a "false logic of difference" internalized by the traveller (5). Thinking about ethics in travel (writing) here involves "exploring travel as an encounter with otherness and difference in representation shaped by 'a machine of othering'" (Islam Preface). Placing its origin in Marco Polo's Voyage, Islam identifies two very different modes of travel: "sedentary," and "non-sedentary"/"nomadic," and argues that it is only the latter that warrants the name of

travel in a non-essentialized sense since it merges dwelling and travelling.<sup>160</sup> Sedentary travel on the other hand refers to a representational practice driven by the need to secure a vantage point from which to articulate difference, encapsulated in the rhetorical gesture of “monarch of all I survey” (Pratt 1992, Spurr) in Western European colonial travel accounts. The result is a view of the other from a bounded space, “a citadel of selfhood” (Islam 3) which domesticates the otherness of places visited. The traveller goes nowhere but from home to home, even while their impenetrable boundary breaks down every time it proclaims its self-sufficiency, as manifest in their systematic (and selective) elision of the role of the travellee in the making of travel accounts. It is, Islam remarks, “precisely in the very process of negotiating ‘the between’, traversing threshold and crossing boundary, that s/he makes her/himself a traveller” (5). Crucially, this relation between the traveller and the other seems mostly grounded in spatial locations as if space naturally shapes its inhabitants in its very image:

This is the immobile locating of the sons and daughters of the soil, who, possessed by an organic resonance, offer themselves to the sacrificial altar of father- or motherland. Whenever one asks why the communities of earthly bodies are segmented into bounded enclosures, the finger is often pointed at the allegedly natural fissures on the body of the earth itself. The image of space as a plenitude, as the organic sculptor of social bodies, harbours the most intractable trope of essential belonging. Once communal self-identity is fashioned in the image of the segmented body of the earth, the relationship with others invariably takes shape in terms of an essential and binary difference: the fixity of location. (Islam 5)<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> A similar idea of travel has been elaborated by James Clifford in *Routes*.

<sup>161</sup> Islam argues that the apparent fixity of location, confirmed by differences such as the ones noted above, is grounded in the Kantian philosophy which mobilizes a circular and self-conforming logic, reinforcing the Cartesian “duality of *res cogitans* and *res extensa*” (9).

Borders between cultures in such instances are not determined by geographical boundaries, rather “geographical lines are assigned to space on the basis of complex discourses of difference” (Islam 62), the borderline is inscribed at the limit of one’s horizon of familiarity (Islam) and “horizon of expectations.”<sup>162</sup> So a sedentary traveller, even one who undertakes a physical journey, does not so much cross a geopolitical border as makes their passage by availing themselves of a series of conceptual substitutes that provide them with the formal means of crossing a boundary, indicating that a transition from one bounded domain to another has taken place (135). Here both empirical geography and abstract figures of geometry in the form of an abstract grid serve as technology for securing homogeneity and the transparent identity of the space of the other.<sup>163</sup> The spatial line of separation is established in the discursive space (66), whereby the traveller demarcates home from the foreign by claiming to witness the particularities of the latter.<sup>164</sup>

The sedentary traveller in this sense travels to not another space but “to an orbit of signs” (Barthes, *Empire of Signs*) of their own making. This travel from point to point can only take place in the conceptual symmetry of “we” and “they” underpinned by a logic of the “same” of universal nature and universal reason. So while the nature of home seems to be triggered by the arrival, the referential testimonies of travellers speak of not what they purportedly saw on arrival but of their point of departure, their place of enunciation (de Certeau in Islam 70).

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<sup>162</sup> See discussion in Chapter 2.

<sup>163</sup> Note, for example, descriptions in Anquetil-Duperron’s account of crossing regional boundaries in India and the attempts to map regional borders on linguistic ones (*Recherches historiques et géographiques sur l’Inde*).

<sup>164</sup> In his discussion of language and translation, Naoki Sakai observes that the understanding of languages as one is a regulative idea, not empirically verifiable. This apprehension of oneness, I argue, is generative of the power to demarcate between the self and the other and difference here is equally challenging to verify along fixed categories of identity.

Islam in his characteristically trenchant prose calls this mode of travel a forgetting of how to dwell (77). Dwelling is understood here not as fixity but in the sense of inhabiting constantly shifting and ever-changing boundaries; it is fundamental to being and becoming. However, even the sedentary traveller is never quite immune to the power of experience and the possibility of an ethical performance of travel. Ethical travel therefore involves a psychological and philosophical journey to “the primordial condition of existence itself” (12). In this schema, the travellee cannot be reductively contained as an object of the traveller’s “knowing gaze” (Fowler et al. quoting Heidegger 4).

This ethical perspective asserts that the traveller does not really produce the other: if the other is so radically inscrutable and cannot be represented except through repetition of past discourses, what the traveller produces is an “othered other.” It is only the *act* of othering that produces a relational point, a negative pole of representation that affirms the traveller’s self-identity and fixes the other’s essence (Islam 80, 82). The ethnographic modes of fixing the other is at work here: Marco Polo’s travel, the text that has emerged as the great “machine of othering,” (Islam) owes its enduring authority to its ethnographic preoccupation and aura of specialist knowledge—which have also been the hallmark of orientalism in its institutional phase. It is framed by two principal questions: how does the other exist in relation to me? (this entails the “othering of the other”), and how is the other’s world composed and how does it function? (Islam 135). It is the second question that provides a practical map for dealing with the other, and also acts as a map for other would-be travellers. And if this dimension of travel has a separate articulation insofar as it involves a functional mapping of the other, it is at the same time subsumed under the ontological question: who is the other? Here the other is already incorporated in the orbit of the same. Colonialism itself is founded on these perceived cultural boundaries held together by a logic of sameness.

As Islam points out, this articulation of ethical concerns in travel writing based on the distinction between sedentary and nomadic modes of travel might be seen to mirror the very mode of thought that the translator / researcher set out to challenge. There may be no absolute way out of this predicament, but the very engagement with this quandary constitutes the ethical in this context. Rather than denying the oppositional concepts, one can trace their genealogy, their ability to entwine different subject positions, and not foreclose the possibility of reading nomadic travel even in the accounts of the apparently sedentary ones.<sup>165</sup>

While the works of Pratt, Clifford and Islam have inspired an established body of work that problematizes representations of cultural difference, critics have also expressed a growing discomfort with ethical interrogations that seem overly optimistic and self-congratulatory. This has led to site-specific scholarship investigating travel writing's capacity to be less complicit with prevailing political orthodoxies and to express complex interdependent subjectivities. The impetus for site-specific research into historical colonial contexts can however come from studies in contemporary travel writing, since representationally speaking, contemporary travel writing continues to resemble the "one-way traffic" (Clark 1999, 3) typical of colonial-era accounts. This continuity between the past and present can be discerned not only in the tropes of power, control and exclusion, but also in expressions of anxieties and insecurities on the part of the travel writer. A look at colonial travel writing from the present, despite the temporal distance at work here and the associated risk of imposing current criteria on historical (con)texts, opens up "colonial vision" as a contested term with anachronistic forms of authority including the potential, in itself, to question and disrupt the foundations on which that authority rests (Lisle 3-4). Dissonances

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<sup>165</sup> Citing Levinas, Islam concludes: "No matter how far one tries to bear an authentic testimony to the language of *saying*, it will always be compromised or expressed unfaithfully in the rational, critical language of *said* (*le dit*). The ethical task [...] is not to do away with the language of *said*, but to bear testimony to the *saying* in the *said*. This paradox, or double-bind, is unavoidable in any ethical project" (210).

within apparently coherent and authoritative accounts can be read as incomplete articulations of power and a confirmation of the artifice of coherence in travel writing and in colonial discourse in general.<sup>166</sup> At the same time, certain ways of knowing the other evident in colonial era travel accounts have been internalized by the postcolonial, and often the ethical inquiries are spurred by an awareness of this embedding in the present.

Therefore, the ethical here has political implications for the present. It is interesting to note that if, as a genre, travel writing has always been concerned with distinguishing the ethical from the political, it has also collapsed the distinction between the two: between “what is” and “what ought to be” (Lisle 6). Lisle observes that “a travelogue can be judged “good” to the extent that it acknowledges, addresses and engages with its ethical and political responsibility to the other.” The question that follows is: in what forms does ethical awareness manifest itself in travel accounts since all texts are culturally situated and most in colonial contexts politically circumscribed? One might also ask, does this awareness serve an ethical purpose when entangled with the political, or can the ethical matter when not supported by the political? These questions are valid for contemporary research into historical travelogues, particularly when modes of othering circulated in historical and colonial travel texts persist in postcolonial epistemologies.

The positing of space as the ontologically primary category of travel writing—related to the spatial grounding of the other and the logic of sameness underpinning sedentary travel—is worth revisiting here:

[T]ravel writers repeatedly differentiate themselves from others by situating their authority in a stable, superior and unquestioned home. While the author is not actually at home for the duration of the narrative, home provides the geographical anchor from

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<sup>166</sup> Lisle’s text cited here is particularly relevant in that she addresses the important issue of identifying criteria for distinguishing “between competing representations of difference in travel writing” (262) within a poststructural framework.

which he/she can make observations and judgements about foreign people and places.” [...]

What is politically significant about this spatialisation of subjectivity is the way destinations are produced, evaluated and judged according to the supposedly universal categories of civilisation and security that characterise the travel writer’s home. (Lisle 137)

The distinction between home and away here seems to be always bolstered by other binaries, such as civilized / uncivilized, modern / primitive, pure /corrupt, historical /mythical.<sup>167</sup>

Here the production of space, like the production of otherness, is made possible by the juxtaposition of colonial and cosmopolitan visions: oppositional spaces are either reinvoked through a colonial map where the other emerges as debased and devastated,<sup>168</sup> or they are projected onto a cosmopolitan map through the logic of a sameness connecting all of humanity.<sup>169</sup> Concepts and terms such as “contact zone,” “go-between,” by shifting attention

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<sup>167</sup> Lisle points out the persistence of colonial-era cartographies of power even in the correctives proposed by scholars. Despite “its critique of the problematic ordering of space between the traveller the other, travel writing studies often reinforces the fundamental distinctions between home and away on which representation of difference is founded. For example, *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing* provides an analysis of the genre by dividing the world into recognized sites, and then tracing how travel writing has produced and maintained those sites over the years (e.g. The Middle East/Arabia; South America/Amazonia; The Pacific/Tahiti; Africa/The Congo; India/Calcutta;). While authors analyze how these sites are culturally produced by travelogues, they never really disrupt the prevailing discourse of modern cartography. In the end, the critical potential of such works is limited because its spatial organisation simply reinforces prevailing cartographies of power. Meanwhile, scholars have amassed evidence to support the claim that travel narratives both inherit and entrench established modes of representing particular regions. Holland and Huggan have attempted to address this issue by proposing the idea of “textual zones,” to be understood in ideological and mythical rather than merely geographical terms. The attempt however does not quite shake off the prevailing cartographies of power since zones are simply another way of “reproducing modern spatial categories as measurable, divisible and immutable” (Lisle 187).

<sup>168</sup> It is however the “logic of sameness” that also enables the “othering of the other” as debased.

<sup>169</sup> The most notable critical work addressing the overdetermination of space in modern cartography in colonial contexts comes from Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes*. The now well-known theoretical concept in Pratt’s work that has proven critical to understanding the relation between space, power and subjectivity differently is “contact zone.”

away from absolute domination/subjugation, can help to disrupt totalizing accounts of colonial encounters. They help foreground a different configuration of the space in relation to the people and places “travelled to” (Pratt 225). This is significant because travel writing, if it has always depended on translation for its construction and dissemination, has also systematically obscured or pathologized the role of the local translator /interpreter in that enterprise.<sup>170</sup> But even if knowledge about the local is more often than not hindered by the systematic forgetting<sup>171</sup> and the claim of autonomy on the traveller’s part, these concepts have gone a long way to presenting a site for dialogue between competing epistemologies. They corroborate the idea that cultural contacts will always defy cartographic ordering of space, since travel is, to use Foucault’s term, “heterotopian” (Foucault 1986) rather than utopian. It produces the overlapping and conflicting spaces and temporalities, which are problematized sites where order and form cannot confer stable meaning on words and things.

Translators have long agreed that the effort to render one language system into another involves the interaction of specific values along with broad cultural ones. It also requires existential choices with far reaching implications for both the text and its audience. How much otherness of the foreign should the translator highlight and or suppress? What combination of the foreignness of the other and its flattening would make the text stand out but not be an oddity in the target culture? How do the translator’s ideological affiliations figure in these choices? (Bermann 5). These questions demand judgment calls that are practical and ethical. Translation’s distinctive ability to offer insight into the language

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<sup>170</sup> This persistent issue in explains recurring doubts around “authenticity” in travel writing. See Bassnett, *Constructing Cultures* on this and the related issue of pseudo-translation; Also Cronin, *Across the lines* for a useful albeit limited look at the traveller’s dependence on local translators /interpreters.

<sup>171</sup> Rendered conspicuous by the general absence of names of native translators/interpreters in colonial accounts.

process—one that is fundamental to the meaning-making involved in all travel—aligns it with ethics.

What is at stake here is the recognition that if different languages and translation processes across cultures share features and semantic overlaps in their effort to relate the referential world, this overlap is always partial. Language is not a simple mode of naming pre-established and universally recognized “meanings,” therefore translation can never be a complete or transparent passage of meaning. This is not a pessimistic view, because even in its partial negotiations of difference, translation provides a linguistic supplement that negotiates cultural incommensurabilities and generates knowledge networks and flows. But if both translation and the “original” text are to be understood, following Walter Benjamin’s “The Task of the Translator,” “as the fragments of a greater language” (Benjamin 79), one might ask, what is the nature and location of this greater language? Does it refer to a fixed primordial essence, or “rather to a harmony where difference, like Derridean ‘différance’ with its generative and infinite deferral of meaning, and therefore of ‘essence’, persists”? (Bermann 6). These questions have implications for how language equivalence is envisioned in translation and travel, and they concern the present study. They suggest that the outlines of a greater human language are drawn through the practice of translation itself, each new rendering contributing to a virtually endless accretion of meanings of language and of translation. The *noncognitive* horizon of otherness implied here, to which we are ultimately responsible, stretches within and beyond each linguistic sign and each effort at translation. (Bermann 6) Here otherness is a recognition of *equality* rather than *equivalence*, understood but not grasped.

In this understanding meaning unravels over time rather than only across space, ethics joins praxis and history. If traditional understanding of translation has defined it largely in

terms of a mimesis,<sup>172</sup> here it is more generative to think of it in terms of a history of “instances,” focusing on its role in perpetuating as well as remaking the knowledge of the other.<sup>173</sup>

This brings to the fore a peculiar double-bind of translation: “If we must translate to emancipate and preserve cultural pasts [...] we must do so while attempting to respond ethically to each language’s contexts, intertexts, and intrinsic alterity” (Bermann 7). The challenge is the simultaneous necessity of “readability and unreadability, translatability and untranslatability, pure reference and substantive essence” (7). This dual responsibility is best addressed through inquiries into the linguistic, cultural, and historical contexts of translation and making these considerations apparent in subsequent translations of translations.<sup>174</sup> It is what constitutes thick translation.

Gayatri Spivak notes that the “impossibility of total translation is what puts its necessity in a double bind” (“Translating into English” 105), suggesting that the translator think in terms of trace rather than achieved translation: trace of the other, of history, cultural traces:

If translation is a necessary impossibility, the thought of a trace looks like the possibility of an anterior presence, without guarantees. It is not a sign but a mark and therefore cannot signify an “original,” as a translation presumably can, especially when assumed as definitively irreducible. (Spivak 105)

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<sup>172</sup> Or an attempt to convey the “truth” of the original in the target language.

<sup>173</sup> See Samuel Weber, “A Touch of Translation: On Walter Benjamin’s ‘Task of the Translator’” *Nation, language, and the ethics of translation*.

Weber distinguishes between “language” and “instance”—translation involves not only movement from one “language” to another, but from one “instance” (a text that already exists in one language) to another “instance” (that did not previously exist).

<sup>174</sup> As indicated in Chapter 2, I refer to travel writing in this research as “translation” of culture, which can also stand as source text for subsequent translations.

The meaning-making potential of translation emerges here when we consider the tendency of rhetoric to subvert meaning constructed by logic—this is what scientific travel writing grapples with. The relation between logic and rhetoric is also one between social logic, social reasonableness and the disruptiveness of figuration in social practice (Spivak 187), which makes itself felt in the encounter with the local. To understand social logic, its vulnerability in the face of rhetoric, one must “have a sense of the specific terrain of the original” (Spivak). The issue becomes complex when one considers that travel accounts occupy the place of both an original and a translation—on the one hand, there is no specific “source text” that it translates or is responsible to. On the other, certain accounts as translations of experience often rely on and include interlingual translations to establish their authority.<sup>175</sup> In this case originality is established through translation. Moreover, scientific travel accounts posit their authority as definitive “translations” of nature as the original. Here the terrain of the original intertwines the terrains of both the traveller and their other. Fulfilling ethical responsibility as a reader /translator here depends on acknowledging the irreducibility of (cultural) translation in any claim to identity.

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<sup>175</sup> See this link established in Chapter 2. As already noted, the *raison d'être* of French travel to India was often access to the country's ancient religious texts and their accounts had to include translation of its stories and fables.

### 3 Why Translate and How

#### 3.1 Understanding “regimes of description”

This research is concerned with understanding the mechanisms of description that shape representations, particularly the overlaps between the European regimes of description in Pierre Sonnerat’s account of India. In *Regimes of Description*, a work exploring the historical circumstances governing descriptions in the late eighteenth-century discourses, authors Bender and Marrinan observe that descriptions, even in strictly scientific contexts, are produced from particular perspectives and situations and based on a finite and selective body of features (4). Besides the question of use-value, there seems to be little difference between descriptions of “real” and imagined things (4). Farther, descriptions do not replicate objects, but rather employ different media to transmit critical characteristics of objects across time and space (4-5). Foucault pointed out that the late eighteenth century saw a rupture between the disciplines of synthesis and analysis, between the deductive formal sciences and the empirical sciences that “detached the possibility of synthesis from the space of representations” (Foucault 2002, 268). But the archeology of description reveals not so much a rupture between regimes of description as overlaps—for example, between description and the utopian idea of knowledge as translatable between cultures without any alteration to its essence and descriptions in which an empirical mode of analysis is deployed in the construction of an imagined world. The travellers’ assertion of the reliability of his /her account based on “having been there” (not an uncommon claim) draws attention to the construction of facts through sieving and parsing experience in a manner suggested by the *Encyclopedie* article on “description” in natural history, which warned that “[a] book which contained so many and such long descriptions, far from giving clear and distinct ideas of the bodies which cover the earth and which compose it, present to the mind only indeterminate [...] figures scattered without order and traced without proportion” (Daston 12). That the

factual has a history draws attention to the category of the factual (12-13),<sup>176</sup> which has its own history.<sup>177</sup> Seventeenth century travel writing was marked by a sensibility of curiosity, an attention to singularities even if these defied attempts to replicate them. This sensibility made way in the eighteenth century for a new “factuality of uniformity” characterized by an attention to render facts cumulative, to replicate retell and generalize over large classes of instances even in the face of pronounced exceptions (Daston19). The difference between attention to the chaos-inducing curious and to uniformity needs be understood in terms of the brand of empiricism involved: if the first was oriented towards singularities as most revealing of the nature of things, the inductive empiricism of the second tamed singularities into regularities and saw them as most revealing of the nature of things (21) By mid-eighteenth century, a belief in the inviolability of natural law (not far from the logic of “natural reason”) seems to have become conflated with a belief in the uniformity of nature and the manner in which such uniformity could be understood in cultural expressions of the other (22-23).<sup>178</sup> Here the local, its geography and history got noticed only to be cancelled out or relegated a secondary position by the logic of the underlying universal. Such a sensibility, termed “description by omission” (Daston)—found, for example, in collections of diverse places arranged to maximize resemblance rather than diversity—meant that local specificity had officially disappeared from nature along with all other forms of diversity and variability (22-23). This major shift in attention pervaded intellectual discourses in general of the time, although not everyone was persuaded: in his critical commentary on Montesquieu’s *l’Esprit*

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<sup>176</sup> Although historians and philosophers of science have worried that facts may be “contaminated” by theory or “constructed” by society, and although they have charted the changing content and credibility of particular facts” (Daston 12-13).

<sup>177</sup> This perspective has implications for the way we approach and understand descriptions and translations (of others) in travel writing—especially those that straddle the line between scientific and literary texts— and the incorporation within each travel account of a variety of subjects that entwine idea and experience, empirical observation, and idealized fiction.

<sup>178</sup> As I demonstrate in Chapter 4, this premise is critical for understanding the manner in which India was sought to be incorporated in the European concept of the world.

*des lois*, French philosopher and mathematician Marie Jean Antoine Condorcet (whose name appears in Pierre Sonnerat's work), countered Montesquieu's emphasis upon local customs and national characters with projects for the universal reforms of weights and measures and of civil and legal codes, that are gathered under the heading "ideas of uniformity." But in general, scientific travel writing of the time displayed a propensity to order difference, irrespective of personal interests of the travellers: "[a] slender but strong chain connects the smooth-textured descriptions of the savants of the time to the voyages of exploration that imposed a grid of uniformity" (Daston 23) over climates, customs, opinions, languages of an entire globe.

The European standard model of the relationship between language and thought itself has been circumscribed by this logic.<sup>179</sup> For example, in spite of the daily experience that languages are different and such differences are serious obstacles to communication, Europe was deeply convinced that languages are also profoundly identical and language difference—experienced in difference of sound—is to be understood in terms of its superficiality (48-49 *Regimes*).<sup>180</sup> Cognition, in this understanding, is pre-linguistic and the same for everybody. But the other could still be described in terms of difference since original cognitive abilities can decay and signs become fragmented, needing "translation" into the universal.

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<sup>179</sup> While language is usually one category in the French traveller's discourse of India, at the same time it emerges as a recurring site of difference, the barrier which seems to subsume all others in knowing the region.

<sup>180</sup> As we have seen in Chapter 2, this belief has deep historical roots in the Western tradition. The conception of universal of thought, rooted in the Greek experience, is confirmed by the Biblical story. Even if, contrary to the Greek linguistic conception, the Babel myth tries to reckon with linguistic difference. According to this linguistic diversity is considered a punishment. And as a nostalgic story about loss of original unity, it establishes the necessity of a return to the original by overcoming plurality.

According to this, the affectations of the soul, of which sounds are the signs in the first place, are the same for all, because objects are the same of which sounds are images (Daston 48).

Everyday words of vulgar languages were considered sites of sedimented “prejudices” and a cognitive obstacle to true knowledge—a realization that coincided with Europe’s contact with the Americas and the rise of national languages.<sup>181</sup> The other possible reaction to the ever-growing insight into semantic differences among languages is the celebration of those differences, the kind seen in the works of Anquetil-Duperron and Leibniz. In this understanding, languages are documents of history; knowledge of languages yield insights into the history of peoples. Anquetil famously collected more than a hundred manuscripts representing numerous languages of India. But his study of languages was ultimately spurred by an interest in tracing the genealogy of his own culture, and here he was convinced that the key to all European culture was to be found in early Indo-European texts, especially in Sanskrit and Persian. The historical aim ultimately did not favor linguistic description—the research for origins seemed to invariably reduce variety to unity (53).

### 3.2 Scientificity of discourse

Considering the place of science in exploring eighteenth-century travel writing has emerged as crucial in this research<sup>182</sup> due to the decision to examine Pierre Sonnerat’s account and the place of language in it. The naturalist traveller’s claim to empirical observation often rested on claims of eschewal of rhetorical language to privilege facts: Linnaeus’ influential *Philosophica Botanica*, which used plain language and expressly banned tropes such as metaphor, irony, and synecdoche, was taken as a model by naturalist travel writers.<sup>183</sup> In the Foreword to *Voyage*, Sonnerat distances himself from those European

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<sup>181</sup> Paradoxically, this fight against linguistic prejudices is the beginning of linguistic research.

<sup>182</sup> See section titled “On Science” in Chapter 2 for a discussion of the intertextual links between science and travel writing. This discussion is one sense a continuation of that but separated because it seems to lead to the “how” in this project.

<sup>183</sup> Yet, as Smethurst points out, “one talked of stripping the language of ‘spacious tropes and figures’, and ‘naked truth’ was the catch phrase of the age aiming at discovering nature in naked prose” (49). See the annotated translation in Chapter 4 for further discussion of this point.

intellectuals whose reliance on style and rhetorical devices, he states, was a way to camouflage falsehood (xv). The claim, not a unique one in late eighteenth-century travel texts, lays open a paradox:<sup>184</sup> that the scientificity of science, which has been posited as a logic, “has always been a philosophical concept, even if the practice of science has constantly challenged its imperialism of the logos” (Derrida 1997, 3). The idea of science is meaningful for us only within a world to which a certain concept of the sign and a certain concept of the relationship between speech and writing have *already* been assigned (Derrida). Here both the translator and the reader are implicated if they are both subject to that culturally/linguistically mediated understanding of representation. The empirical or the “real” can exist through an invocation of the *logic* of the empirical, itself a rhetorical concept. What Derrida calls the “logic of supplementarity” is the strange reversal of values whereby an apparently secondary presence takes on the crucial role in determining an entire structure of assumptions (Norris 67). In a way, the nature of the other’s difference—which a cultural translation purports to convey—has already been established insofar as it is presumed to be based on a located assumption of universality. Here the impossibility of separating the signified and the signifier is one that is *historically* articulated. And the very avowal of (timeless) empiricism can sustain itself only by putting into doubt a system of oppositions (primitive / modern, pure / corrupt) based on the idea of an absolute point of departure. But even this fallibility can only be related to a certain kind of intertextuality traceable to a point, and not to any absolute beginning. In “Plato’s Pharmacy,” Derrida demonstrates that the effort to fit everything into binary oppositions depends on distinguishability that may not exist in that word. The word is the medium and not a result of split into either or, although translations may dismember it into either or structure. Instead of defining such words as theory, Derrida finds the

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<sup>184</sup> Here I draw on Derrida’s position in *Of Grammatology*, trans, Gayatri Spivak.

“exorbitant” (deviating) terms of each text.<sup>185</sup> It is therefore crucial for the translator/translation researcher to pay attention to the polysemous elements that make up representations; the striking manner in which these permit multiple renderings of the same word *within* the context presented in the text—through manipulations, but without mistranslation. Knowing *how* to read and translate involves recognizing that it is not only an issue of interlingual translation but also of translation between different disciplines *within* the Western epistemology—between non-philosopheme and philosopheme (Derrida 1985, 185, 120).<sup>186</sup> The insight corroborates de Certeau’s and Islam’s position that the traveller’s / translator’s place of enunciation is central to their reading of the other. The message for translation here is that the irreducible plurivocality of the units and categories (word, language) of representation defies this pure translatability (that the scientific rests on). So the idea of translation (like vernacular /local languages) being secondary comes undone when faced by its potential to introduce difference.

The issue of authorship in scientific discourses, already discussed in relation to ethnography, is important to consider here as well. The idea of authorship that derives from being associated with an original that is the world is different from the one related to literary texts, but it is nevertheless useful to draw of translation theories to examine how the representation of the foreign intersects with it. To address the lack of critical engagement with the foreign, translation theory has used the term “pseudo-translation,”<sup>187</sup> “an original composition that its author has chosen to present as a translated text” (Venuti 1998, 34). Such

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<sup>185</sup> For Derrida, such examples are not meant to account for other examples in other texts, or for generalizations. The suggestion of a theoretical approach lies in that these “undecidables” have in common their displacement of what is taken for granted as the ground rule for a reading. In this sense, the logics they make visible and functional are generalizable, but they are not logics if logic is understood as something separable from the text.

<sup>186</sup> The translation between non-philosopheme and philosopheme rests on the thesis of translatability of a semantic content into another signifying form. See Derrida, *The ear of the other*, trans. P. Kamuf. See my discussion of the metaphor of translation in the Western tradition in Chapter 2.

<sup>187</sup> See in particular Lawrence Venuti’s *Scandals of Translation* (1998).

a move is useful in the field of translation “since it involves a concealment of authorship,” leading to “a reconsideration of how an author is defined in any period ...” (34). Something similar happens in a scientific discourse:

The world is the original author. Science merely speaks that which is already written in the text of this world. Thus science and scientists abdicate the responsibility that is due to the original author. This also implies that science speaks for the world and does not, by itself, add anything to what the world says. Therefore, the scientific narrative of the world is not a construction of the practitioners who are embedded in a history and culture, but is merely a “revelation” of the text of the world. (Sarukkai 655)<sup>188</sup>

As Sarukkai sees it, the traditional displacement of the author in scientific texts by the cultivated image of the discoverer as one who merely reveals nature is best captured by the concept of pseudo-translation as well. It implies an abdication of responsibility, as well an ability to say something on someone else’s behalf.

The idea of pseudo-translation, however, can also refer to any work “whose status as “original” or “derivative” is, for whatever social or textual reason, problematic” (Robinson 2009, 184).<sup>189</sup> This is what makes the concept particularly relevant for the present research. Sonnerat’s account, purportedly an original work, heavily relies on translation, by himself, by native translators and other fellow orientalists.<sup>190</sup> If, however, the issue here is of attributing authorship (as it is commonly expected to be in the Western translation tradition), it is complicated in the Indian context. This is because Sonnerat was translating texts from a

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<sup>188</sup> In contrast, the sociological critique of science seeks to place the responsibility of the discourse on the scientists themselves, arguing that the scientific discourse is co-constituted by their narrative of the world, which is “contaminated” by the socio-cultural historical positions they embody.

<sup>189</sup> See Emily Apter, “Translation with no original: scandals of textual reproduction.”; Douglas Robinson, “Pseudotranslation.”

<sup>190</sup> That he included or drew on works by others is particularly evident in the sections dealing with religion and mythology.

tradition where authorship did not have the kind of significance as in Europe. The Indian texts in question are records of thought processes / arguments that do not belong to *an author*. The ubiquity of translation in India both in written and oral texts, related largely to India's multilingualism, has meant less obsession with a meta-discourse on translation focused on bestowal or denial of authorship.<sup>191</sup> The idea that the scientific narrative could be considered pseudo-translation implies that the narrative of the scientists should itself be read as “original” rather than “displace this ‘originality’ to the voice of the world” (Sarukkai 655). But in the context of this research, the scientific account's problematic relation to translation and authorship needs a more nuanced approach.<sup>192</sup> If we consider the account of Sonnerat, on one hand it is similar to those accounts of the world that flaunt their “originality” in contrast to those that conceal their inability to tell the “real” behind rhetorical language (Sonnerat). But it is a pseudo-translation in the sense that it conceals, intentionally or not, what it is made up of and what it seeks to rewrite—the already translated versions of India as the original.<sup>193</sup> In this case the characteristics of both seem to be present in the same text.

The decision to translate *Voyage* stems partially from this awareness of translation as rewriting and the need to explore the historicity of language and translation implicit in the work. If, for the naturalist traveller, the world as an original is made up of both observable

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<sup>191</sup> In fact, despite its heavy reliance on translation for communication in all sections of population, India has seen relatively little theorization of the practice. Also see Harish Trivedi, "In our own time, on our own terms: 'translation' in India," for a discussion of history of translation in India and of Indian terms for translation.

<sup>192</sup> One might also note that “scientific” accounts themselves are on a spectrum depending on how embedded they are in the science.

<sup>193</sup> Sarukkai introduces the concept of “dubbing”—replacing the language of the “original” (film) with the dubbed language—as way to theorize the link between science and the literary concerns of translation. There is the assumption here that the “essence” of the film is retained, suggesting that language plays a secondary role in comparison to the visual.<sup>193</sup> It is the close link between dubbing and culture that makes this comparison a useful one. It draws attention to the inherent nature of texts as multi-layered. This is of course most evident in visual texts, but the possibility that there are multiple layers even to the unadulteratedly textual needs to be taken seriously. One might ask if texts are always multilayered, what does the translation of a text mean?

nature and cultural practices which are themselves situated translations, which characteristics of the latter get elided and how? How does the language of the other seep into the same text that conceals it? The ethical responsibility ultimately lies not in proving the status of a text as original, translation or pseudotranslation, but rather in trying to trace the processes, negotiations, human and material mediations that co-create such texts. This does not suggest absence of interest in authorship or individual agency. Rather it problematizes the easy bestowal or negation of textual authority in research into contexts of intercultural encounter.

### **3.3 Thick description, thick translation**

The above perspectives inform my reading of travel accounts as domestic representations that are at once partial and universal. The issue here is that of reading texts in context when the latter is marked by both longstanding traditions and the contingencies of a contact zone. Theo Hermans has highlighted the main challenges to such an undertaking: first, “there is the problem of grasping, understanding and gaining access to concepts and discursive practices, including concepts and practices of translation, in languages and cultures [...]”. Secondly, there is the fact that the cross-lingual and cross-cultural study of concepts, discursive practices and scenarios of translation requires the use of translative operations. We need to translate in order to study translation (Hermans 2003, 384). In this pragmatic stance<sup>194</sup> the world does not speak any language more than others. Language does not give access to the essence of things, rather to certain vocabularies and strategies for addressing certain moments in human history. What follows is that in the cross-cultural translation of translation (insofar as travel writing is already a translation) there is no such thing as a complete and accurate representation of foreign concepts of meaning-making, that the

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<sup>194</sup> Feeding into and fed by the philosophical antifoundationalism associated with the work of neopragmatist Richard Rorty. See discussion in Hermans 2003.

accuracy of representation cannot be measured in a way that lets us choose the *best* one, or that any representation can preclude the possibility of other ones, whether less or more partial.<sup>195</sup> There is however room to detect omissions, impositions, and domestications in representations. Rather than focusing on the inherently impartial nature of representation in fatalistic terms, one can consider the generative potential of the partial that is often the impetus for translation. The question that seems productive in the context is one posed by Lydia Liu: “In whose terms, for which linguistic constituency, and in the name of which kinds of knowledge or intellectual authority does one perform acts of translation between cultures?” (Liu 1). One approach to devising ways of practising intercultural translation of translation seems to be what Kwame Anthony Appiah, drawing on Clifford Geertz’s concept of “thick description” has called “thick translation” (Appiah 1993, 2000).<sup>196</sup> “Thick translation” seeks “with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context” (Appiah 427). It addresses my goal of exploring the nature of mediations and intertextualities shaping Sonnerat’s text.

Geertz’s concept of “thick description” was meant to counter the “poverty of Structuralist reductiveness and schematism in anthropology” (Hermans 2003, 387). It is the term for the interpretive negotiation (387) aimed at understanding the manner in which ideas and concepts emerge in cultures. It requires us to negotiate the gap between the manifest and the implicit. The line of thought is useful for drawing attention to both the interpretive and the constructivist nature of the ethnographer’s (as well as the travel writer’s and translator’s) descriptions. The issue at hand is not whether an end product is a complete or accurate account of a particular society, but whether it allows us to appreciate both what is similar and what is different, although the issue of omission will often lead one to ask which “truth”

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<sup>195</sup> This perspective resonates with the link established between translation and semiotics in Chapter 2.

<sup>196</sup> A notion he borrowed from Gilbert Ryle, *The concept of Mind*.

gains currency and prevails and how in asymmetrical encounters between cultures.

Additionally, “thick description” requires that the “sweep of abstractions” can be tempered by the “delicacy of distinctions” (Geertz 25)—details within larger narratives. In privileging the many over the one (Inglis 115), it has the potential to foster a diversified vocabulary in translation studies. In translation research, this possibility is offered by actual practice of translation.

This approach is chosen partly to avoid the imposition of categories deriving from one particular tradition while taking note of the cultural contaminations that shape the production and circulation of texts and discourses. Seen in this light, it is both an acknowledgement of the inevitable incompleteness of all translations, and an unwillingness to appropriate the other even while translation is taking place (Hermans 2003, 388). Therefore what is required is an overt awareness of the manner in which meaning is constructed, at the risk of being considered a *fidèle ridicule* rather than a *belle infidèle*.<sup>197</sup>

In adopting thick translation as a research method, my goal is to place translation, interpretation and description in the same discursive space and draw attention to the fact that as a translingual act itself, this translation enters, “rather than sits above, the dynamic history of the relationship between words, concepts, categories and discourses” (Liu 20). This interest is shared by the concept of “localism” and the focus on the *process* of meaning-making in networks (ANT) discussed earlier. It is also essential to the study of mediations at the heart of the concepts of *histoire croisée* and contact zone. My choice of this translational and analytical approach is less concerned with the traditional hermeneutical relation between translator and text than with investigating the ways in which texts can be read as sites of

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<sup>197</sup> I borrow this from John Leavitt, “Thick translation: Three soundings.” *Language, Culture and the Individual: A tribute to Paul Friedrich*.

Leavitt describes “thick translation” as the combination of an anthropologist's attention to cultural context with a nearly or truly philological attention to the specifics of texts” (79).

debates, power struggles and for delineating the difference of the other. It is part of the “translingual practice” (Liu 1995) that can help explore the conditions of translation whereby new meanings emerge and circulate in a host culture due to and often in spite of its encounter with a guest culture. Here translation can be understood in terms of the invention of meaning within particular historical contexts, a kind of “meaning-making history” that cannot be divorced from issues of both culture and power (Liu 32 quoted by Hatcher 110).

The concept of thick translation seems to be a particularly productive one when we consider the common ground shared by translation and ethnography, insofar as both are concerned with the crossing of an unavoidable reality of linguistic, and therefore cultural, difference.<sup>198</sup> A similar point is made by Leavitt, who observes that translation and anthropology can mutually benefit by attending to the “depth” and “thickness” of cultural and philological contextualization (Leavitt 79). The “thickness” of texts that Leavitt underscores as one of the dimensions of translation refers to “the presence or absence of layers of information about the source text [or culture] carried over into the target text” (98). It is, however, not thickness per se but the “analytical excursions [that] add layers of understanding ‘above’ and ‘below’ what is conveyed in the source text” (98) that matter here.<sup>199</sup> To this end the translator can draw on a toolbox of varied concepts and strategies—notes, framing discourses, visual and narrative dissonance, micro and macro histories, analytical interventions within translations so on—which, in combination or alone, can shed light on aspects of a source text that cannot be squeezed into uniform prose blocks of thin

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<sup>198</sup> See Chapter 2 for a discussion of this connection.

<sup>199</sup> Leavitt cites the growing interest in foreignizing approaches in Translation studies, suggesting that foreignizing is not inherently conducive to any particular objective. If foreignizing translations tend to give for information about the source text, they are necessarily thicker than domesticating ones. But a domesticating translation (or a travel account that combines translation and ethnographic description) can also be thickened by prefaces, footnotes, maps and other paratextual elements, all of which add to the layers of interpretation to the text in question (98).

translation. Thickness as a dimension has no inherent limits (Leavitt 98). Take for example these lines from French traveller Anquetil Duperron's observations on India's languages:

Travelling down the peninsula, one comes across the *jargon* of Balasore, corrupted from Bengali ... then Telugu—it is the Indian language that is closest to Sanskrit. Its area extends from Ganjam on the Orissa coast to 8-10 coss<sup>200</sup> north of Tamil-speaking Pulicat ...

The coast of the Pescherie<sup>201</sup> has a particular *jargon*, a corrupt Tamil that resurfaces west of Cape Comorin. (Anquetil-Duperron x-xi, my translation)

Anquetil's observations are heavily influenced by the dominant linguistic ideology of eighteenth-century France. As a pioneer in oriental philology alongside William Jones, Anquetil was also interested and invested in translating from Indian languages. Here his philological attention to plurality is entwined with epistemological assumptions underpinning the view of language and an Enlightenment approach to knowing the other. Therefore, his description can also be read as an internalization of the dominant French ideology in a tussle with an acknowledgement of difference. Michael Cronin has noted language as a site of recurring anxiety in contemporary travel writing, especially over the future survival of linguistic diversity. In historical contexts of "East-West" encounter the anxiety is often, if not exclusively, about the infinite diversity of language. If, on the one hand, the traveller's attempts at providing a "standard" description underscores the power of language ideology to circumscribe the "real," it also speaks of the history of the ideology in the traveller's home, the place of enunciation. An ethical translator here needs to consider how these strands of influence intersect. In such a reading, travel accounts become readable as artefacts of the

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<sup>200</sup>A measure of length in India, varying in different parts from 2.5 miles or more to about 1.25 (from 4 to 2 kilometers approximately) (OED).

<sup>201</sup>Extending from Cape Comorin (Kanyakumari) to Nagapatnam (Nagapattinam) (Beawes & Chitty, 216).

“entangled history” marked by misrecognition rather than simplistic polarities (Forsdick et al).

The naming of languages in Anquetil’s description also manifests the orientalist scholar’s (and later the European colonizer’s) reliance on the enumerative and cartographic for ordering variety. The places mentioned in the description oblige the translator to consider the traveller’s itinerary, how it might have been determined by Anglo-French conflicts in India, and to what extent that rivalry was an extension of the wars between Britain and France in Europe and North America, and so on. The separation of languages as corrupt and pure necessitates a discussion of the nature of language relations in eighteenth-century India, if and how they differ from or are commensurate with the traveller’s understanding.

If travel writing as a genre provides an interpretive framework that enjoys longevity (Schulz-Forberg 22), its longstanding features do not manifest themselves across texts exactly the same way. Therefore, Anquetil’s account provides a variation of the genre. It is shaped by the particular context of the traveller while displaying considerable overlaps with the dominant characteristics of eighteenth-century European travel accounts of India. “Thick translation” articulates the significance of a statement or a word by paying close attention to the contextual richness of the situation at hand. In this, it also disregards any clear separation between the descriptive and the theoretical, and is not averse to “self-reflexive, provisional theorizing which is prepared to be awkward and experimental” (Hermans 1999, 160). Its self-reflexiveness lies in the translator’s awareness of their own cultural context and prejudices.

The concept of thick translation, while it does not subscribe to specific discourses and/ or methodologies, is underpinned by ethical concerns surrounding representations of others in travel writing and translation. The tendency in travel writing to exclude the role of the travellee in the construction of representation has already been noted. But there is also need to acknowledge, as part of the same ethical imperative, that not all Western travel

accounts can be accused of propagating the brand of representation associated with the heyday of colonialism. Because the genre of travel writing relies so heavily of the logic of identity and difference, the image of the sure-footed traveller seems difficult to shake off. Yet, the anxiety of the traveller is often quite palpable, particularly when faced with the language of the other and the task of engaging with it. Considered from an ethical point of view, thick translation addresses the need to take note of the possibility and presence of discordant voices within discourses, even if those voices do not end up being politically consequential in the grand scheme of things.<sup>202</sup> This awareness helps examine the nature of the “machine of othering” (Islam, Preface), and the drawing of boundaries in the context at hand. It is about seeking to locate both connections and gaps: the traveller writer’s authority as a witness to difference is often based more on selection from their “intertextual baggage”<sup>203</sup> than on the empirical. This facet of travel writing has been captured by Michel de Certeau’s notion of the traveller’s movement between points by ellipsis of the “conjunctive loci”: it is by repeating the discourse of others that they announce the arrival in another place, and it is also by declaring a discourse as different that they indicate crossing of a boundary (Islam 67, de Certeau 101). So all travellers who travel between points in fact travel through a system of signs or through discursive passages—this is what makes possible a “coherent” account while skipping over links and omitting whole parts (de Certeau 101).<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Besides attending to such voices as a corrective to a homogenous reading, Porter suggests considering “the feasibility of textual dialogue between Western and Non-western cultures,” that would cause subject-object relations to alternate, and “we might read ourselves as the others of our others and replace the notion of a place of truth with that of a knowledge which is always relative and provisional” (153).

<sup>203</sup> See discussion in Chapter 2.

<sup>204</sup> Michael Cronin (2000, 2012) has shed light on a similar issue—travel writing’s tendency to obscure or miss the complexity of local languages—through the concept of “fractal travel” (drawing on Benoit Mandelbrot’s work *The Fractal Geometry of Nature*, 1983. The notion, when applied to travel, underscores translation phenomenon being present across different scales of inquiry Cronin 17, *Across the lines*).

The objective here is to explore these connections in specific contexts, to adopt an ethos of criticism that precludes the possibility of ethically situated subjects “standing outside the world in order to judge it” (264) by universal and seemingly objective ethical norms. This is undoubtedly a tall order, but a “thick translation”-oriented research responds to this call by placing the researcher /translator inside the text rather than above it.

#### 4 Translating Pierre Sonnerat's *Voyage aux Indes Orientales* (1782)

##### Introduction

The following annotated translation of excerpts from Pierre Sonnerat's *Voyage* seeks to put translation in the same plane as the explanatory and the interpretive. The sections I have translated are the Foreword, Introduction and excerpts from Chapter XII (Languages and Scripts of the Indians). The process of reading the text-in-context has necessitated a consideration of the paratextual elements in the publication, since these help reflect on the material conditions of the production of the book. The decision to translate the Foreword, the most significant paratextual element in *Voyage* has also been determined by the fact that it is written by the author—which is often not the case—and emerges as integral rather than external to the analysis. The autobiographical nature of the Foreword also helps add a layer of context not gleanable from the other sections of the book.

Translation figures as both the object and mode of analysis in this chapter. Besides the discussion of the paratextual elements, the translation is organized in three main categories: religion, time, language. These categories interweave in the annotations and are connected to perspectives in translation studies as well as travel writing, ethnography, science and linguistics, with attention to exploring the co-constitutive nature of their relationship in the text.

The analysis, particularly of language, follows a comparative approach with a focus on the multilinguality of India in dialogue with the assumptions about language that seem to inform the traveller. The goal here is to go beyond the perspective of the traveller to include the travellee.

The translated sections are included in their entirety in Appendix B.

#### 4.1 Situating *Voyage*

While science emerges as a crucial factor in reading and translating *Voyage*, my attention to this work stems from an interest in its polyvalence, its specific capacity to link multiple discourses. Like many of his contemporaries, Pierre Sonnerat showed an interest in the study of society, but his range, because of travel and his expertise in natural science, was much wider than that of the enlightened philosophers who delved into the subject as armchair travellers. In this sense, he was also a representative of the generation of eighteenth-century European travellers who combined ethnographic, geographical and linguistic information with descriptions of flora and fauna in a personal narrative. Considered as a forerunner of social anthropologists, he was a gifted popularizer who communicated panoramic accounts of foreign countries by synthesizing firsthand experience with accounts already in circulation. His interest in the theogony, customs and traditions of Southern India was well timed to both take advantage of and provide momentum to a growing interest in Indology.

In the two-volume *Voyage*, the account of India stands out from that of the other places<sup>205</sup> described in the work in two important ways: first, Volume 1 is entirely devoted to the region, and this despite the subcontinent's relatively minor importance in French political and commercial interests in Asia. But this makes sense if we consider the unique nature of the Indo-French relationship: that as subordinate colonizers to the British in India, the French saw themselves as potential liberators of India, or at least better equipped to understand the culture of the region. In a letter addressed to Adanson in 1779 Sonnerat expressed the hope that his patron d'Angiviller would support this work which offers knowledge of all times and especially knowledge about India and its inhabitants. Many have spoken about India without imparting any "real" knowledge, and his goal was not to write uselessly like others and not to

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<sup>205</sup> The other places in Asia described in the publication are: China, Pegu (Myanmar), Ceylon, Ile de France (Mauritius), Ile de Bourbon (Réunion) Madagascar, Cap de Bonne-Esperance (Cape of Good Hope), Maldives, Malacca, the Philippines & les Moluques (the Moluccas).

be deceived (Ly-Tio-Fane 99).<sup>206</sup> To this end, he had translated Hindu fables from Tamil, the Indian vernacular language he was most familiar with. He claimed to have learned and also enlisted the help of Brahmins to understand the cultural and religious practices in the region (99). Second, rather than natural history, the traveller's area of expertise, it is details of religion and society that dominate the sections on India, which also serve as ethnographic categories. Observations on natural history, motivated in part by mercantile interests focused on natural resources, ultimately seem to serve the overarching goal of situating India historically, philosophically and epistemologically among nations. In this, science, religion and language interweave to reconcile the empirical with the speculative to create a kind of coherence that in turn secures the place of science in orientalist representations of India.

#### 4.2 On the paratexts

An examination of the socio-cultural contexts in which travel writing and translation are undertaken can benefit from attention to the paratextual elements of the text in question, particularly when they command attention because of their abundance. Translation studies has addressed the need for a methodology whereby contextualization can take into account both the translated texts and the meta-discourse on translation (Tahir-Gürçağlar 44) in the form of textual material that does not form part of the main text. Such meta-discourse often takes place in the crucial yet much ignored category of paratexts—title pages, prefaces, dedications, illustrations, reviews—which, according to Gérard Genette, “enables a text to become a book and to be offered [...] to its readers and [...] to the public” (Genette 1).

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<sup>206</sup> A similar sentiment was expressed by Anquetil Duperron. In his introduction to the translation of *Zend-Avesta* (Anquetil-Duperron 1997, 74) Anquetil expressed his skepticism about the European scholarship of India, and his frustration at the European reader's unquestioning acceptance of it. Anquetil attributed the inadequacy of European scholarship to insufficient knowledge of India's languages. And he sought to address the issue by translating Indian texts from Farsi and Sanskrit.

Paratexts thus mediate the relations between author and reader and ensure the text's presence in the world by asserting its nature.

Genette does not explore the role of paratexts in travel literature in any depth, even though these are crucial in the presentation and reception of the genre. Given the abundance of paratextual or peritextual<sup>207</sup> elements in *Voyage*, and in light of the connection of translation with travel writing established in this study, a brief consideration of their significance in the account is in order. Combining the meta-discourse present in paratexts with biographical information can help explore the intellectual mooring of the travel writer, the nature and complexity of his/her relationship with the audience, the constraints and possibilities attached to the socio-economic context of travel and its writing. Moreover, paratextual elements can be read as a privileged site for announcing the strategy elaborated inside. And, as I demonstrate, the different paratextual elements, in their relation to each other as well as to the main text, can lend a work its peculiar form and syntax. Such relations have been explored by Alex Watson in an analysis of the paratextual in travel literature ("The Garden of Forking Paths"). Watson underscores the role of these elements particularly in the construction of authorial identity, the nature of the textual, political space they occupy in a travel text, the ways in which decisions about textual structure corroborate or contest power relationships, stereotypes. These, he argues, are based on an understanding that challenges the binary model of text and paratext posited in Genette's description through spatial metaphors such as threshold, edge, vestibule and undefined zone. He addresses the need to rethink this separation and calls for a "rhizomic approach, in which the (travel) text is defined as a complex network of competing structures" (Watson 56). A similar understanding informs my reading and translation of *Voyage*: instead of approaching paratextual elements in

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<sup>207</sup> Genette distinguishes between peritext—paratextual material included in the same volume as the text, and epitext—material not materially appended to the volume of the text (344).

a *fixed* subordinate relation to the main text, I prefer to see each of them as “an additional textual surface that compounds a work’s heteroglossic complexity” (Watson 66). Just as travel writing seeks to represent a multipolar world of shifting power relationships between polyvalent cultures and encapsulates a plethora of interests and knowledge regimes, the relations between the different elements of a travel text, including paratexts, are shifting and heterogenous. Crucially, one’s understanding of this relation can depend on the kind of attention accorded to the paratextual both individually and as a whole. If the physical structure of the text articulates power relations, the synchronic nature of paratexts can destabilize ideological certainties of the narrative. And the characteristics of the form and content of a specific account can only be revealed when the paratextual is considered integral to the main text. In this orientation, the geographical space implied in the spatial metaphors seems inadequate in their implied fixity.

In Sonnerat’s work, the peritexts emerge as a site for forging an authorial persona in tension with the authority of the institution(s) he served, the dictates of the knowledge network he sought to inhabit and the political, economic aspirations and impediments that he negotiated. The elements I consider are the dedicatory epistle, report of evaluation of *Voyage* by two academicians, list of subscribers, and Foreword.

The planning of the publication of *Voyage* indicates that the work was expected to appeal to a large public with particular attention to creating a collector’s item (Ly-Tio-Fane). The original print was published in two editions: an expensive version that included 140 plates in color and was printed in three sets, each in a specific kind of paper; and a more moderately priced in-octavo edition comprising three volumes illustrated by seven plates of the more “sensational” subjects (Ly-Tio-Fane 102). The dedicatory epistle (Image 2, Appendix), a common feature in travel accounts of the time, is particularly expressive in its acknowledgement of the author’s debt to his patron, comte d’Angiviller, who gave authority

to the printer to proceed with the work, wrote letters on Sonnerat's behalf for the latter to be rewarded for his service to science, and tried to obtain subscriptions for Sonnerat from members of the royal family (100).<sup>208</sup> The dedication, presumably applicable to both volumes (of which the second deals with China and the various French territories in the Indian Ocean), is however striking in its focus on India, although the language is unremarkable: "The main objective of my research on a celebrated people has been to justify the support you have accorded me all through. Permit me to publish it under your auspices..." (*Voyage*, Dedication Page). d'Angiviller was director general of the *Bâtiments, arts et manufactures du roi* (roughly the equivalent of minister of culture) and a close associate of the royal family. His endorsement,<sup>209</sup> along with that of the *Académie royale des sciences*, lent authority to Sonnerat's novel undertaking, the focus or the selling point of which seems to have been India. The goal was to present to the educated public a straightforward, comprehensive, and pictorial account of a subject passionately debated by missionaries, antiquarians, philosophers and scientists for the last quarter of a century—India's antiquity. Sonnerat's interest in India was in keeping with a general intellectual interest in France and across Europe<sup>210</sup> focused on discovering the origin of religion and language and a link between East and West.<sup>211</sup> The authority of natural history was a means to settling the issue.

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<sup>208</sup> The approval and protection of the king (of Versailles) was advantageous for the work. In fact, the king subscribed for 12 copies and the Ministry of Marine for 20.

<sup>209</sup> The patron's name appears in much larger type on the dedication page than the author's name on the title page.

<sup>210</sup> Among those who pursued this interest were Voltaire, Anquetil-Duperron, Nathaniel Halhed, Johann Gottfried Herder, John Zephaniah Holwell, William Jones, Joseph de Guignes, François Volney.

<sup>211</sup> See Urs App, *Birth of Orientalism* for a discussion. As App notes, while in the seventeenth century, the European spotlight had turned to China, in the late eighteenth century, "the notion of an Indian cradle carried the day" (App 12). By the turn of the nineteenth century, for some, the origin of all ancient religion and philosophy was seen to be in India. Voltaire was instrumental in propagating this view.

But Sonnerat was also an enthusiastic collector of natural specimens and a valued contributor to the *Cabinet du roi* and repositories across France and in Europe. The report by the two academicians, astronomer Lalande and botanist Fougeroux de Bondaroy,<sup>212</sup> (Image 3 Appendix 1) highlights the *variety* of places and people the traveller came into contact with, all of which would lend value to his collections (Sonnerat ix), if not to the entire work. The report starts with a rough account of Sonnerat's itinerary (reflecting the title), with scant regard for the chronology specific to the voyage that was ostensibly the subject of the book. It lists all the countries Sonnerat visited since 1769, although all of them do not feature in *Voyage*. While this study does not examine if and how the other voyages, made at different times, influenced the account of India,<sup>213</sup> one can conclude that the report points to the cycles of accumulation<sup>214</sup> in the process of scientific knowledge gathering and construction, and the credibility that the mention of all the journeys lend to the work at hand. This presents a facet of intertextuality of travel writing that is interwoven with an awareness of the value attached to the cumulative in scientific knowledge. If intertextuality in the form of reference to other's

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<sup>212</sup> The two were commissioned to evaluate the manuscript of *Voyage*.

<sup>213</sup> The kind of questions this can raise has been suggested in the first Chapter where I refer to the fact that disparate places were often connected through the eighteenth-century traveller's itinerary and that the connections mediated and found a mediated presence in French representations of the exotic other, betraying slippage of meaning between all non-European people and the conflation of the three geographical areas of colonial expansion, India, Africa, and the Americas, in some works (Marsh 2009, 64-65). This connection could be made between places visited on a single voyage or over multiple ones.

<sup>214</sup> Pickford and Martin have underlined the accumulative aspect of travel writing, one that is inseparable from translation, in their discussion of the two-volume *New Universal Traveller, or A Collection of late Voyages and Travels through Europe, Asia, Africa, America and the South-Sea Islands* appeared with the Edinburgh publishers Mudie (1793). Compiled by the Scottish author Robert Heron, this nine-hundred-page collection brought together an extensive range of travelogues, including English translations of French, Danish and Swedish accounts. Sonnerat's book presents another facet of this, where the information in the paratextual elements (alternately focusing on India and the other countries), and the main text (first volume dealing exclusively with India) combine to address a readership that is differentiated.

Science's progress through "cycles of accumulation" has been pointed out by Bruno Latour (See Smethurst 19).

voyages can suggest redundancy or lack of originality of the current, intertextuality evoked in the report lends *Voyage* its institutional authority.

The cumulative also brings to mind the term “polygraphy,” used to describe the tendency on the part of travel writers to undertake multiple rewritings of journeys. Charles Forsdick has shown that a polygraphic account can be part of a “network of self-authored representations of the same journey” (Forsdick 2009, 299). As the framing of Sonnerat’s work demonstrates, polygraphy can also be effected by the “epistemological strategies of national institutions” (Smethurst 19), discernible here in the evaluative report in *Voyage*. Attention to the paratextual here provides fresh insight into the view that textual strategies in travel writing (related to explorations) depending on cycles of exploration are marked by “belatedness, [...] deferment of proof, recycling and refinement” (Smethurst citing Latour 19). It also reveals that the synchronic nature of paratexts can destabilize an homogenous reading of the narrative. The report by the two reviewers also mentions Sonnerat’s interest in India:

[...] M. Sonnerat, making up his mind that he could carry even further his observations on India and continue the work he had started, went back to the Coromandel coast and travelled across [...] Carnate, Tanjore and Madurai for two years. (Sonnerat I: I, viii)

This could be read as another facet of the cumulative, but perhaps also of polygraphy: while the endorsement of the reviewers seeks to highlight the traveller’s repeat visit to and relatively long contact with India, the details also imply that his experience was limited to the country’s southern regions.

The semantic ambiguity of polygraphy speaks to the persistent idea of travel writing as suspect, the ambiguous nature of its authority. The term “polygraph,” Forsdick points out, “designates not only a prolific author, repeatedly [...] retextualising a previous experience; it

can also be a lie-detector, reliant on the monitoring of physical and emotional responses to determine whether a person is telling the truth. Given the close association of the ‘traveller’ with the ‘travel-liar’ [...] such semantic ambiguity is telling” (301). This uncertainty, one might add, becomes apparent in the current text when one pays adequate attention to the paratexts as integral to the construction and understanding of the main narrative.

A few other interesting details in the report help to situate the text in the triangular colonial space that was eighteenth-century India and shed light on the nature and implications of France’s subordinate status to the British in the context. The report informs that war halted Sonnerat’s research in the subcontinent (*Voyage* viii), thereby raising questions about the actual length of time the author of *Voyage* could have devoted to the sections on South India (and India in general) in the account (Ly-Tio-Fane). It does not mention the British but refers to the siege and fall of Pondichéry which led to Sonnerat’s captivity, adding that during this time Sonnerat’s attention had to shift from research to administrative responsibilities (viii). The references to the traveller’s plight blur the line between his own voice and that of the institution that he served.<sup>215</sup> Interestingly, in the main text, Sonnerat mentions the 1778 siege of Pondichéry, but not his presence in the conflict. The reader of course can guess his involvement, but it is the paratextual material that makes this explicit. In this instance at least, the so-called “threshold” (Genette) needs to be brought into the text for a fuller understanding of the effect of the Anglo-French political conflict on the making of *Voyage*.

Sonnerat’s role as a collector, aligning with the significance of the intertextual and the cumulative, is reinforced in the paratexts of the second volume of *Voyage* as well. As indicated earlier, the first volume focuses exclusively on India, and the second deals with all of the other places included in the work, with a large section in it devoted to new findings in

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<sup>215</sup> Paratexts usually refer to those elements not authored by the writer of the main text. Therefore, the presence of a voice different from the author’s is not unexpected.

natural history accompanied by illustrations. The majority of the islands discussed in this volume were more important than India for French commercial interests. Since it was commerce that also provided the impetus for French scientific research in Asia, India was less important than the islands as a source of specimens.<sup>216</sup> It is therefore not surprising that an eight-page list of subscribers (Image 4, Appendix 1), dominated by names of members of European aristocracy, nobility, clergy and bureaucracy,<sup>217</sup> as well as repositories in Europe—graces its opening pages. The volume seems to address entities that were more interested in collecting (information about) tangible specimens than in speculative discourses about India's past. The latter was the purview of the *philosophes*.

#### 4.2.1 *On the Foreword*

The claim of personal experience lending authority to travel writing is articulated in the *Voyage* in a few ways. In the Foreword Sonnerat suggests that he could not devote sufficient time to knowing India and as a result his research was perhaps less than adequate. But the statement is marked by ambiguity:

I did not intend to offer this work at this moment, given the other essential activities occupying most of my time. Moreover, compelled by my state to cover a new country in a short time, I fear not having given it my full attention; but I am tempted to communicate my observations to my peers and if this work is of benefit to them, my objective will be accomplished, since my voyage had more to do with learning and making myself useful than satisfying my curiosity. (Sonnerat I: I, viii)

We have already noted the political scenario that determined Sonnerat's "state" in India. Indeed, in the time under review, it was not unique for a French traveller's itinerary in the

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<sup>216</sup> See discussion in Chapter 1.

<sup>217</sup> The list is headed by Ferdinand of Prussia.

region to be dictated more by the dynamics of Anglo-French relations than by the traveller's own agenda. The implications of France's status in India as a subordinate colonizer to Britain for the French techniques of representation of the region are wide-ranging. Referring to the growing importance of a textual India for France in the late 1800s, Kate Marsh has noted the need to attend to the social and institutional status of individual authors in shaping the evolution and longevity of certain ideas about the country while relating the contingencies of France's position in Europe and the world (Marsh 3). The word *état* in Sonnerat's elliptical statement sheds light on the issue. Translatable as "state" (of being)—physical, moral, psychological and in the sense of a political community, the nation,<sup>218</sup> the significance of *état* lies in connecting the personal and the public, the traveller and his place of origin, the French "state." The allusion to the British is however unmistakable. That the encounter between France and India in the eighteenth century was shaped by France's relation with Britain is now an accepted fact, even if it is rarely given sufficient attention. Given the policy of *revanche* which motivated French foreign policy between 1763 and 1783 and an increasing British domination of Indian trade, India was a locus for exploring British alterity (Marsh 2009, 4) as well as finding an alternative source for a universal human history. Discourse about India was therefore part of a European narrative (Marsh 4). The full significance of Sonnerat's "state" can however be appreciated when read with the report of evaluation that describes the effect of the British siege on Sonnerat's research in India. At the same time, the statement alluding to the precarity of the French in India is also an assertion of the "immediate" nature of the work, which validates its status not only in European discourse of India but also in science. Here the traveller is the "faithful witness" (de Certeau, 69-73) by a double claim: the experiential one of having seen, heard and lived through it all, and the scientific, or pseudo-scientific one of the expert, who is not a purveyor of the mere "curious."

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<sup>218</sup> *Petit Robert, OED*. I refer here to the pre-Revolution sense of nation in France.

Therefore, if the traveller's attention to India was limited, there is also the suggestion that more attention might not necessarily mean useful attention. Here the trope of *utile* and *dulce*, referring to an awareness on the author's part that the reader may expect to be entertained as well as instructed, is invoked, and rendered distinct by one of the rare expressions of the subject position of the traveller, a protagonist with whom the reader is invited to identify and whose "translation" they can trust. The naturalist's focus on detail-based description seems to be in tension with narration relating the autobiographical.<sup>219</sup>

Here the reference to the British seems strategically vague: it made little sense to attract the ire of France's political archrivals when continuation of French trade and intellectual pursuits in India depended on their support:<sup>220</sup> competition and cooperation were facets of the same relationship and often inseparable. This ambiguity is however dispensed with later in the chapter titled "Tableau des révolutions arrivées dans l'Inde depuis 1763 jusqu'à la prise de Pondichéry" (Account of revolutions brought upon India between 1763 and the fall of Pondichéry). Here he does not mince words in castigating the Europeans in general and the British in particular:

The English, successors of the French, made [the Indians] miss the less tyrannical yoke of other nations: without appearing to be sovereigns, and using the pretext of a title obtained from the Nabob, they exercised a most harsh despotism and committed abominable extortions. This excess of violence, combined with scourges of all kinds that beset the Indians, turned their country into a vast desert [...]. (Sonnerat I: I, 8-9)

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<sup>219</sup> See Susan Stewart, *Crimes of writing: Problems in the containment of representation*. Stewart has noted that "between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century the paradigm of travel writing shifted from supposedly 'disinterested' observation to biographical narrative" (177), "shaping renegotiations "between description and narration" (180).

<sup>220</sup> In second half of the eighteenth century, the French and other continental Europeans in India would increasingly depend on the British for transportation between Europe and India and within the subcontinent.

The nature of the triangular relation between the main protagonists is manifest here, as is the specificity of French alterity. If travel writing makes evident that every version of the other is also the construction of a self (Clifford 1986), the French self in this case is constructed not only in relation to the Indian but also its European other. In the second half of the eighteenth century, as the British increased their territorial control in India, the French discourse of alterity became polyvalent (Marsh 27). Literary works from the period are replete with examples, such as Lemierre's *La veuve du malabar*, in which imagined French rule is contrasted with the violence of other European powers and the barbarity of Europeans contrasted with the relative civility of the people of the subcontinent.<sup>221</sup> European alterity was differentiated: if all Europeans were greedy, both fictional and factual travel accounts showed the British to be particularly so.<sup>222</sup> This critique was part of the larger rhetoric of liberty in the French discourse on India from that period. The liberty of the French to trade was consistent with the liberty of Indians from the oppressive and unscrupulous practices of the EEIC. It is therefore not surprising that the English translation of Sonnerat's work, published in 1788 in Calcutta, leaves out this chapter on European intervention in India.

But the British were also part of a bigger problem: the general European expansionist policy in India which jeopardized the activities of Europeans like himself who favored mercantilism. At the same time, in castigating colonial rapacity, Sonnerat was fulfilling what had become customary for French travel writing: a reference to European colonial greed.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Voltaire's epistolary novel *Les Lettres d'Amabed* emphasizes this.

<sup>222</sup> Examining French literary works, particularly plays, Marsh notes that the late eighteenth-century works which historicised the recent past frequently counterpointed French identity with that of the cruel British. This was particularly true of plays narrating the fall (1799) of Tipu Sultan, the most important Indian ruler to have allied with the French. But this strategy of presentation had been in use since 1758 (Marsh 28).

<sup>223</sup> In this one notable precursor to Sonnerat was traveller Anquetil-Duperron, who expressed his disappointment with the colonial enterprise with a special mention of the *oisiveté* (idleness) of the French in Pondicherry (*Voyage en Inde* 1754–62, 90).

“Ever since India became known to Europeans, she has been subjected to *their* relentless greed” (Sonnerat 8, my emphasis). British conduct is different from that of the other Europeans in degree rather than in kind, and “state” seems a sufficiently neutral term that fit the tone and purpose of the comment. The term resonates with Forsdick’s observations on the genre of travel writing with implications for translation: that attention to the polysemy of the word, to its thickness, makes it possible to read and render it both as an assertion and negation of the power of the individual over their account.

This personal interpretation of the European political intervention implicates French policy in India as well—it sets the stage in the narrative for the heroic defense of Pondichéry in which Sonnerat himself was involved. The state of war affected the personal well-being of the traveller, which would have repercussions for his enterprise in India, a beneficiary of which was to be the French state. If the traveller’s journey from point to point takes place in the conceptual symmetry of “we” and “they” underpinned by a logic of the same (Islam), here Sonnerat’s reference to the “we” in the third person (*their*) suggests a distancing from that very self against which India is contrasted.

The utilitarian purpose of *Voyage* for the state is emphasized in the Foreword when Sonnerat claims that his voyage had more to do with making himself useful than satisfying his curiosity (viii). The term “curiosity,” appearing with almost mechanical regularity in travel writing throughout the period, is significant here. In the seventeenth century, with the advent of the various scientific academies, the understanding of this common trope in European travel writing shifted from solely negative to both negative and positive. As the “optical truth” of the scientific gaze became prominent towards the end of the eighteenth century, it took on several conflicting meanings: “a desire to possess the ‘singular’ object”; “a vulgar, popular interest in exotic objects for commercial profit”; “an inclination to knowledge which will lead the observer to a rational philosophical articulation of foreign singularities”

(Leask 2002, 4). However, if desire for novelty and wonder, traditionally related to travel literature, fueled the pursuit of scientific knowledge through travel, in the late eighteenth century it was the quest for scientific knowledge that fueled curiosity and shaped the travel writer's approach to knowing the other. It can signify the original as well as the singular and therefore warrant a place in the Cabinet. Examining the nebulous epistemological claims of the term on the contemporary status of travel writing, Leask suggests that in the eighteenth-century travel writing remained "yoked to the negative as well as to the positive senses of curiosity, inasmuch as it is [...] linked to fleeting, superficial accounts of foreign lands and peoples, and to the novelty, singularity, and dazzle of the traveller's 'first impressions'" (Leask 5).<sup>224</sup> In light of Sonnerat's view of European avarice expressed in *Voyage*, it is interesting to note that in the eighteenth century "curiosity" also moved from an association with passion of lust to that of greed (Daston and Park). The "class distinction between the noble hard-working curiosity and popular excitement in ignorance," Daston and Park suggest, is traceable to this shift.<sup>225</sup> The understanding of curiosity as disinterested science wrestled with the popular conception of it as self-indulgence throughout the eighteenth century. By the mid-eighteenth century, it was possible to understand curiosity as an amoral instinct, but its past association to a moral framework and to the idea of self-indulgence that was useless to society is felt in Sonnerat's words.<sup>226</sup>

In the rest of the Foreword the central trope and main focus of the volume dealing with India are stated:

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<sup>224</sup> This ambiguity, however, gradually compromised the epistemological prestige of "curiosity" in the early nineteenth century (Leask 2002, 5).

<sup>225</sup> Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*. For a study of the literary representations of the practice and production of curiosity in early modern Europe see Benedict, Barbara M. *Curiosity: A cultural history of early modern inquiry*. Also see Stephen Greenblatt's *Marvelous Excesses* for an examination of role of the "marvelous" as a mediating agent between the outside and inside, the subjective and the realm of objects.

<sup>226</sup> See Neil Kenny, *The Uses of Curiosity in Early Modern France and Germany*.

In this first volume, I present a people celebrated for their moderation and antiquity, in the second, the nations which by virtue of their location have necessary connections with French trade and establishments in Asia. The history of India demonstrates that it does not take long for despotism and oppression to debase people, weaken the most flourishing states, and degrade human character; the modest and gentle manners of the Indians were worthy of respect; but the happier a people, the more they are the object of neighbours' envy, and cruelty, tyranny, and ignorance will always triumph over happiness and virtue. (Sonnerat I: I, xiii-xiv)

I have divided the first volume into three parts. The first contains information about the Indian peninsula, its topography, commerce, its castes or tribes, the customs of members of these groups, their initiation, marriage and funeral rituals, the arts, languages, currency on the Coromandel coast, the fondness of Indians for fables, which I illustrate here through the translation of a few such stories. (I: I, xiv)

Here the Foreword emerges as a site where the status of the naturalist intersects with the aspirations of an orientalist through the evocation of translation. Research in translation has shown that paratexts can reveal aspects of translational phenomena that are absent or implicit in the translated texts themselves (Tahir-Gürçağlar 44). One such aspect is the status of a text as translation, especially where the assumption of translation rests on the reception of the text among the target audience. In *Voyage*, the paratextual elements bring to attention the role of translation in a text's claim to authenticity. Sonnerat states that he has translated a few of India's fables to illustrate the attachment of the people to such stories (xiv). In the manner of orientalist accounts of India, translation here serves as a mechanism of persuasion and authority based on the (implicit) claim of having direct access to language. It also "sets the

scene” for an account that is partially ethnographic.<sup>227</sup> The strategy makes use of the paratextual *and* translation to establish the traveller’s ethnographic and orientalist authority.

While the Foreword gives us a sense of the spirit of collection and ethnographic approach present throughout the work, it also makes clear the distinct objectives of the two volumes. Sonnerat sought to establish the validity of his account on the dual axis of having translated<sup>228</sup> and having seen. But it was the specificity of the latter that would set his work apart from the more erudite and celebrated scholars of India. Here the traveller’s scientific “eye,” not unlike that of an ethnographer, projects the fragmentary and incomplete experience of the other into a rhetorical form that creates the illusion of a comprehensive and coherent whole. Readers, by prior acquaintance with this form, are expected to fill in the missing parts, creating in their imaginations what is not given but must be there by implications drawn from the form itself. One of the two variants of the common trope of “translation,”<sup>229</sup> the “iconic” one, is manifest in the reference to the translation of Indian fables.<sup>230</sup> Here the traveller’s authoritative move also lies in mentioning translation with ethnographic categories (castes or tribes, customs of members of these groups, their initiation, marriage and funeral rituals, arts), all of which, when read alongside the commentary on culture, relativizes the text to the intertextual discourse of India (note the “fondness of Indians for” prefixed to the category “fables” drawing attention to the intertextuality of translation), and elevates its author to a savant. It underscores the entwining of interlingual translation with the construction of a coherent other in the account. Here the

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<sup>227</sup> The reference here is to the “I was there” trope, had been in vogue in travel literature from at least the sixteenth century. It was borrowed by ethnographers, and as Tyler mentions, it was also relegated to the function of “setting the scene.” This was to prevent the autobiographical from jeopardizing the ethnographer’s claim to representational authority (Tyler 80).

<sup>228</sup> The claim of having accessed original Indian texts and translated them links him to the likes of Anquetil-Duperron, Holwell, Wilkins, among others.

<sup>229</sup> Discussed in Chapter 2. See “On ethnography.”

<sup>230</sup> The iconic version consists in the actual translation of “real” texts which are written transcriptions of various kinds of spoken native [...] myths, tales, etc. (Tyler 89).

imposition of narrative over the “observed reality,” an unavoidable component of all language which attempts to move from experience to representation, becomes crucial.

The use of time as a narrative device has been one of the features studied in ethnographic texts. Johannes Fabian has referred to the pervasive use of the present tense, the “ethnographic present,” to establish an illusion of realism while conveying a sense of eternal validity, which at the same time imposes a pivotal point of view that does not easily allow for alternative interpretations. Here time and gaze ultimately cooperate in inviting identification with the persona of the narrator and with his/her experience of time. The sense of timelessness constructed in the Foreword of *Voyage* is complex: it is not merely the exclusive use of the grammatical present tense but also the bridging of past and future tenses that creates an effect of “suspended temporality,” a mythical past pointing to an inevitable future, not based on observation but on universal moral wisdom, another myth. The selective use of the past tense (“were worthy of respect”) works to translate the archeological view of the other into the eternal present. This is a use of the (grammatical) past which ethnography shares with travel writing. Here seemingly innocuous comments imply relationships of power in favoring both nostalgia and stereotype, the two mechanisms that tend to freeze societies into static generic images and reinforce the barrier which separates the self and the other by establishing what Fabian called “denial of coevalness.” Here the view of translation as a dialogue between “I” and “thou”<sup>231</sup> “lapse[s] into a classic ahistoricism” (Niranjana 68).<sup>232</sup>

It helps to note here that the foundation on which the idea of translation as dialogue rests. It drew inspiration from the structural anthropology of Lévi-Strauss, whose notion of translation drew on Rousseau, the most “ethnographic” of the eighteenth-century *philosophes*

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<sup>231</sup> Specifically the kind elaborated by Steiner (already discussed in this study). Niranjana has argued that this facile view of translation as exchange is more concerned with the idealized image of translation than it is with a real world in which inequalities and asymmetries of power make the idea of “exchange without loss” (Niranjana 68) a utopian one. See *Siting translation*.

<sup>232</sup> See Derrida, *Of Grammatology* and “Structure, Sign, and Play.”

(Johnson 143). The connection links the translation model of anthropology with the projects of eighteenth-century orientalists in India, who were influenced by the debates of the *philosophes*, particularly Voltaire's and Rousseau's humanism (Niranjana 68-69). This hermeneutic view of translation is sensitive to difference as an element of subjectivity, but not necessarily to the power relationships that constitute and are constituted by difference. It is underpinned by a sense of the individual subject and of culture in the humanistic sense of a universal tradition subsuming difference. In this understanding we can know the past only through mechanisms of translation, as a "verbal construct" (Steiner 30). This constructed past, however, also purports to show Western man his own past in a distorted mirror (Polezzi 179).<sup>233</sup>

Here the privileging of the universal creates the effect of a scientific text. The ethnographic categories in Sonnerat's Foreword, following immediately after the narrative of "eternal validity" and therefore severed from the specificity of *a voyage*, carry that effect of timelessness, establishing the *one* as the testing ground of the universal.<sup>234</sup> The categories function as indexical particulars. The traveller evokes them, presuming that readers can make the appropriate connections by filling in any absent details from their general knowledge of the literature mediating between him and the reader. Like his contemporaries, Sonnerat refers to a range of classic texts available to European orientalists: he quotes Dutch missionary and orientalist Abraham Roger (*Le théâtre de l'idolâtrie*) on several occasions, and cites Voltaire, Linnaeus, Bailly as well as British orientalists John Holwell and Alexander Dow. According to Ly-Tio-Fane, comparison of his chapters on religion with the contents of Books IV and V

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<sup>233</sup> The point is driven home if we consider that India was operative not only in the European discovery of Asian religions but also in that of Europe's own cultural and political identity (on the subject, see App, *Birth of Orientalism* 2010).

<sup>234</sup> As noted in Chapter 2, the history of ethnography in travel can be explored as the history of the emergence of a basic set of analytical categories which, to a greater or lesser degree and in different languages, marked travel writings from the middle ages until the last century (Rubiés 251).

of *Histoire générale* (Picart et al.) demonstrates how heavily he depended on this work for information (Ly-Tio-Fan 110). Two other contemporary French publications that may have directly influenced his work were Anquetil-Duperron's *Tableau historique de l'Inde* (1771) and de la Flotte's *Essais historiques sur l'Inde* (1769). It was, however, from the activities of those in his immediate circle of associates that Sonnerat drew the strongest inspiration: notably the work of Comte de Maudave (112),<sup>235</sup> who greatly stimulated French interest in India through his correspondence with Voltaire (112).<sup>236</sup> He was even more indebted to the writings of his godfather, Pierre Poivre, whom he does not publicly acknowledge. But the substance of his volume on India is derived from a manuscript by Poivre, *Les mémoires d'un voyageur* (1768). Sonnerat's version seems to be an elaboration of the topics discussed in Poivre's work.<sup>237</sup> The making of the *Voyage* thus depends on an intertextual process that constitutes a community of discourse not limited to France.<sup>238</sup>

Therefore, the rhetoric of referential discourse present in the Foreword corroborates that the traveller's words refer to a world beyond the text, and that world is actually built up by the textual conventions that govern the writing of travel.<sup>239</sup> The readers must take the author's word for that external reality, or "judge it by comparing it with other texts of other realities whose externality is determined by yet other texts in an infinite profusion of texts"

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<sup>235</sup> See *Voyage en Inde du Comte de Maudave* (1773-1776), edited by Jean Deloche.

<sup>236</sup> Maudave and Sonnerat are thought to have met in India after 1773. Before his death in Mazulipatam in 1777, Maudave had completed an account of his adventures and misfortunes in *Nouveaux mémoires sur l'état actuel du Bengale et de l'Indoustan* which he intended for Bellecombe, Governor of Pondichéry and Sonnerat's superior.

See Madeleine Ly-Tio-Fane for a detailed account of Sonnerat's network of influences, including the influence of native Indian artists on his illustrations (111-115).

<sup>237</sup> Ly-Tio-Fane notes that the more eye-catching aspects of Indian social organization—the caste system, marriage customs, funeral rites—are developed. The chapter on religion receives a more secular treatment (Ly-Tio-Fane 115).

<sup>238</sup> It was in the pictorial illustrations of Indian life that Sonnerat seems to have added greatly to Poivre's portrayal. A discussion of these is beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>239</sup> This observation is made by Tyler ("Ethnography, Intertextuality" 83) in relation to ethnography, and seems to hold true here.

(Tyler 85, citing Pratt and Thornton). The articulation of dependence on other texts is particularly interesting for its authoritative tone, and for the double movement through which the present text is at once embedded in and set apart from contemporary discourses of India: “The reader,” Sonnerat states, “will inevitably find here a number of subjects already treated by other authors, which in this case will create a contest of evidence” (I: I, xv). This kind of intertextuality is posited on a “textual attitude”<sup>240</sup> which allows the travel writer to impose his interpretation of other cultures and even substitute it for reality. But this tried and tested strategy, if it helps embed the text deep into the tradition of the home culture, is also a direct challenge to ideas of originality, even the very *raison d’être* of the current text. So the acknowledgement of debt to other texts must also advertise the traveller’s singular contribution to scholarship. This separation rests on the word *concours* (translated here as “contest”), signifying both collaboration and contest / competition. It encapsulates the “double-bind” of the relationship between the traveller and his European other, as well as between intertextuality as a validation strategy and the sense of redundancy associated with it. *Concours* here seems to be aimed at rescuing the text from the “abyss of representation” (Derrida) implicit in the traveller’s mode of knowing the other. The tension is sought to be settled in the closing lines of the Foreword:

I have not sought to embellish what I have seen and examined; I would even add that a man who has travelled since his early youth should not take recourse to style; the pleasurable often serves only to conceal falsehood; and if this work lacks the sparkle of some of the modern ones, it will at least have the absolute merit of truth. (1:1, xv)

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<sup>240</sup> Edward Said (1978) describes the “textual attitude” of Napoleonic France toward the Arab world. This attitude aimed at “dispelling mystery and institutionalizing even the most recondite knowledge” (83).

The traveller is alluding to discourses of India in general, a majority of them found in or informed by travel texts. Although this kind of privileging of “truth” over style is extremely common in travel writing of the period in general,<sup>241</sup> Sonnerat’s position on the issue has to do with his affiliation to science. In the journals of eighteenth-century “scientific” travel writing, the self-conscious adoption of an empirical attitude to the natural world was reflected in the choice of language and modality. The use of plain language was advocated in influential works like Linnaeus’ *Philosophica Botanica* (1751), which also banned use of rhetorical devices. The underlying idea is that literary strategies such as the use of metaphors and rhetoric belongs to the baggage of natural language and are not part of science (Sarukkai 653).<sup>242</sup> Sonnerat’s contempt seem to be directed at those travel writers whose claim to authority seemed to rest on their way with words. Here he is engaged in dialogue with fellow naturalists (Linnaeus, Joseph Banks, Commerson, de Juseau), but also with those thinkers whose scholarship of India shaped his own but whose literary prowess he could not emulate.<sup>243</sup> Foremost among them was Voltaire, more of an armchair traveller but undoubtedly the most influential European intellectual to write about India in the eighteenth-century. Sonnerat shared with Voltaire an interest in a new brand of orientalism (led by France) less bound to the Christian chronology of human origin. The comments above have as much to do with establishing himself as a serious contributor to scientific information

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<sup>241</sup> As Batten points out, at the time it was widely accepted that the style “best suited to the travel account was plain and unornamented” (*Pleasurable Instructions* 44).

<sup>242</sup> The discourse of science here has uncanny parallels in the orientalist’s quest for the “plain,” “pure,” “simple” original of India. See, for example, Urs App’s (*Birth of Orientalism*) discussion of this focus in Holwell’s work.

<sup>243</sup> Citing James Cook’s journal, Smethurst (*Travel Writing and the Natural World*) notes that the British explorer’s lack of education might have been an advantage in putting forth his accounts with undisguised truth (52).

about India as with claiming a place in the intellectual community that sought to define a new French identity in eighteenth-century Europe.<sup>244</sup>

In the paratexts of *Voyage* one notices a back and forth between the institutional and the individual. If the heterogeneity of travel accounts lies in weaving intertextual links with people, places and interests, the paratextual elements provide a glimpse of those connections and together emerge as a microcosm of the main text. But these elements, I suggest, do not just present the text, they are in a dialectic relationship with it, confirming as well as putting to question assertions found in both. This challenges the view of paratexts as a mere accessory of the text (Genette 410).

Taken together, the paratexts also address an audience that is differentiated in terms of its interest and expectation. They are indicative of the nature of collusion at work between the author and the reader and provide a unique insight into the different mechanisms involved, indispensable for exploring the channels of contact set up between the traveller and the reader in *Voyage*. Crucially, while the spatial metaphors<sup>245</sup> associated with paratexts suggest a kind of exteriority to the main text, in *Voyage* they emerge as crucial for the contextualization that “thick description” and “thick translation” call for.

### 4.3 Translating religion

The late eighteenth century saw the emergence of what has been described as “modern” orientalism (App), the secular institutional study of the Orient by specialists capable of understanding oriental languages and handling primary source material. Spurred by a quest to

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<sup>244</sup> The British Sanskritists were involved too, and the combined efforts culminating in the *École spéciale des langues orientales vivantes* in Paris (1795) took inspiration equally from Voltaire’s idea of Indian origins and the work of the British.

<sup>245</sup> Although according to Genette paratexts are not delimited by hard and fast boundaries (2), his use of words such as “zone,” “fringe” (2) in the description suggests separability rather than a relation akin to a network of competing meanings.

denigrate the Bible and destabilize Christianity,<sup>246</sup> it focused on Asia's non-Abrahamic religions—especially those with sacred scriptures that were possibly older than the Old Testament. This broadening of perspective was prepared by a growing interest in India as the “cradle of civilization” (App xii), and whether implicitly or in an overt fashion, religion became central to discourses of India. Premised on the notion of a universal “essence” common to all religions and on the logic of a distinction between esoteric and exoteric branches of religion, orientalist discourses often sought to put the Bible on a continuum with Asian religions. This is evident in Sonnerat's account: of the three parts in Volume 1 of *Voyage*, two are devoted to Hinduism.<sup>247</sup> The other major interest, language, was related to the question of religion. With the discovery of a string of nonbiblical texts—among these eighteenth century's *Ezour-vedam* (championed by Voltaire), *Shastabad* of Holwell, *Desatir* of William Jones, and *Zend Avesta* as well as *Oupnek'hat* of Anquetil-Duperron—touted as “the world's oldest,” the study of Asian languages and literatures became pressing.<sup>248</sup>

The persistence of religion in eighteenth-century enlightened thought can be explained if one considers that the framework of the philosophical enterprise included not

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<sup>246</sup> Therefore, it was supposed to be less beholden to the Judeo-Christian worldview.

<sup>247</sup> While this “new” orientalism may seem to pit science against missionary “protoscience,” this is because of the assumption that the onset of “modern” Orientalism in the first decades of the nineteenth century was a clean break from the missionary past. However, information gathered by missionaries in the early eighteenth century was still very much in use in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.

<sup>248</sup> Urs App notes the obsession with questions of origin in *Birth of Orientalism*: “In the second half of the eighteenth century, Europe's confrontation with an increasingly complex world and an exploding history triggered an extraordinary amount of thought about the origin of things. Academies held essay contests about the origin of inequality among men (inspiring Jean-Jacques Rousseau's first philosophical work in 1755) or the origin of language (won by Herder in 1772); among European historians and philosophers, it became customary to inquire about the origins of just about anything. For example, in 1758, Antoine-Yves Goguet published three volumes of his thoughts *On the origin of laws, the arts, and sciences and their progress among the ancients*; in 1773, the first volume of Antoine Court de Gébelin's 9-volume set of studies on the primeval world appeared; in 1777, Jean-Sylvain Bailly published his letters to Voltaire about the origin of sciences and their Asian inventors. [...] In this environment, it was only natural that the origin of religion should also be a question of great interest” (App 457).

only the worlds of science and arts but also political and economic thought, and crucially religion and ethics (Vyverberg 35). While religion and philosophy had defined the nature of ethical thought since the classical Greek era, during the Enlightenment these foundations were supplemented, shaken, or destroyed by anthropological insights. But human nature and “virtue,” the latter sought in “natural universal religion,” were generally viewed in the French Enlightenment as allied (53). The foundation of morality, Voltaire held, is the same among all nations, because it comes from God. “Religion teaches the same morality to all peoples, with no exception” (Voltaire quoted in Vyverberg 54).

Presumption of a universal religion as a way to apprehend difference was evident in the perception of India as an ahistorical society, uninterested in keeping a chronological record of its past, which could nevertheless be accorded to it. Questions of chronology gained importance since Voltaire took the revolutionary step of beginning his universal history not with Adam but rather with China and India (App 35). By the early 1770s the major challenge to biblical authority and chronology was India. The opening lines of the introductory chapter in *Voyage* demonstrate this orientation:

The origin of all people is traceable to facts or fables: but that of the Indians is lost in the depths of time; on this as well as so many other matters one is reduced to mere speculation. The ancients considered Indians to be the first inhabitants of the earth. While it is not possible to demonstrate the veracity of this opinion, India appears to have at least all the characteristics that warrant it. (Sonnerat 1:1, 1-2)

India in its splendour gave religions and laws to all other people; Egypt and Greece owe her their fables and wisdom. (I: I, 4)

The universal idea of religion implied in the above lines has always proven problematic when applied to India. Dandekar argues that unlike most religions, Hinduism<sup>249</sup> can hardly be called a religion in the popularly understood sense of the term because it is missing the requisite features of one: the notion of god as central to it, any affirmation about the nature of god, recognition a sole prophet or a particular book (Dandekar 237). Whether one agrees with this position or not, exactly these characteristics were projected on the dominant religion of the country in eighteenth-century European accounts. This was a domesticating translation of India aimed ironically at creating a new European self. The kind of religion that was sought to be created required an authoritative scripture. Two such invented texts were Holwell's *Shastah*, pretend translations from a mysterious ancient Hindu text titled *Chartah Bhade Shastah* (*Catur Veda Śāstra* in Sanskrit), "a work not heard of since" (Trautmann 30), and the *Ezour-vedam*, purportedly the translation, by a Brahmin, of a Sanskrit commentary on the Vedas. For a time, Voltaire was convinced of its authenticity and antiquity.<sup>250</sup> Today we know that the *Ezour-vedam* was definitely authored by one or several French Jesuits in India.

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<sup>249</sup> The word "Hinduism" is not mentioned in Sonnerat's text, and indeed is absent in eighteenth-century texts in general. It became common in English only in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, and mostly in books by British authors. This does not mean Hinduism was invented or constructed by nineteenth-century British colonizers. The evidence suggests that a Hindu religion theologically and devotionally grounded in texts such as the Bhagavad-Gita, the Puranas, and other commentaries acquired a sharper self-conscious identity through the rivalry between Muslims and Hindus in the period between 1200 and 1500 and was firmly established long before the turn of the nineteenth century. However, if what one means by Hinduism is simply the English word itself, then the claim that it did not exist before the nineteenth century is correct. See Lorenzen, David N. "Who Invented Hinduism?"

On this subject also see Romila Thapar, "Syndicated Moksha?" and "Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity"; Sylvia Murr, "Les conditions d'urgence du discours sur l'Inde au Siècle des Lumières"; Wendy Doniger, "Hinduism by Any Other Name."

<sup>250</sup> Voltaire wrote about the *Ezour-vedam* between 1761 and 1765 in his *Essai sur les mœurs*, and *La philosophie de l'histoire*.

See Voltaire, *Essai sur l'histoire générale, et sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations, depuis Charlemagne jusqu'à nos jours*. Vol.1 (1761).

Voltaire described the *Ezour-vedam* to be the work of a Brahmin who knew French very well (Voltaire 1761, 6.287) and produced “a faithful translation” (6.298). During the time he was preparing to add a chapter about the text to his *Essai*, Voltaire claimed that the extraordinary text came to him from the French traveller and royal engineer Maudave, who had received it from its Brahmin translator (and correspondent of the French Compagnie des Indes) in Benares (6.470). The focus was on locating the *oldest* Hindu text, and the stamp of the native scholar was crucial. Voltaire repeated his story until he encountered Holwell’s *Shastah* and learned that the latter could be far older than the *Ezour-vedam*. The story is relevant for this research: that the work was in fact a forgery was first brought to public notice by Sonnerat,<sup>251</sup> who also cites the native scholar/translator as the basis for his claim:

I was no less favored by chance [in having the] the so called translation of the *Ezour vedam* which is in the Royal Library. I had it read to a learned but zealous Brahmin, and since this work was nothing like the idea he wished to convey (to me) of his religion, he felt obliged reveal its mysteries to me. (Sonnerat 1:1, 7)<sup>252 253</sup>

The true nature of the text, Sonnerat claims, is revealed by a member of that very community which European scholars considered to be notoriously secretive about their texts: the

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<sup>251</sup> In the chapter titled « Des livres sacrés des Indiens » (“Of the Sacred books of the Indians”), Sonnerat asserts that the *Ezour-vedam*, a pretend translation, is “definitely not one of the four Vedams” and it is “controversial text, written by a missionary of Masulipatam” who “tried to reduce everything to the Christian religion” (Sonnerat, vol 1: III, 215).

More recently, Ludo Rocher has convincingly argued that the text was never translated from Sanskrit but written in French and then partially translated into Sanskrit (Rocher 57–60).

<sup>252</sup> The evidence that the translation is fake once again lies in Sonnerat’s access to the Brahmin/source which he does not embellish.

<sup>253</sup> Perhaps this is the real attention-grabbing point Sonnerat makes: Voltaire, undoubtedly the major voice in Enlightenment Europe and scholarship on India, is drawn into the discussion and proven to have been chasing a fake source.

traveller's concern with conveying the "truth" is shared by the pandit who feels the obligation to put a stop to the propagation of falsities.<sup>254</sup>

The figure of the Brahmin, a key presence in colonial and orientalist constructions of India, is a curious one in both Sonnerat's and Voltaire's writing. Proper names of native Indian translators/scholars are rarely found in these works. It is the generic class that suffices to validate or challenge arguments and function as a sign of authenticity skillfully and sparsely sprinkled throughout discourses.<sup>255</sup> The role of the traveller /orientalist scholar is to bring to light information that, were it not for their unflagging dedication, would have remained in the dark (Gallien 3).<sup>256</sup> The modern day Brahmins, successors to the ancient Brachmanes, were considered on the one hand to be the custodians of a sublime philosophy, and on the other, displaying a most shameful superstition (Voltaire 1774, 184).<sup>257</sup> Sonnerat's claim, like Voltaire's, rested on a rather common narrative technique of ensuring veracity by association and implication. It was assisted by the fact that readers want to believe "facts" related by a *seemingly* reliable source, the figure of the mysterious generic entity called the Brahmin. The "new orientalism" led by the likes of Voltaire, Anquetil-Duperron, Holwell,

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<sup>254</sup> Later in the *Voyage*, Sonnerat challenges Voltaire once more for supporting Holwell's claim about the antiquity of the *Shastah*. This is because the Tamils believe the Vedas to be the oldest Indian texts (I: III, 212).

<sup>255</sup> In reality the native translator /interpreter (referred to in colonial texts as pandit, munshi) could be conversant in Sanskrit, Persian and vernacular languages of India, and the languages of the colonizers, came from all of the major religious groups in India. In addition, the Hindu translators /interpreters did not come exclusively from the Brahmin community, but the stamp of a Brahmin was often considered important to mention. On this subject see: Alam and Alavi, *A European Experience of the Mughal Orient*; Neild-Basu, "The Dubashes of Madras"; Hatcher, "Translation in the Zone of the Dubash: Colonial mediations of Anuvada"; Claire Gallien, "From Tension to Cooperation: Complex Interactions Between British Orientalists and Indian Scholars in Calcutta."

<sup>256</sup> Claire Gallien says this of the relationship between British orientalist and the native scholars/translators. "Their talents were used in researching, compiling and translating materials, but their labour as well as intellectual abilities were not considered worth noticing. It was the British approach and treatment of this new source of knowledge, their curiosity and wisdom, which were ultimately praised" (3).

<sup>257</sup> See Urs App, *Birth of Orientalism* for an account of the Brachmane in orientalist scholarship of India.

Dow and Jones—all of them more established scholars of India than Sonnerat—also sought to be based on the claim of direct interchange with the Pandits in India. It “drew its authority from its knowledge of the languages of India and opposed it to that of the travelers and missionaries” (App 32). Naturalist traveller Sonnerat’s revelation of the true nature of the *Ezour-Vedam* made him part of that elite group while questioning the latter’s claim to superior knowledge. This story of competing European claims once again underscores the inseparability of contest and collaboration.

#### 4.3.1 *On pseudo-translation*

The story of the *Ezour-vedam* presents a striking instance of pseudo-translation, and sheds light on the manner in which translation was implicated in the construction of a particular version of India. Typically, pseudo-translation refers to original writing posing as translation—instances of which are common in travel writing. The strategy involves the concealment of “origins” and often of the traveller’s dependence on the native translator/interpreter.<sup>258</sup> My purpose here is not to cite instances of fictitious translation in travel writing—which are abundant in the discourse of India in the period concerned—but to consider it as a mechanism for constructing the other on the part of a travel writer who is located between scientific and more mainstream oriental scholarship (which in the closing decades of the eighteenth century became part of a body of “scientific” knowledge). Susan Bassnett has observed that cultural construction is a determinant factor in presenting a text as a translation, or in acknowledging, *selectively*, the presence of translation (1998). Given Sonnerat’s self-identification with the scientific community, it is helpful to examine the issue

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<sup>258</sup> In *Descriptive translation studies—and beyond*, Gideon Toury describes pseudo-translations (or fictitious translations) as “texts which have been presented as translation with no corresponding source texts in other languages ever having existed – hence no factual ‘transfer operations’ and ‘translation relationships’” (40).

of authorship in his construction of India, and how it relates to the understanding of translation in the formation of scientific discourse.

If the “world is the original, the touchstone around which scientific discourse emanates and by which it is sustained” (Sarukkai 654), the scientist’s very authority is premised on *not* being the original author, but rather a faithful writer, rewriter, translator, of the world as original. Scientific discourse only opens up the text of the world that is already written. This logic, one might add, is not unrelated to the concept of “culture as text” (Geertz) on which the ethnography rests its epistemological and social authority.<sup>259</sup> While Sonnerat exposed the *Ezour-vedam* to be a pseudo-translation, the significance of translation in his own account and his partial acknowledgement of it present another instance of it. Here I see pseudo-translation not as an original posing as translation (as discussed by Toury and Venuti), but rather as a text whose status as “original” or “derivative” is problematic (Robinson 184). This would include a text that is taken to be an original but that combines translation of existing texts with firsthand experience. My purpose is to note that the implicit understanding of the world and of “nature” as the “original,” out there for the taking, makes representation of culture (often posited in colonial travel writing as an extension of nature) inherently dependent on pseudo-translation in the sense of the latter definition. And while the identification of pseudo-translation in translation studies has been largely motivated by a need to make visible the original author and the forgotten native translator interpreter, it can also stem from an interest in exploring the nature of mediations shaping a specific account. Science, as a mediating trope and mechanism in representations of others, makes the abdication of responsibility that is due to the “original” author a peculiar one. More importantly, in the context of this study, a travel account underpinned by science, in spite of

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<sup>259</sup> Here I draw on Talal Asad’s observations on the ethnographer’s authority, also discussed in Chapter 2.

its ethnographic content, seems oriented not to the construction of the practitioners embedded in a history and culture, but to the “revelation” of the text of the “World” which nevertheless speaks only locally.

#### 4.4 Translating time

Both the *Ezour-Vedam* and Holwell’s *Shastah* sought to construct what Sonnerat refers to when he describes India’s past as “lost in obscurity” (Appendix 2): a traceable history for the religion of the Hindus with *a* god.<sup>260</sup> Such a religion needed a history long enough to settle the crucial question of transmission of ancient texts. As App notes, “[p]revious researchers of Indian religion soon got so lost in the millions of years of Indian world ages and scores of unknown sacred scriptures that they were unable to find a foothold that somehow related to accepted chronology” (360). The other crucial idea, supported by Voltaire’s radical theism,<sup>261</sup> was that of universal consent: “all civilized people [...], Indians, Chinese, Egyptians, Persians, Chaldeans, Phoenicians: all recognized a supreme God” (Voltaire cited in App 311). This is where texts like the *Shastah* and the *Ezour-vedam* came in handy. The modern orientalist used constructed Indian texts to suit their agenda of constructing an ancient monotheism.

The intellectual premises for the construction of early Indian history by European scholars, the supposed lack of systematic record that Sonnerat refers to, were drawn from contemporary European historiography. It put a premium on chronology together with sequential narrative suggesting linear transmission (Thapar 2013). Attempts were made to

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<sup>260</sup> App observes Holwell’s “God is ONE” at the very beginning of the *Shastah* aimed at positing a god “who was thoughtfully equipped with an urge to reveal himself and limited liability.” (*Birth of Orientalism* 360).

<sup>261</sup> The idea that “one must recognize a God who remunerates and avenges, or no God at all” (Voltaire quoted in App 69).

establish links between European and Indian history,<sup>262</sup> which provided additional evidence for the theory that Greek and Sanskrit were cognate languages. The search was for a “history of India devised along the lines drawn by the humanistic version of Enlightenment historiography which would reveal the [true] identity of Indian civilization” (Thapar 2013, 21). The informants of the Europeans in India were the recalcitrant Brahmins who were tapped for information on religion and law, the latter a concern particularly of the British. The Islamic branch of knowledge was increasingly ignored. This was partly due to Islam’s relative newness, but there were other reasons:<sup>263</sup> European attitudes to Islam in India were mediated by the perspective of it being a Semitic religion and having a heritage partly shared with Christianity. This was reinforced by Europe’s history of conflict with Islam going back to the Crusades—Muslim rulers in India were seen as political rivals. Considered from this perspective, the attention to a history of India centred around Hinduism was important to a colonial view of the country, but it was also part of Europe’s own pre-colonial past. The construction of religious history could draw on notions of unity of “nature”:

We have every reason to believe that nature was indulgent toward her first children. She chose neither the frozen north nor the burning sands of Libya as their birthplace: the soil that gave birth to them had to provide abundantly for their needs, without their labour; And in all likelihood they were not designed to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow. (Sonnerat I: I, 2)

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<sup>262</sup> Which explains, according to Thapar, the wide publicity given to the identification by William Jones of Sandracottos with Candragupta, the Mauryan king, thus linking him with Alexander of Macedonia (Thapar). Interestingly, orientalist Joseph de Guignes based his notion of universal history of the world on translation, and his knowledge of India drew on his correspondences with Tamil Indian translator Maridas Pillai.

<sup>263</sup> Initially, attention was also given exclusively to Brahmanical sources, leaving out other systems, particularly those from the Buddhist and Jain traditions.

The theme<sup>264</sup> of “excess” implicit in the notion of nature’s indulgence toward India is unmistakable in these lines: ideas flourished in India because there was no need to harness nature and toil over it for basic needs. But it is this very abundance, of nature and of ideas that nature facilitated, that led to the debasement of the people and attracted the envy of others. In all this Indians emerge as passive recipients of nature’s bounty as well as of human violence in the form of foreign invasion. But this otherness seems possible to articulate only by making them part of nature. Later this natural excess would be related to the profusion of gods and the abundance of allegories in the Hindu tradition.

If the origin of India is lost in the depths of time, the idea of “time” that frames the construction of India is the time of the Western European *here* having its own epistemological mooring. Travel accounts are replete with representations of borders,<sup>265</sup> notably between the past and the present, which give them their often problematic temporal texture (Youngs 2019, 25). Inden has observed that two of the assumptions built into the “episteme” of Indology are that the real world (whether material and determinate or ideal and ineffable) consists of essences and that that world is unitary (Inden 402). These two entail the further assumption that there exists a “human nature” which itself consists of a unitary essence. Since this essence is assumed to be most fully realized in the “West,” a fundamental challenge confronting the expert of non-Western others has been how to reconcile the essence of the other’s civilization, with the Western European manifestation of human nature’s unitary essence—rational and scientific thought (402)—itself a temporally (and spatially) circumscribed event. Fabian delves into this framing practice in travel writing and the

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<sup>264</sup> The lines also articulate the eighteenth-century obsession with climate theories of cultural differentiation. Climate was seen as the “most universal, the most powerful” of causes for differing national character” (Vyverberg 66).

<sup>265</sup> Some others are between the known and the unknown; civilized and savage; domestic and wild, land and sea; cultivated and desert.

epistemological principle on which it is based.<sup>266</sup> What is noticeable here is the “schizogenic use of Time” (Fabian): on the one hand non-fictional travel writing is based on “coeval research” (60) as it takes place in contemporaneous, shared time. On the other, the writing of travel, based on the epistemological and cognitive economy of the traveller, is asynchronous (Fabian uses the term “allochronic”), because it situates the object of its description in another time through nostalgia and stereotype. The temporal distancing of the other—a much discussed theme in postcolonial studies—is achieved by presenting as the norm the West’s “present.” It serves as a reminder “that travel writing textualizes a spatio-temporal practice: to travel is to move across space and time, [but also to bear] witness to the otherness of place and time” (Aedín Ní Loingsigh 45).<sup>267</sup> The temporal distancing in Sonnerat’s account takes a specific form within this logic:

India alone offers the traces of this primitive fecundity: in all other parts of the globe an infecund nature had to be conquered by industry. Therefore, a right of seniority is due to the Indians, which may also be justified by the testimony in Hebrew texts [...].  
(Sonnerat I: I, 2)

I know that distinguished savants such as M Linné and Bailly<sup>268</sup> have placed the Origin of the human (species) in Siberia, from where they are claimed to have spread over the rest of the earth by successive migrations.

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<sup>266</sup> See discussion of this point by Aedín Ní Loingsigh, “Coevalness” in *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies* (2019).

<sup>267</sup> This practice is certainly not limited to Western portrayals of non- Western cultures. Charles Forsdick in “Exoticizing the Domestique: Bécassine, Brittany, and the Beauty of the Dead” has noted a temporal ‘othering’ of France’s peripheral regions in his research. On the subject also see Michael Cronin “Speech Acts: Language, Mobility and Place”(2014).

<sup>268</sup> Carl Linnaeus and Jean Sylvain Bailly.

Among different rationales in support of this system,<sup>269</sup> they say that it is the only region where wheat, the first food grain (nourishment) for civilized people, grows naturally. (Sonnerat I: I, 2)

The notion of “primitive fecundity,” seen in the multitudinousness that provided a rationale for colonial order, was a familiar one in European travel accounts and philosophical discourses of the non-European other. Sonnerat’s comments are uncannily similar to those made by Voltaire, to whom India seemed to be older than China and Egypt because “the sciences are much older in the Indies,” a “conjecture [...] based on the fact that the land of the Indies is much easier to inhabit. [...] The soil of the Indies shows a much more varied fertility and must have stimulated human curiosity and industry to a greater degree” (Voltaire quoted in App. 29).<sup>270</sup> The trope of fertility was also used in numerous Western accounts to present a gendered image of the country. It was part of the stereotype of the effeminate Indian which emerged within discourses of diet, sexuality and religion (Nayar 2015, Teltscher 2000). The stereotype is, however, turned into a personal observation in Sonnerat’s account.<sup>271</sup> He does not use the hyperbolic language that would be typical in its elaboration in travel writing, although still presents India as “incomparable” (Chard). The use of citation and comparison,<sup>272</sup> the reference to Linnaeus, “father of modern taxonomy,” and his *system* lend his account the authority that set him apart from the *philosophes*. Here science, engaged

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<sup>269</sup> I have translated *systeme* as “system” to refer to that of Linnaeus.

<sup>270</sup> In 1761 Voltaire wrote that “these considerations [about the fertility and easy life in India] seem to strengthen the old idea that mankind was born in a land where nature did everything for men and left them with almost nothing to do” (quoted in App 29). Voltaire’s comments in turn seem very similar to Jaucourt’s representation of India’s past published in the *l’Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné* (1751-80).

<sup>271</sup> I do not claim that Sonnerat’s “science-based” observation was unique, but rather that the combination of the intertextual and experiential lends the account its specificity.

<sup>272</sup> Two of the mechanisms of representation in ethnography discussed by Tyler in *Ethnography, Intertextuality and the end of description.*”

in a dialectic of surface and depth, is oriented toward the discovery of underlying principles in order to confirm India's antiquity.

Since Sonnerat also aspired to the status of a *philosophe* (Adas 99), here his goal coincided with that of the orientalist interested in identifying universal "truths" common to all of humanity. His speculation on India's easy fecundity, linked later in a more ethnography-oriented chapter<sup>273</sup> to the low productivity of average Indian workmen (Sonnerat I: I, 103-4), reflects the central intellectual preoccupations of his time. Even those Enlightenment intellectuals who were not overt proponents of the idea of a universal history of humankind subscribed to the notion of human well-being as causally related to technological progress through the harnessing of nature.<sup>274</sup> In the late eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries the general consensus among European intellectuals was that the unprecedented control over nature made possible by Western science and technology proved that European modes of thought corresponded much more closely to the underlying realities of the universe than did those of any other people, past or present (Adas 7). Indians, like all the peoples of Asia had made considerable technological advance in ancient times when the peoples of Europe were still wallowing in barbarism (Sonnerat 99). But in contrast to the Europeans, who struggled through the centuries to improve their technological capabilities and eventually emerged as the most advanced of all civilizations, the Indians and Asians in general had progressed little. So the Indian example was not only comparable to other Asian countries; at one point in the chapter on the manufacture of tools in India, Sonnerat suggests that the great European innovations in machines and tools were tied to "progress" in civilized development as a whole (103), thus establishing the conceptual symmetry between Asia and Europe based on the flexible positional superiority of the traveller.

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<sup>273</sup> Chapter titled « Des arts & métiers des Indiens » ("Of the Arts and Professions of the Indians").

<sup>274</sup> For some this view was no doubt shaped by a commercial interest in the natural resources of non-European countries.

The slide from empirical into interpretive, from description of nature to the “nature of culture” is clear in the rest of the chapter. Here is one example:

Without undertaking to solve this scientific question, the fact remains that the traces of most remote antiquity are to be found among Indians, and the first sparks of reason shone in these climates, because intellectual faculties can only develop when physical needs do not interfere. (I: I, 3)

It is worth dwelling on the statement: “Reason” or “natural reason,” the basis of laws of people, is observed everywhere. The French Enlightenment view expressed in the *Encyclopédie* was that in its primitive state, reason is “as old as mankind,” but further developed in “civilized” nations” (Vyverberg 27). Nature controlled, a sign of progress, is contrasted with wild or spontaneous nature (regress) in a worldview where the ability to harness nature is deemed beneficial to all of humanity and therefore not unconnected to the idea of universal reason. Vyverberg observes that “for the mainstream of the French Enlightenment, the cooperation of universal reason and empiricism in analyzing the natural world, and in guiding the future course of mankind, was a virtually unquestioned assumption” (66). If this points to a tension between empiricism and the concept of uniformity of human nature, the idea of a single human nature prevailed and re-echoed through the whole age of Enlightenment, both as an assumption and as an ideal (68). In the next section I want to examine how the pattern of early development, stagnation and decline intersect with the assumption of universal human nature in Sonnerat’s description of India’s linguistic landscape.

#### **4.5 Translating language**

Referring to the dominant European ideology of “primordial monolingualism,” Jean-Louis Calvet observes that the expression “babelization,” signifying the multiplication of

languages on a particular territory, is the linguistic equivalent of the term “balkanization” for states (18-19). Linguistic difference in this sense implies confusion, incomprehension and fragmentation, and is associated with the idea of divine punishment. However, while all languages may be equal by virtue of having descended from the pre-Babel original, it is the speakers who confer upon a language its superiority. In June 1782, participants in the Academy of Berlin’s annual competition were asked: What has made French the universal language of Europe? The premise of the question undermined the fact that at the time at least six million French people did not speak this language of privilege. One of the two winners of the competition, Frenchman Antoine Rivarol, traced the literary achievements in French and argued that it had taken the lead over other languages, which then gave it “right of primogeniture” (Rivarol’s expression cited in Calvet 49), a kind of proximity to the “original.” The emergence of French as the dominant language in eighteenth-century Europe and its standardization need to be seen in this context (44-45). At the same time, a move toward monolingualism bolstered by methods of enumeration and mapping may have marked European attitudes to multilinguality in general, often finding expression in colonial discourses of language.

Notwithstanding the “uneven matrix of orientalist situations across different cultural and historical sites” (Lowe 5) and the internal complexities and instabilities of each orientalism (5), much of the European discourse of India in the late-eighteenth century was framed by a common set of devices that underline the intertextuality of the discourses.<sup>275</sup> A

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<sup>275</sup> I do not imply lack of engagement with language, since the period also saw the emergence of new scholarship on Indian languages, especially in philology. Anquetil-Duperron was one of the prominent philologists who, alongside Jones, came up with the hypothesis of a common source for all languages.

It is worth noting that the British debates on the status of English and the Indian vernacular and classical languages for education of Indians had to do with needs of governance, and the much-discussed dispute between the orientalists and Anglicists on the subject did not emerge until the early-nineteenth century. In the eighteenth-century, British engagement with the region’s languages could be seen in the establishment of orientalism as the official policy.

case in point is the notion of languages stemming from a common source. Rooted in Christianity, this view of “primordial monolingualism” (Calvet 18) was later put to the service of nationalist goals in Europe, correlating the concept of standardized language to that of nation. While the missionaries tried to incorporate ancient Asian cultures and religions into biblical scenarios, deist philosophers and intellectuals like Voltaire and Holwell sought to use Asian texts as “older Old Testaments” (App 3), so that India’s languages and texts functioned not only to shape Europe’s knowledge of the subcontinent, but also Europe’s own linguistic and religious identity. Alongside this, in Enlightenment thinking the belief in the logic of “natural reason” became conflated with the idea of uniformity of nature and how this could be understood in cultural expressions of the other. This general attitude framed the view of India’s languages for a majority of the French travellers in the century: linguistic plurality was seen as a condition that needed to be fixed.<sup>276</sup>

In representing the unfamiliar for the reader at home, travel accounts established, with science and empiricism on its side, a regime of “truth” that in fact hinged on the discursive structures of myth and idealization. The myth<sup>277</sup> of a single source, to which European countries aspired and against which they compared and contrasted their own vernaculars and those of the colonies, functioned to separate languages into discrete categories. A corollary to this was a comparative method aimed at tracing a common root, belonging to a particular identifiable common “race.”<sup>278</sup> When Sonnerat seeks to give an account of the religion of India, which the country’s fragmented linguistic landscape and the unreliable translations of

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<sup>276</sup> The monolingual ideology of Europe has been described as having its source in eighteenth-century Enlightenment and in the ideology of “one nation, one culture, one language.”

<sup>277</sup> As Calvet notes, while one need not overemphasise the myths, it should not be forgotten that “being readymade ideas,” myths govern the social experiences of humans (20).

<sup>278</sup> The theory of a single source led to the categorization of Sanskrit (and Persian) as ‘high’ languages and saw the relations between Sanskrit and the vernaculars as comparable to those between Greek, Latin and contemporary European languages.

its ancient texts seem ill-equipped to make accessible, the notion of this essential connection is unmistakable:

The errors of all nations are caused by forgetting the natural language. Once it falls into disuse, the commentators<sup>279</sup> render it unintelligible and finish it off. In their commentaries on the original sacred books, the Brahmins of each region have slipped in absurd, preposterous fables presuming that those who were told such stories would find them enjoyable. Hence the difference of opinion on the birth, actions, nomenclature of Gods, even the principal ones; the great difference in festivals and ceremonies, this infinite multitude of inferior gods, demi-gods, saints, which, like the sacred animals of Egypt are celebrated and worshipped in one place, while are unknown or despised in another. The wise Indian is however no idolater.

[and]worship[s] one supreme and infinite Being, of which everything else is part.

(Sonnerat I: I, 5-6)

Sonnerat's comments, implicating both language and translation, reflect the dominant ideology in eighteenth-century Europe that saw language as separate from thinking:

“thoughts can be stripped of their external linguistic form without major loss” (Guldin 15).

Prioritizing the original over the translation and similarity over difference, it viewed language as a mere covering for thought, plurality leading inevitably to degraded versions. The attempt to construct a retrospective history of language was thus part of France's own cultural history. Lüdi notes that although plurilingual practices and the use of non-standard languages have always been present in France, between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries there was “a progressive shift from local languages and dialects to French” (Lüdi 207-8) effected

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<sup>279</sup> The French word in Sonnerat's text is “glossateur” meaning “commentator.” As I see it, the word encompasses both the practice of commentary in the Indian tradition, and interpretation, the latter referring to translation. The word is also significant if we think of vernacular translations of pan-Indian texts as “rewritings,” suggesting commentaries on a source.

through numerous legislations. Such a process can involve the eventual internalization of the dominant ideology by speakers feeling a sense of pride in “speaking the ‘legitimate’ language or [...] insecurity and guilt if they think this is not the case” (209). In the pursuit of linguistic homogeneity, standard languages are accorded “retrospective historicity,” (Lodge 8) a constructed past that sets them apart from less prestigious varieties.

#### 4.5.1 *Search for a standard*

The question of linguistic purity in Europe, attainable through cultivation and expansion (Lodge 196)—for example in France by the *Académie française* (1635) and its provincial imitations—is closely related to standardization. Seventeenth-century France saw growing efforts to control French language norms through purified diction and fixing *bon usage* (good usage). In his *Remarques sur la langue française* (1647) Claude Favre de Vaugelas declared that “words and expressions were to be judged by the current usage of the best society” (quoted in Ludi 207). Lodge argues that in France (and Britain) institutional pressure to conform to prescribed linguistic usage has been strong for so long that standard language is deemed to be the only authentic form and all deviations are considered failed attempts to express oneself properly (Lodge 5). Seen in this light, Sonnerat’s observations on language are revealing: “The living languages of India have enough affinity with [Sanskrit] to be considered the latter’s offspring, but corrupted by mixing with bad jargons” (I: I, 126), he observes. Following a general “mapping” of the languages of India, not unlike descriptions found in other French accounts from the period,<sup>280</sup> he focuses on Tamil, the language he was most familiar with:

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<sup>280</sup> For example, in his *Recherches historiques et géographiques sur l’Inde* (1786), Anquetil-Duperron remarked that the reader would be well-advised to look at a general map of India while reading his enumeration of its languages (1786, p. xi). Anquetil’s description is noteworthy for its frequent references to instances of language mixing, corrupt languages, jargons.

It is without doubt the most deficient of India's languages, in that each of its characters can be pronounced and written in different ways (I: I, 126).

Minute changes in sound alter the meanings of entire sentences leading to incomprehension. (I: I, 126)

Such confusion for Sonnerat pervades relations between India's languages in general. The same gods become unrecognizable in the local translations of Indian mythology—*Brouma* in Pondichéry becomes *Brahma* in Tanjore and *Birmah* on the Orissa coast (Sonnerat I:III, 201). The religions and laws of the rest of the world, the wisdom and the fables of Greece and Egypt, can be traced to ancient India, a land of intellectual and material wealth, he insists (I: I, 7). But the current ignorance and debasement of the people, reflected in the disarray of its languages, is surely the necessary consequence of a past in which everything seemed conducive to fulfilling human desire (I: I, 7). If Tamil here stands for an Indian whole, Sonnerat justifies this relationship by citing prominent British orientalist Alexander Dow's description of Bengal.<sup>281</sup> Of all the works written on Indian mythology, Mr. Dow's is undoubtedly the best, even if its description of religion is superficial. However, barring a few minor exceptions occasioned by the sects and above all by language, the same principles apply to Bengalis and Tamils (Sonnerat I: III, 195-196). Ultimately, the corrupt state of language is related to the absence of cultivation of science (I: I, 126), clearly an allusion to the benefits of standardization.

The first books on French grammar sought to find the underlying system of French language in Latin and uncover structural parallels between French and Latin, Greek and Hebrew. These books aimed to "strip the language of its vulgar accretions" (Lodge 163), severing it, as it were, from its living roots among speech communities. The history of

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<sup>281</sup> Here he refers to Dow's "An enquiry into the state of Bengal" part of the author's *The History of Hindostan* 1768.

French, the language Rivarol described as “incorruptible,” is in this sense intimately linked with a strong tradition of purism (156) dependent on a codified language legitimized through an elaboration of *bon usage* (proper usage), or “ideology of the standard” (178).

*Bon usage*, by no means a static set of norms,<sup>282</sup> paradoxically confirms the existence of *mauvais usage* (improper usage). The omnipresence of patois—defined by the *Encyclopédie* as «langage corrompu tel qu’il se parle presque dans toutes nos provinces » (quoted in Lodge 193)<sup>283</sup>—in seventeenth and eighteenth-century France has been widely attested. Sonnerat’s attention to Sanskrit seems to play a similar role (albeit conversely) in his description, when, by separating the regional languages as “living” he implies that Sanskrit, the language of the Brahmins, is indeed not *quite* alive among the people. Here Sanskrit’s purity hinges on its immutability; yet its continuity, elusive but certain, is manifest in the life of the vernaculars. The dualistic view of language, evident in Sonnerat’s words (living/dead, pure/corrupt), seems to come undone in testifying to the *transformations* of Sanskrit—not unlike Latin’s *deformations* in popular usage in Europe (Calvet 101).

Sheldon Pollock, comparing the situations in South Asia and Western Europe in somewhat oppositional<sup>284</sup> terms, notes the role of Sanskrit as a *generative* force in the life of vernaculars:

If the progress of Latin around the beginning of the Common Era entailed the reduction of linguistic diversity across the western Mediterranean world, the progress of Sanskrit entailed the literization of a vast range of vernaculars in southern Asia.

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<sup>282</sup> See Lodge, *French: From Dialect to Standard*, for its evolving definition in France (180).

<sup>283</sup> “[A] corrupt manner of speaking used in more or less all our province” The definition adds that “The [French] language is spoken only in the capital”).

<sup>284</sup> I do not claim the absence of ideologies of purity in India. In fact, Pollock has discussed the persistent ideology, among Sanskrit intellectuals in India, as late as the seventeenth century, that related vernacular to “corrupted dialect” (308). Rather, my intention is to underscore that the general attitude toward linguistic plurality and the absence any institutionally imposed language ideology in eighteenth-century India would be incommensurable with the ideology of the standard.

Nowhere in the texts of premodern south Asia do we find the least hint of despair at the proliferation of languages (Pollock 508-509).

[...] the very constitution of peoplehood through kinship, group solidarity, and common culture, *especially language*—however self-evident a feature of European history—is very hard to demonstrate for any period of South Asian history before modernity and seems just another fallacious universalization of a Western particular.

(510, my emphasis)

To understand the construction of the vernacular (Tamil language) and the local, synecdochically related to the language of India in Sonnerat's account, one must also consider the interwoven project of European colonization and the study of language as "intimately linked to the wider [...] emphasis on human hierarchies" (Pennycook 81). The traveller's translation of difference here encompasses an understanding of the local as unsystematic yet static, of language as a pre-given entity that the local puts to use, rather than language as locally produced through the constant restructuring of both language and the social domain (46). The point here is not to overemphasize change, or to deny that certain communities identify with certain places over long periods of time. As Selby and Peterson observe, Classical Tamil literature is in fact "explicitly conscious about the close relationships between language, geographical territory, and culture" (4). But this has emerged, as they point out, in dialogue with heterogeneity—from a mixing of cultural currents (6) that have flowed through the region—rather than in its absence.

Despite his skewed reading of India's linguistic plurality, Sonnerat, however, seems to recognize one of its fundamental characteristics: that the evolution of a common mythology in India was not hindered by a diversity of languages and cultures. Indeed, one of the fundamental features of Indian literature is that it recognises relationships between different literatures having their own peculiar character and temperament while being linked

by certain common phonological, morphological and lexical features cutting across religious, ethnic and geographical boundaries (Das).<sup>285</sup>

What is the relation between purity and continuity (of an “original”) in this context? Sudipta Kaviraj has pointed out that in India, “essential structures of social exchange and communication are entrusted to oral continuity rather than written codification” (Kaviraj 131). Continuity, seen in the presence of Sanskrit in the vernaculars, suggests, rather than negates, flexibility and change. The tradition of mnemonic reproduction allowed for constant change and variations—deliberate or unintentional, but mostly silent and surreptitious (132). The literary, religious and administrative authority attributed in European discourses of India to the two “prestige” languages, Sanskrit and Persian, tends to overlook or denigrate the complementary use of widely spoken people’s languages such as Tamil and Urdu within and outside these domains. This involves a denial of the role of vernacular Indian languages as primary vehicles of literary expression, both written and oral. The fact is that multiple linguistic linkages marked individuals as well as communities and regions in the subcontinent. Therefore, the ideology of purity premised on fixed, normalized language devoid of corrupt accretions would meet with challenges at multiple sites of language practice in India.

#### **4.5.2 *On cartography***

Much of the colonial enterprise of classifying, mapping, and naming languages can be understood in light of demands of governance, but the general attitude in Europe that deemed languages to be discrete, standardizable entities was also part of the “scientific” Enlightenment tradition, which intersected with the travellers’ quest for the curious and the

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<sup>285</sup> *A History of Indian Literature: 1800-1910 Western Impact: Indian Response.*

Yet all of India’s languages are “not direct descendants of a common proto language” (Singh & Manoharan 17), some have evolved locally out of two or more adjoining, interacting languages (18).

informative. If “qualitatively new knowledge” (Ludden 252) produced during the eighteenth-century European presence in India served “instrumental functions for capitalist, military, and administrative expansion by the English East India company [,] [...] the *methods* to produce this knowledge were not specific to India [...]. Even the most instrumental knowledge, produced to sustain technologies of colonial rule, [...] was produced under the Enlightenment rubric of objective science” (252 my emphasis). It was the methodologies authorized by the scientific standards of the day against which the accuracy and authenticity of new knowledge about India was tested (252). This technique of knowledge construction and accumulation, dependent on the exchange of favours between colonial administrators, orientalist and naturalists initiated in the principles of observing and classifying the environment, curiously held on to “as an undislodged current in its discourse, a reconstructed religious impulse [...].” (Said 1998, 121)

The tendency in orientalist scholarship to particularize “things oriental into manageable parts” (Said 1998, 72) is most noticeable in attempts to delimit languages as homogenous and fixed entities circumscribed by regional boundaries. It is evident in *Voyage* in the chapter on India’s languages.<sup>286</sup> For example:

The language spoken from the coast of Orissa to Cape Comorin, and up the Malabar coast as far as Cochin is Tamil [...]

On the coast Orissa they speak Talinga, a language that is different from Tamil in writing and pronunciation, although, when translated, the characters of both correspond to the same ones in French.

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<sup>286</sup> The apprehension of language as a direct expression of community identity—generally absent in pre-modern India—gradually developed with colonial efforts to map the languages of the subcontinent and provided a radically new view of the relation of the speaker to their speech.

Yet another language, different from Tamil in writing and pronunciation, is spoken on the Malabar coast. (Sonnerat I: I, 125-127)<sup>287</sup>

One of the principal means of ordering India's linguistic plurality in European travel accounts was enumeration. Allied with the "scientific" cataloging characteristic of the post-Renaissance episteme, the enumerative helped to establish a typology of languages, and emphasized the characteristics of the languages the travellers came into contact with. It was as *de rigueur* in the prominent French travel texts of the eighteenth century to describe the local languages as corresponding to regions, as it was to point out that in spite of their fragmented state, all the languages sprang from the same source.

This was not unrelated to the absence of clear distinctions between geography and the other broad categories of knowledge in the orientalist discourses of India (Edney 42-43). Not only was geographical discourse inseparable from those of languages, the latter were studied in cartographic terms (Edney).<sup>288</sup> Observations of landscape, based on a broad understanding the features of landscape that should be studied, could encompass data ranging from geography, flora, fauna, through commerce, history to language and religion. It was the "map's 'graticule'" (18) that allowed all data to be represented in the same manner—the assumption being that translation between European and Indian systems of knowledge on a subject could be achieved by reducing them to a common measure. Sonnerat's attempt at mapping and listing India's languages as he traversed regional boundaries in the southern part

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<sup>287</sup> See Appendix B, "On Indian languages in General."

<sup>288</sup> Tracing the connections between cartography and its formative role in eighteenth-century European colonial knowledge, Edney notes that before the eighteenth century a distinction was made between geo-graphy (earth description) and choro-graphy (region description), the former entailing the study of the world as a whole and of mapmaking, and the latter describing a particular region and its inhabitants without reference to the rest of world (Edney 43). By the end of the seventeenth century this distinction of scale dissolved. In a new approach to classify the subject of observation, geographers started distinguishing between physical and human features of landscape—reflecting the "Cartesian dualism between mind and matter and the contemporary idea that the natural world is a stage for human action" (44).

of India echoed such an approach. Cohering with the notion of “unity of language” (Sakai), this view of multilingualism<sup>289</sup> could be seen as a translation between two modes of social and cultural signification.

Naoki Sakai observes that the notion of unity of language as a “historical *a priori*” is a “regulative idea” (Sakai 74), which lets us tell one language from another: “It organizes knowledge, but it is not empirically verifiable [...]. It is therefore “an objective in praxis,” the enactment of an idea, rather than “in experience” (74). Crucially, since the unity of one language is already accompanied by the unity of another, the notion “is possible only in the element of ‘many in *one*.’” (75, my emphasis). This apprehension of oneness has been pointed out by Islam in the notion of a conceptual symmetry between the traveller and their other. It is present in Sonnerat’s account when he reads the specificity of the vernacular languages through a European lens and observes them to be undoubtedly corrupt offspring of Sanskrit (Sonnerat 126, see quote earlier). But if the local translators of Hindu texts, common to all (Hindu) Indians, altered them by inserting fables well-known in the country where they wrote, such a situation, he adds, was not unique to India. Haven’t the Catholics and the Protestants, instead of reading the scriptures in Hebrew and Greek, become increasingly attached to local interpretations that divide them? (I: III, 201-202). The true religion of the Brahmins can only be understood through a faithful translation of the Sanskrit Vedas, which is impossible when that “source” is lost.

This comparison, based on the idea of “plurality of languages in one humanity” (Sakai 73) is at once an acknowledgement and a denial of difference. It is both an epistemic principle determining what is to be considered proper language, and a strategic principle, the latter insofar as it tells us what we must *seek* as proper language. In Sakai’s concept, the enactment of the idea involves “processes that take place in the interstices of many

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<sup>289</sup> This view continues to inform secular ideologies of modern nation states, including India.

incongruous fragments” (75), which he describes as translations. Translation here is to be understood in terms of translating “radical difference of discontinuity” (Sakai 86) that does not accommodate measurable, strictly spatialized representation into “measured difference [that can be] imagined in terms of a border [...] between two spatially enclosed territories or entities.”(86). In the context of this study, it can be understood to convert forms of knowledge unfamiliar into familiar but lesser objects, which begins with an acknowledgement that a universal language has been lost and the multiplication of languages in a territory inevitably results in fragmentation, confusion, incomprehension.

This attempt to organize linguistic plurality interestingly echoes the “aesthetic of the marvelous,” which with its “dual emphases on variety and otherness” constructed a “marvelous topography” (Nayar 2005, 214)<sup>290</sup> of the Indian space. This feature and function of travel writing, which Nayar terms the “scientific marvelous,” (216) negotiated the unfamiliar through enumerations, categorizations, and rational explanations (216). “This not only reduced the Other into something knowable, it also enabled the traveler to retain his epistemological/cultural integrity in the face of the Other’s excesses” (216). Nayar’s study is concerned with seventeenth and eighteenth-century British explorations of India’s otherness. But it is equally useful for reading French descriptions of India’s languages, where the demystification of difference follows a pattern similar to the one he elaborates (217). Much like Anquetil’s<sup>291</sup> description cited earlier, the mapping of languages onto regions in Sonnerat’s account, interspersed with comments about the negative excess of multilingualism<sup>292</sup> seems readable only as a “lack”: “All these languages, instead of

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<sup>290</sup> Nayar draws on Stephen Greenblatt’s notion of the “marvelous” elaborated in *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World*.

<sup>291</sup> In his description Anquetil-Duperron indeed suggests that the reader should use a map to understand his description. His enumerative approach is very similar to Sonnerat’s, which I have cited earlier.

<sup>292</sup> Anquetil’s enumeration of the languages of the land is overwhelmed by instances of language mixing he comes across, leading him to conclude that “to communicate with the people of India, one

improving, as would have been the case if these people had cultivated the sciences, have become so corrupted that one can hardly find any trace of Sanskrit in them” (Sonnerat I:I, 126). The vernaculars are expected to manifest their connection to Sanskrit and found to be “deficient”—the more a language obscures this link, the greater its state of corruption. Here principles of visual observation guide the general approach to verbal description and epistemology,<sup>293</sup> and linguistic difference slides into the realm of both science and myth.

#### 4.6 Apprehending the local

We have already noted the representation of the local translator in the figure of the Brahmin in orientalist discourses of India. In Sonnerat’s account it manifests an unmistakable distinction made between the monotheistic elite—the wise Indian who is no idolater (I: I, 6), and the ignorant Indian who requires stories and likenesses and whose weakness for the figurative is fed by the local Brahmins through preposterous interpretations (I: I, 6). The distinction between higher and lower planes of thought and action runs like a common thread through the themes discussed by Sonnerat in *Voyage*.<sup>294</sup> Criticism is dealt out to the “ordinary” Indian because they are guided by their senses: they need stories and can worship divinity only in figurative form and through elaborate ceremonies. Such references are nevertheless useful for shedding light on, first, the local translator/ interpreter likely encountered by Sonnerat and his contemporary European travellers, and second, the nature of vernacular-Sanskrit relation in the region.

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needs to know not only the ... languages and their alphabets, but also the local jargons and dialects - a prospect that is [...] terrifying” (*Recherches historiques* xii).

<sup>293</sup> Matthew Edney, *Mapping an Empire: The Geographical Construction of British India*.

<sup>294</sup> See Paola von Wyss-Giacosa, “Confronting Asia’s ‘Idolatrous Body’” In *Commun(ica)ting Bodies* (2015), for a discussion of this distinction through an analysis of Sonnerat’s illustration of Indian gods in *Voyage*. von Wyss-Giacosa describes Sonnerat’s distinction between the ordinary Indian’s “impure” practice of worship and the elite’s philosophical monotheism. Interestingly, the illustrations (of the gods) in the *Voyage* seem to follow a paradigmatic principle detached from their discursive context, much like items on an inventory (387-420).

The absence of details about local translators/interpreters in *Voyage* makes it challenging to portray them. One notable example is found in stories associated with Tamil catholic pandit Maridas Pillai (also known as Maridas Poullé) and French naturalist traveller Foucher d'Obsonville, the latter known to have been in contact with Sonnerat.<sup>295</sup> d'Obsonville was the editor of Pillai's French translation of the *Bhāgavata Purāna*<sup>296</sup> (titled *Bagavadam*). As chief interpreter for the French in Pondichéry, Pillai played a prominent role as a local “go-between”—his French interlocutors ranging from missionary Coeurdoux, philologist Anquetil-Duperron, to naturalist Sonnerat and astronomer Le Gentil. He is believed to have based the translation not on Sanskrit but on an abridged Tamil version—a conclusion based on links demonstrated in the work between Tamil and Sanskrit names.<sup>297</sup> In his introduction to the translation, the editor, who does not name himself or the translator, refers to Pillai as the Indian interpreter whose assistance he had availed for the translation.<sup>298</sup> But being a Christian, Pillai may have misunderstood aspects of the canonical text (Poullé and d'Obsonville x). d'Obsonville therefore feels justified in ridding the translation of unrecognizable terms and supposed synonyms to restore it to its original simplicity and innocence, since there is a general belief among the sages of India in a single, supreme god. (Poullé and d'Obsonville xiv). d'Obsonville was clearly looking for a Sanskrit original that might reveal a universal, monotheistic history<sup>299</sup> in a literary tradition which defied any stable

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<sup>295</sup> d'Obsonville is also known for his *Supplément au voyage de M. Sonnerat* (1785)

<sup>296</sup> Hindu sacred text, one of the eighteen Puranas.

<sup>297</sup> See the version of this translation titled *Bagavadam ou Bhāgavata Purāna* (2004), edited and introduced by J.B Prashant More with a preface by Pierre Filliozat, establishing this link.

<sup>298</sup> According d'Obsonville, upon its completion (long before its publication by the Frenchman), the translator clandestinely sold his work to European buyers. Both Anquetil-Duperron and Sonnerat (Le Blanc 17) are known to have acquired copies of the manuscript.

<sup>299</sup> See Claudine Le Blanc, “Les premiers passeurs de Bhāgavata Purāna,” in *Passeurs d'idées religieuses entre l'Inde et l'Europe* (2009).

demarcation between Sanskrit and the vernaculars,<sup>300</sup> or between the oral and the written. This involved a dual process: the insertion of Sanskrit into a universal history of the world through a translation of the Sanskrit-vernacular relation into terms understandable to the European reader, and the necessary dehistoricization of India's multilingualism. Here translation, in the broader sense, becomes constitutive of language; prioritising similarity over difference, it accords language its unity and its limit before a text can be engaged with. This translation also involves the use of "cultural signs" (Lowe): the editor, who appears to take on the mantle of the translator, seeks to replace the "incoherence" of India's multilingualism with the motif of "universal monotheism" gleaned from other orientalisms that circulated in eighteenth-century Europe.

The above example brings us back to ideas formative of the modern understanding of language as discrete entities detached from local practice. Sonnerat's description of Tamil as defective because of its variability (see earlier) is a "translation" of the local into the ideology and idiom of the standard. Linguistic diversity does not threaten the idea of universality (Bielsa), because not only are the languages corrupt expressions of an underlying truth readable in the trace of Sanskrit, they paradoxically display, in their "strong expressions and lively images" (Sonnerat I: I, 127, see Appendix B), little deviation from nature. The reference to mimetic representation of the world, "to the quotidian, yet unlanguage" (Bhabha 1998, 131) suggests that nature as an open book can only be read in its logic through that translation which gives access to its essence, to reveal the unseen beneath the surface. But in the midst of the discourse of language through familiar tropes of corrupt, defective, impure, and through the ideology of error and perfectibility,<sup>301</sup> this description of language in

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<sup>300</sup> I do not claim that the Indian example is unique or that the distinction between language as pure and corrupt was absent in India.

<sup>301</sup> See Sonia Das, "Failed Legacies of Colonial Linguistics: Lessons from Tamil Books in French India and French Guiana," for a discussion of how print technologies between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries helped crystalize missionary and colonial ideologies of perfectibility and error of

action comes across as irreducibly alien. As Smethurst puts it, “[w]ithout formally recognising it, [eighteenth-century] traveller-scientists were engaged in thick description as an actor-oriented method, crossing horizontally between the subject, behaviour and environment, and ‘recording’ social expressions on their *surface* enigmatical” (41).

This approach to language is linked to a global (rather than worldly) view of our environment. It draws attention to the temporal dimension of language that gets cancelled out by the spatially oriented one.<sup>302</sup> The elision of temporality demands the suppression of the differing historicities of language and translation within and across cultures. The assumption at work in Sonnerat’s account is that the vernacular languages of India are derived from Sanskrit. But the etymology of Sanskrit, meaning “perfected” or “artificial,” suggests another possibility: that the vernaculars preceded a purified Sanskrit, the latter’s power lying in its “nonintelligibility and unavailability” (Doniger 2009, 18-19). Perhaps a more fundamental point to consider would be the processes of “cross-fertilization” (19) between Sanskrit and the vernaculars of India, in the course of which local gods might get Sanskrit names and “Sanskrit gods take on characteristics of local gods” (19). This mutual exchange underwent a transformation around the middle of the second millennium, when vernaculars like Tamil came to compete with and replace Sanskrit as the language of literature while absorbing the latter’s conventions and ideologies (19). Examples of this could be found in the retellings of the Purāṇas, which came to incorporate local stories into Sanskrit categories. The language relations that Sonnerat and d’Obsonville grappled with need to be seen in light of this mostly deliberate (Pollock 2006, 504) “process of change by which the universalistic orders, formations, and practices of the preceding millennium were supplemented and gradually replaced by localized forms” (Pollock 1998, 41). The traveller’s attempt to insert Sanskrit

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Indian languages. These ideologies have influenced the perception of language and literature in India since the nineteenth century.

<sup>302</sup> See discussion in Chapter 2.

into a universal history of the world paradoxically rested on an entropic (Cronin 2010, 340) view of multilingualism. It worked to situate “history outside the domain of human activity” (340) and thereby outside what can be considered political.

My emphasis on the temporal dimension of language and the related historicity of the local is meant to foreground linguistic heterogeneity occasioned by language *use* rather than to posit the local in essential terms. Annie Montaut observes that “[o]ne of the most frequent observations in Indian sociolinguistics and language shift studies is the extraordinary resilience of language maintenance in diasporic situations all over India” (Montaut 94, citing P.B. Pandit). The choice of language is determined by the type of socio-economic exchange, each being the main one in a given context. Therefore, the scenario of a single language use for all communication does not exist in India. Rather than as equal mastery of two or more languages, multilingualism here is to be understood as a “verbal repertoire” (94) made up of various segments that are not in competition (94).

Perhaps one way to reflect on the local and their language(s) is through the notion of the “denizen,” as opposed to the “citizen,” elaborated by Michael Cronin (2010, 338). The distinction examines the nexus of language and mobility in accounts of contemporary travel, but it is applicable to historical texts that put in place the methods and tropes, for dealing with difference, which have hardened into explicit dogmas. A denizen is someone who not only dwells in a place but can also “move through and knowingly inhabit [it]” (338). This movement involves, I want to stress, accommodating change: Maridas Pillai belonged to the group of local polyglot “go-betweenes”<sup>303</sup> in Pondichéry whose role as linguistic mediators was crucial for the French community. Pondichéry has been a multilingual city with its own “linguistic ecology”<sup>304</sup> within the Tamil-speaking regions of South India. Like many others in

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<sup>303</sup> See, for example, Kapil Raj, “Mapping Knowledge: Go-Betweenes in Calcutta, 1770–1820” (2010).

<sup>304</sup> See discussion by Danna Agmon, *An Uneasy Alliance: Traders, Missionaries, and Tamil Intermediaries in Eighteenth-Century French India* (Diss. 2011).

India, it was also a city that became segmented by colonialism. A competent go-between here was not only multilingual, but equally able to mediate in different registers of knowledge and authority. Pillai's linguistic mobility between India and Europe was made possible because of being embedded in the language(s) of place in the present.<sup>305</sup> Here the issue of caste must have inflected the nature of this relation as well, although information about Pillai's background is scant. But we know that his ancestors belonged to the elite non-Brahmin Vellalar caste, and his father converted to Christianity. In the course of the colonial era, the Vellalar community came to be associated with Tamil scholarship. This facet of Pillai's identity perhaps also explains why he would be looking to translate from Tamil rather than Sanskrit. At the same time, Tamil is both a vernacular and a classical language and has established its authority as a vernacular by drawing on its classical past with a literary tradition arguably older than that of Sanskrit. So the notion of vernacular-Sanskrit opposition is especially problematic in its case. In the story of Pillai's translation of the *Bhâgavata Purâna*, language therefore emerges as a relational and dynamic practice, and translation as a "telling in turn" (Merill 5) that enfolds its own previous iterations but is not limited by them.

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Agmon draws on the term "language ecology" from Einar Haugan, *The ecology of language: Essays* (1972).

<sup>305</sup> In addition, Pillai's Catholic identity would not mean severance of ties with his Hindu family history. As Agmon notes, the French Jesuits in South India followed a policy of "accommodation" toward the converts. They had to engage with Hindu forms in order to acquire religious authority among the converts whose culture was marked by those forms (66-67).

## Conclusions

Using translation as both a mode and an object of investigation, this dissertation has examined the plurality of mediations at play in Pierre Sonnerat's *Voyage*. This hitherto unexplored approach in the study of European travel writing of early colonial India has focused on tracing certain dominant modes of textualizing India readable in the account and how translation figures in them. My overarching goal has been to reconstruct the socio-cultural and epistemological contexts of the traveller and the travellee explicit or implicit in *Voyage*. The contextualization through annotated translation emerged as an effective way of examining a text that is itself an example of interlingual travel.

Approaching eighteenth-century India as a triangular colonial space has proved crucial in this project. Sonnerat's account demonstrates that reference to the British is unavoidable in its contextualization. The mediating role of the colonial space in the context is most apparent in the effect of the French debacles on individual travellers, of France's subordinate political status on the nature and scope of French scholarship on India. Sonnerat's biographer notes that the Frenchman's captivity in Madras (1778) under the British may have been a crucial time for the completion of his work on Southern India (Ly-Tio-Fane 104). She does not elaborate on the statement, but it seems to imply that the forced removal from Pondichéry may have given Sonnerat an opportunity to work on the book. At the same time, war with the EEIC led to the loss of numerous specimens he had collected for the *Cabinet du roi* during his travels in Asia. Political rivalry, however, did not preclude contact with the British for professional ends: we know of Sonnerat's repeated overtures to naturalist Joseph Banks for membership in the British Royal Society, and that the Frenchman's safe passage to Europe in 1813 after nearly two decades in British captivity was ensured by Banks. Therefore, while the Anglo-French relationship was fraught with tension, its effects were unpredictable, and often contingent upon factors not captured by the label of

colonial rivalry. However, a distinct French identity is present in Sonnerat's account, particularly in his criticism of British colonial oppression in India. But while such criticism may have been based on personal experience, here the individual and the social inflected each other: a general denunciation of colonial greed was also a common trope in Enlightenment-era French accounts of India. In this, the traveller was conforming to reader expectations at home. In any case, explicit references to political rivalry are kept separate from scholarly ones in the narrative. Interestingly, his criticism of existing European scholarship of India, another commonplace in French travel accounts of the time, mostly implicates French intellectuals like Voltaire and Bailly. As I have noted, Sonnerat mentions British orientalist Alexander Dow's work on Indian mythology as a source for his own account of the subject, although he finds it to be less than perfect. These examples demonstrate that if interpretations of French cultural production in relation to India during the period seem to always include the British factor, the situation in India was part of the connected history in which national labels of "French" and "British" were flexible categories. The boundaries between ally and opponent could not be defined exclusively in these terms. Therefore, a view of history in relational terms and the micro and macro as intricately connected underscores a need to reconsider the assumption of stability attached to a traveller's national or ethnic identity across knowledge networks. It also foregrounds the uncategorizable nature of colonial knowledge construction and exchange in general.

One unexpected outcome of my focus on mediation has been the realization that some of the clearest references in *Voyage* to the immediate context of its writing and to the traveller's subjectivity are found in the paratexts. As a result, I have treated these as integral to the exploration of the work. The paratextual elements that situate the text in the politics of its time also work to lend the work its ethnographic authority: having taken part in war with the EEIC also meant having had first-hand experience of the place of the conflict. But, if the

ethnographic move also works to fix the narrative as a definitive, timeless account resistant to the immediate, the synchronous character of the paratexts complicates that reading and facilitates an instability that aligns with the shifting multifariousness of the account.

The paratextual elements have warranted attention also because together they can be read as not only a microcosm of the main text, but a source of information that is not present elsewhere in the book. A case in point is the presence of the autobiographical cited earlier. Combining these with biographical information from other sources has helped me explore the intellectual mooring and professional interests of the travel writer. In general, the synchronous nature of the paratexts problematize the ideological certainties in the narrative. Additionally, by bringing together autobiographical and the institutional voices, the paratexts in *Voyage* underscore that travel and travel writing are distinct processes— that generically shaped knowledges are bound up with the exercise of power, which is part of the discourse. Here the relation between the traveller and the institution that endorsed him reveals the multiple translations involved in the process. If accounts of exotic sea voyages and explorations have been marked by an absence of any systematicity (Leask 2019, 95-96), it was the textual recasting and presentation that lend coherence to the assorted methods and collections. The report by the two reviewers of *Voyage* appointed by the *Académie royale des sciences* attest to this and sheds light on the process through which individual voyages could be brought together to serve the accumulative urge of natural science on behalf of the state.

My focus on the strategies of representation at play in travel writing and how these intersect with translation has reaffirmed the significance of the inherent interdisciplinarity of both practices. As I have suggested, attention to ethnography has proved crucial, as has an awareness of the nature of the “scientific.” In *Voyage* these serve to underscore the importance of the rhetorical—a notable one being the narrative of error and perfectibility of cultures—rather than a reliance on the systematic collection of knowledge through

experience. The mode of cultural translation involved here is at once personal and social—the latter complicit with the aura of systematicity found in non-fictional travel writing of the period, even if this categorization is partly arbitrary. The details surrounding *Voyage* indicate that often it is not the personal authority of the traveller but the social authority of his knowledge network that tended to hold sway. This does not imply the absence of resistance to this tendency: indeed Sonnerat is often cited as one of the more consistent critics of the European colonial attitude to the non-European other.<sup>306</sup> But “resistance” in itself indicates the presence of social and institutional authority as a dominant force (Asad 163). Here Sonnerat’s openness to difference itself was also circumscribed by the ideology of Enlightenment universalism.

The above points are consistent with travel writing’s generic indeterminacy, and the process of contextualization in my translation has revealed facets of this, including the ambiguous relationship between fiction and non-fiction within the genre. Crucially, my research has demonstrated that if a text is to be characterized in terms of a dominant around which it is organized (Jauss), incongruities between its formal features and implicit focus can problematize how that dominant is understood. For example, in *Voyage*, the numerous ethnographic categories of description related to categories of cultural “practice” observed by the traveller can be read as secondary to the underlying attention to the myth of India’s origin, religious and linguistic, throughout the work. Here, as a reader and translator, my contextualizing apparatus has proved to be crucial.

This is related to how translation figures in *Voyage*. My analysis from the perspective of translation’s relation to science demonstrates that more than language it is the “modes of thought” of the other that is the object of translation in this instance of interlingual travel. In fact, it is possible to view it as “thick translation” on the part of the traveller, since it serves

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<sup>306</sup> Richard Allen, *European slave trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850*.

the objective of making a culture meaningful through certain frames of reference: Sonnerat's description of language involved separating Tamil from its place of practice, making it stand for India as a whole and inserting into a universal history of the world. This entailed the decontextualization and recontextualization of language through a "translation" of India's linguistic specificity into terms understandable to the European reader. This stands in contrast to the thick translation undertaken in this project, insofar as my approach depended on re-inserting the language of the other into the translation and putting it in dialogue with the linguistic specificity of the traveller. But the present translation is unable to exclude the former as a reference point, attesting to both the inadequacy and indispensability of the traveller's representation. And while I foreground thick translation as a corrective conducive to unflattening certain modes of representation, the ethical dimension of the strategy is clearly not a given.

My focus on the relation between science and travel writing in *Voyage* also demonstrates the specificity of translation in the narrative: the implicit understanding of the world and nature as "original" makes the representation of culture dependent on a translation that is inherently problematic. The concept of pseudo-translation seems to address the issue. But rather than trying to address issues of authorship, as is typically the case in translation studies, I have found the concept more useful for exploring the nature of mediations shaping a specific account.

The permeability between discourses implicated in the mediations are most present in Sonnerat's descriptions of language and religion. As I have demonstrated in my translation, the relation between the two in *Voyage* is marked by mutual mediation: the notion of Hinduism as essentially monotheistic determines the portrayal of language as fundamentally divisive; on the other hand, the textualization of Hinduism seems dependent on a fixed hierarchical view of the vernacular-Sanskrit relation. The traveller's experience of linguistic

plurality at multiple levels however puts that ideal to question and forces an engagement with vernacular languages.

While language is one category in *Voyage*, it emerges as a recurring site of difference in this research. Hence the considerable attention devoted to the topic. The nature of my exploration here stems from my own interest in understanding the links between Western representation of Indian multilingualism and language policy in postcolonial India, the latter echoing the standardizing urges of colonialism. Sonnerat's description-based chapter on India's languages seeks to fix language in predictable ways: to regions, as pure or corrupt and in hierarchical relation to Sanskrit.<sup>307</sup> These distinctions, rarely based on experience, are mediated by the personal and the social. The negotiations are determined by translational operations between languages and epistemologies.

Translating the description of language in *Voyage* therefore required attention to the traveller's point of departure, the place of enunciation projected onto the other: that despite the daily experience that languages are different and that such differences are serious obstacles to communication, eighteenth-century Europe was deeply convinced that languages are profoundly identical and language differences are to be understood in terms of their superficiality (48-49 regimes). For the traveller in India the comparative method at work in the apprehension of languages also involved identifying Sanskrit and Latin (and Greek) as cognates. This view moved Anquetil-Duperron to translate the Sanskrit Upanishads into Latin rather than French, with annotations in Greek. But, as I have noted, the linguistic context of the subcontinent suggests that such comparison, based on an assumption of similarity, is fundamentally ahistorical. If both languages transcended the local, their paths diverged quite early: unlike Latin, the space and power of Sanskrit was never demarcated in a

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<sup>307</sup> This tendency underscores that "descriptions can be useful only to the extent that they are confined to proper boundaries and subject to fixed laws" (Trabant, "Mithridates in Paradise" 47).

universal, stable fashion or politically sanctioned. An incommensurability becomes evident as well between vernacular formations in France and India. No doubt both were spurred by “new visions of vernacular political space,” (Pollock 2010, 573) but in early colonial India, vernaculars were yet to be established as facts of the genetic makeup of its people. The perception that posited the existence of discrete languages could be read as a “pluralization of monolingualism” associated with expectations of normative linguistic behavior. As I have argued, it is centrally dependent on a notion of the commensurability of languages across cultures.

My translation of mediation in *Voyage* has revealed that the exploration of interlingual and intercultural representation must first recognize the role of *intralingual* translation in shaping views of others. This is an issue of translation *within* the Western epistemology. Here translation has emerged as an *a priori*: it constitutes language before any interlingual translation can take place. This is based on an idea of oneness subsuming plurality. As I have argued, it is at once an acknowledgement and a denial of difference, insofar as it privileges equivalence over equality. Translation here is to be understood in terms of translating radical difference that does not accommodate measurable, strictly spatialized representation into “measured difference.”

The absence of local translators/interpreters or the travellee by name in *Voyage* has meant that my exploration in this respect is based exclusively on other sources. The example of Maridas Pillai and d’Obsonville is particularly relevant because these individuals moved in the same networks as travellers and “go-betweens,” and both Sonnerat and d’Obsonville were familiar with South India, knew about each other, and Sonnerat was aware of Pillai. The story of Pillai attests to a language practice that is difficult to fit in the oppositional view of the mobile traveller and the static travellee implicit in Sonnerat’s depiction. It also suggests that travel writing as a genre requires the immobility of place to make sense of mobility. This

observation is applicable to all facets of the traveller's other but seems particularly relevant to my translation of the sections on language. As I have argued, the embeddedness of the local needs to be seen in terms of mobility "in place"—across and *within* the palimpsests of language that attention to historicity underscores. It is this facet of the go-betweens that made them valuable cultural mediators for the travellers.

Therefore, the emphasis on the vernacular language and its practitioner in this research is not meant to posit them in essential terms, and in fact not all European travellers fit the mold of what Islam describes as "sedentary" travel. I have used the notion of the "denizen" to describe Pillai as a go-between who is adept at both dwelling in place and moving through it. But it could equally apply to Swiss French traveller Antoine Polier, who lived in India between 1757 and 1788, and made a fortune as a cultural broker between disparate groups and languages. Polier's record is distinct from other European accounts not only because of his long sojourn in India, but also because much of it comes from a compilation of his correspondence in Persian (*I'jaz-i Arsalani*), written during his stay in North India. Addressed to his local contacts ranging from nobles to traders and artisans, the letters help locate him in the socio-cultural milieu of the region. It is telling, albeit not unexpected, that a text chronicling the quotidian rather than a narrative addressed to a European readership captures the linguistic sensibilities of the community he was embedded in. By all accounts, in the fashion of a denizen, Polier came to inhabit those sensibilities (Alam and Alavi).

The issue of language in *Voyage* seems ultimately to be one of mediating diversity. Therefore, given Sonnerat's embeddedness in the intellectual milieu of eighteenth-century France, a more general question emerges: how may have the French Enlightenment shaped the traveller's attitude to difference? An in-depth discussion is beyond the scope of this section, but certain observations made in studies of French intellectual history are worth

visiting in conclusion. It has been noted that a fundamental assumption in French Enlightenment thought was that human nature was in some essential sense uniform through space and time (Vyverberg 195). Unity and simplicity were commonly thought to be essential qualities of nature. If there was an interest in the descriptive and the empirical, it was undermined by an idealizing urge that also characterized Enlightenment concepts of the subcategory of nature—human nature (195). This factor, I have argued, had important implications for the understanding of religion: nature was generally believed to moral, and religion, like ethics, was thought of as natural to humans. Diversity, when it was recognized, was seen both at home and abroad as attached to group identity. The purification and elevation of French as the language of France between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries attests to this process. The unmistakable cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment worldview saw its own ideals as the proper standard for all others. In a way, adherence to Enlightenment ideals meant a propensity to detecting error. Difference, to be acknowledged, needed to be accommodated within a worldview founded on assumptions of equivalence as sameness.

Finally, the ethical concerns of representation articulated in this research may seem to mirror the very mode of thought that it set out to challenge, and thus promote an oppositional view akin to Occidentalism. As Syed Manzurul Islam observes, there may be no absolute way out of this quandary. However, as I have demonstrated, the very engagement with these concerns can provide insight into how certain oppositional views, when read through the lens of mediation, emerge as intertwined and translatable.

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## Appendix A

Image 1

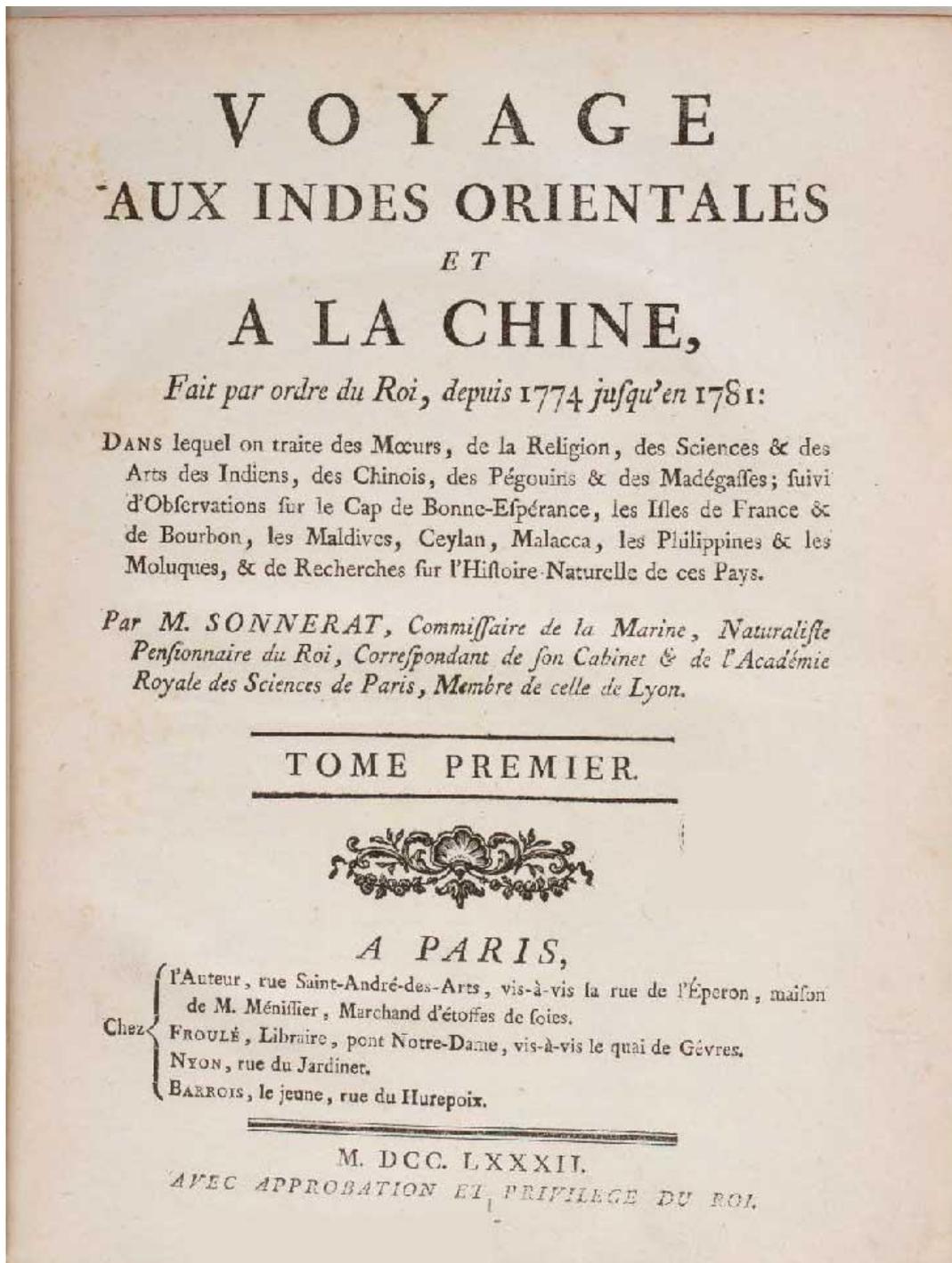


Image 2



A M O N S I E U R

LE COMTE D'ANGIVILLER,

CONSEILLER DU ROI EN SES CONSEILS,  
 Mestre-de-Camp de Cavalerie, Chevalier de l'Ordre Royal  
 & Militaire de Saint Louis, Chevalier-Commandeur des  
 Ordres Royaux, Militaires & Hospitaliers de Saint Lazare,  
 de Jérusalem, de Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel; Intendant  
 du Jardin Royal des Plantes; Pensionnaire-Vétéran de  
 l'Académie Royale des Sciences; Directeur & Ordonnateur  
 Général des Bâtimens du Roi, Jardins, Arts, Académies  
 & Manufactures Royales; Grand-Voyer de la Ville de  
 Versailles.

MONSIEUR,

*Le principal but de mes recherches sur un Peuple  
 célèbre, a été de justifier la protection que Vous m'avez*

Image 3

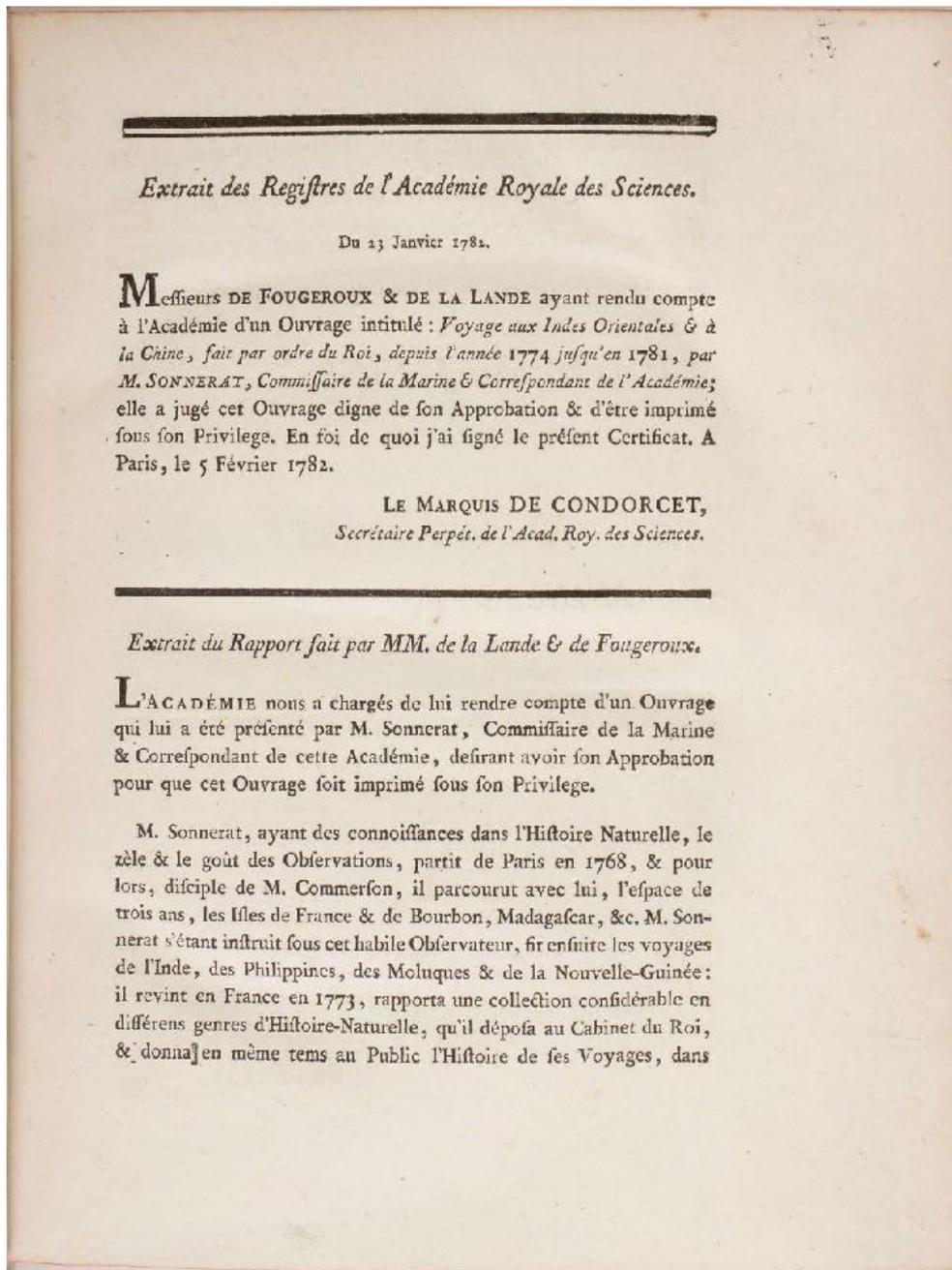
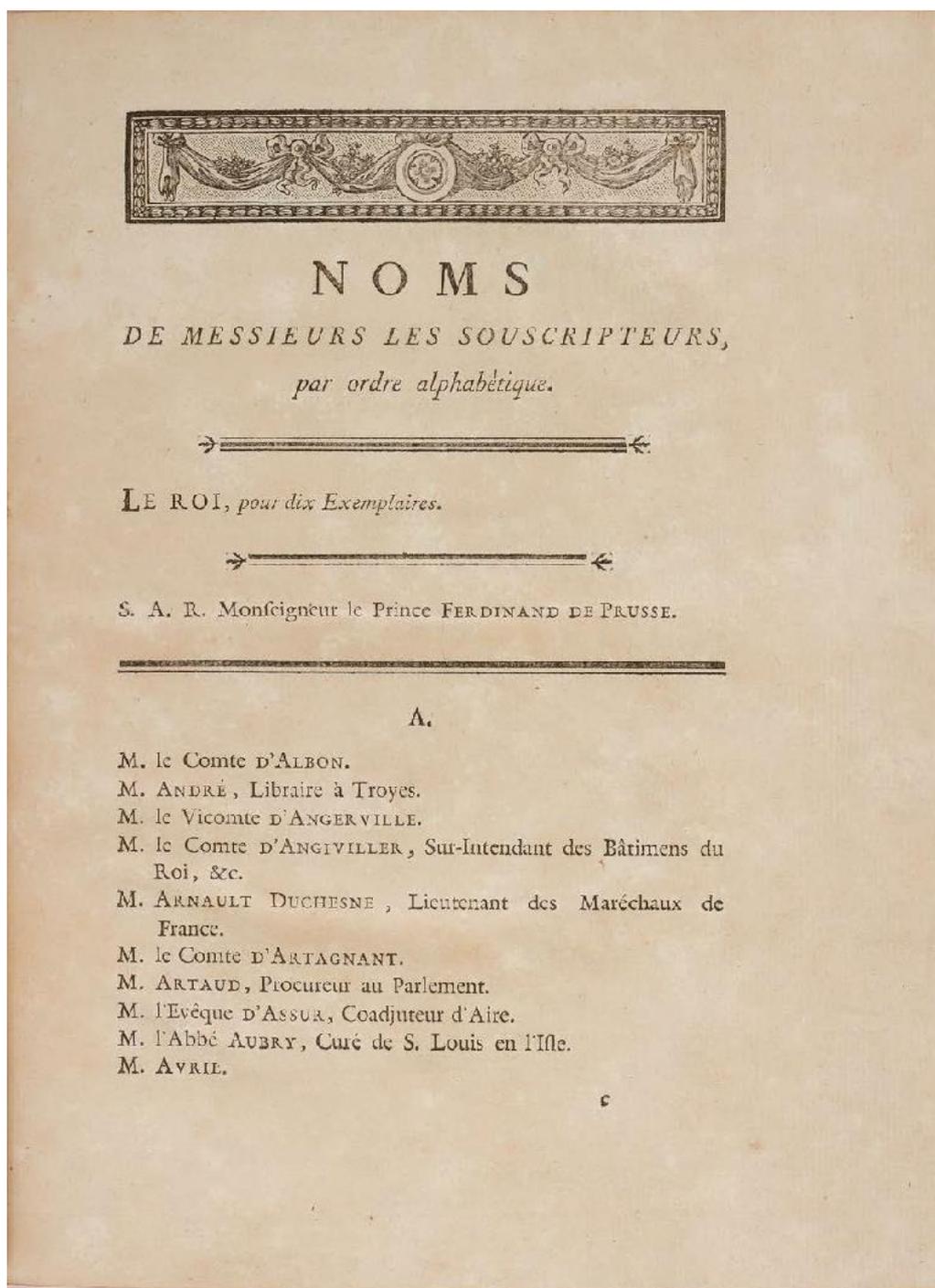


Image 4



## Appendix B

### *A Voyage to the East Indies and China*

*Undertaken by order of the King between the years 1774 and 1781*

*Containing a description of the manners, religion, arts of the people of India, China, Pegu (Myanmar), and Madagascar, followed by observations on the Cape of Good Hope, Isle de France (Mauritius), Isle de Bourbon (Réunion), the Maldives, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Malacca, the Philippines and the Moluccas, and research into the natural history of these countries*

By M Sonnerat, Commissary of the Marine, Naturalist, Pensioner of the King, Correspondent to his Cabinet and to the *Académie royale des sciences de Paris* and member of the *Académie royale des sciences de Lyon* <sup>308</sup>

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<sup>308</sup> Footnotes that appear in *Voyage* are marked by asterisk in the appendix.

## Foreword

I did not intend to offer this work at this moment, given the other essential activities occupying most of my time. Moreover, compelled by my state to cover a new country in a short time, I fear not having given it my full attention; but I am tempted to communicate my observations to my peers, and if this work is of benefit to them, my objective will be fulfilled, since my voyage had more to do with learning and making myself useful than satisfying my curiosity.

In this first volume, I present a people celebrated for their wisdom and antiquity, in the second, the nations which, by virtue of their location have necessary connections with French trade and French establishments in Asia.

The history of India demonstrates that it does not take long for despotism and oppression to debase people, weaken the most flourishing states and degrade human character; the modest and gentle manners of the Indians were worthy of respect. But the happier a people, the more they are the object of neighbours' envy, and cruelty, tyranny and ignorance will always triumph over happiness and virtue.

I have divided the first volume into three parts. Book I contains information about the Indian peninsula, its topography, commerce, the division of its people into castes or tribes, the customs of members of these groups, their initiation, marriage and funeral rituals, the arts, languages, currency on the Coromandel coast, the fondness of the Indians for fables, which I illustrate here through the translation of a few such stories.

Book II contains a summary of Indian mythology, and its links with that of the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans.

After this portrayal of the Indians, I delve into the details of their religion, show how superstition has hardened under the domination of priests, the millions of men who were considered to be the wisest on earth and to whom all nations thronged for knowledge; this

part includes information about the religion or beliefs of people on the Coromandel coast, the Gods they worship and the links between their religious system and that of the people of China, Siam and Pegu; their festivals, ceremonies, superstitious practices; their view of the creation and duration of the world, measure of time, metempsychosis, heaven and hell; finally the history of the Cenobites of India so revered in a country pervaded by their superstition and fanaticism.

The reader will inevitably find here a number of subjects already treated by other authors, which in this case creates a contest of evidence. I have not sought to embellish what I have seen and examined; I would even add that a man who has travelled since his early youth should not take recourse to style; the pleasurable often serves only to conceal falsehood; and if this book lacks the sparkle of some of the modern works, it will at least have the absolute merit of truth.

## Book 1

### On India

#### Introduction

The origin of all societies can be traced to facts or fables, but that of the Indians is lost in the depths of time; on this matter as well as so many others, one is reduced to mere speculation.

The ancients considered the Indians to be the first inhabitants of the earth.

While it is not possible to demonstrate the veracity of this opinion, India appears to have at least all the characteristics that warrant it. We have every reason to believe that nature was indulgent toward her first children. She chose neither the frozen North, nor the burning sands of Libya as their birthplace: the soil that gave birth to them had to provide abundantly for their needs and without their labour; and in all likelihood they were not designed to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow.

India alone offers the traces of this primitive fecundity: in all other parts of the globe an infecund nature had to be conquered by industry.

Therefore, a right of seniority is due to the Indians, which may also be justified by the testimony in the Hebrew Books, according to which the Pishon,<sup>309</sup> the Tigris, the Ganges and the Euphrates flowed from a common source in the terrestrial Paradise.

I know that distinguished savants such as Messrs. Linné (Linnaeus) and Bailly have placed the origin of humans in Siberia, from where they are claimed to have spread over the rest of the earth by successive migrations.

Among different rationales in support of this system, they say that it is the only region where wheat, the first nourishment for civilized people, grows naturally.

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<sup>309</sup> One of four rivers (along with Hiddekel (Tigris), Phrath (Euphrates), and Gihon, mentioned in the Book of Genesis.

This assertion would be justified if wheat could be considered necessary for our subsistence; but clearly that was not the case. Growing wheat requires preliminary preparations which could not be possible in the state of nature. Even in our time, the majority of humans live without bread; and rice, which is the principal food of the people of Asia, seems better suited to the primitive human. Moreover, Siberia is not the only country where wheat grows without cultivation; A similar phenomenon is seen Sicily.

The presence of nitre, which for M. Bailly is another proof of Siberia's early habitability, is no more conclusive. The mountains of India and Pegu (Myanmar), which because of their position, shape and precipices are totally uninhabitable, contain more nitre than places that are well-situated and fertile. In Europe, nitre naturally occurs in the soil as much as in Asia, but it does not develop without a long and an intense fermentation, something the heat in India facilitates and the cold climate in Europe does not.

Without undertaking to solve this scientific question, one can maintain that the traces of most distant antiquity are to be found among the Indians, and the first sparks of reason ought to have shone in these climates, because intellectual<sup>310</sup> faculties can only develop when material needs do not interfere. Besides, it is known that all nations came to India to collect elements of their knowledge, and that Pythagoras left Greece to study under the Brachmans, who were considered to be the most enlightened of men. Bacchus, Semiramis, Sesostris, Alexander, and so many others before them, would not have carried arms into India had they not been attracted by the fame of the country. Men do not sail a thousand leagues from their native soil, sacrifice hundreds of thousands of their men, to invade a land that is

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<sup>310</sup> In the text, "intellectual" is opposed to "material," therefore "spiritual" could be the other (approximate) translation for it, and indeed may have been the intended meaning. However, I have maintained "intellectual" to suggest a paradox in the logic of the discourse, since intellectual faculty here can also be correlated to the harnessing of nature through industry, as in the case of the European, posited as the opposite of the Indian.

savage and uncultivated. Besides, long before the era of these famous conquerors, all nations went to India for knowledge and riches.

Before Rama<sup>311</sup> propagated his doctrines (epoque that goes back more than 4800 years), Indians were as learned as they are now—their fables and sacred texts are proof. If we observe the pagodas of Salcette and Elora, the petrifications of Tiruvakkarai,<sup>312</sup> we go back to a remote past; and if we heed the Indian legends according to which the sea once touched the Ghats,<sup>313</sup> how many centuries must have passed since the retreat of the sea?

The Indians however claim that the mountain Meru, situated in the North, was the abode of the ancient ascetics, which (as M. Bailly observes) seems to point to a people from the North having spread in India: but in which epoch did they descend from the mountains of Tibet?

India in its splendour gave religions and laws to all other people; Egypt and Greece owe her their fables and wisdom.

It is no doubt strange that a country so celebrated in antiquity has fallen into ignorance and debasement, but could she have averted it? And isn't her current state a necessary consequence of that position? A rich country, where everything seems to contribute to human desire, soon becomes the bloody theatre of war. Such has been the fate of India. Its history cannot be but infinitely interesting; however, given the impossibility of finding the necessary material for such a work, one is almost always left to conjecture.

Nevertheless, to give my readers an accurate idea of a people so worthy of being known, I have faithfully collected the scattered anecdotes suitable for observing the revolutions they have undergone at different periods. I have mainly sought to know their

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<sup>311</sup> \*Sixth incarnation of Vishnu, see Book II, *Of the mythologies of Indians*.

<sup>312</sup> \*Village situated seven leagues to the west of Pondicherry. See Book 1, Chapter 2, *Of the Coromandel Coast*.

<sup>313</sup> \*High mountain ranges, extending from the Cape Comorin to Kashmir, which separate the two coasts, Malabar and Coromandel.

religion, manners, current customs, and their sacred books, because there is every reason to believe that their history is contained allegorically.

Despite all this information, I am aware how difficult it is to give an exact account of their religion. The ceremonies and ideas of each community that inhabits the peninsula on this side of the Ganges would have to be described. It would still be an imperfect work, because in the same town, the same clan, people subject to the same laws, customs and celebrating the same festivals, do not agree on the hierarchy of their Gods. I have tried, to the best of my ability, to reconcile their ideas in order to construct their history.

But they all recognize the same principal deities, under the same names, such as Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva,<sup>314</sup> have the same views of the soul, of its migrations from one body to another, and universally hold sacred the same books that are said to contain the principles of their religion.

The errors of all nations are caused by forgetting the natural language. Once it falls into disuse, the commentators<sup>315</sup> render them unintelligible and finish them off. In their commentaries on the original sacred books, the Brahmins of each region have slipped in absurd, preposterous fables presuming that those who were told such stories would find them enjoyable. Hence the difference of opinion on the birth, actions, nomenclature of Gods, even the principal ones; the great difference in festivals and ceremonies; an infinite multitude of inferior gods, demi-gods, saints, which, like the sacred animals of Egypt, are celebrated and worshipped in one place, while they are unknown or despised in another.

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<sup>314</sup> \*Brahma is the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the destroyer. See Book II, *Of the mythologies of Indians*.

<sup>315</sup> The French word in Sonnerat's text is "glossateur" meaning "commentator." As I see it, the word encompasses both commentary and interpretation, the latter suggesting the practice of translation. The word is also significant if we think of vernacular translations of pan-Indian texts as *rewritings* signifying commentaries on a source.

The wise Indian is however no idolater. He has no regard for the stories related by the Brahmins to indulge the weakness of people: he worships one supreme and infinite Being, of which everything else is part. And when asked for a description, he responds without hesitation: "It is as difficult for me to describe the supreme Being as it is for you to represent the voice with which you speak, or the sound of a bell: we hear them in the same way everything signifies a supreme Being, without the possibility of definition, or one discernible form."

If I have not been able to trace the origin of Indians in this work, the research will at least provide evidence of the first advances in the arts and sciences, and the different revolutions they have experienced. It will also establish the influence of these ancient people over their neighbours, and help resolve a problem hitherto considered unsolvable, namely whether the Chaldeans, Egyptians etc. received their learning from the Indians, or vice versa.

I am grateful to several learned individuals who have helped me in this undertaking, and shared with me their research on the people among whom I travelled. I acknowledge with pleasure that without the information that M. Martin, former Conseiller of the Indies, willingly shared with me, and without his steadfast support during my stay in India, my account of the religion of Indians would have been deeply flawed. I was no less favored by chance [in having the] the so-called translation of the *Ezour-Vedam*, which is kept in the Royal Library. I had it read to a learned but zealous Brahmin, and since this work was nothing like the idea he wished to convey of his religion, he felt obliged reveal its mysteries to me.

## Chapter XII

### Languages and Scripts (Manner of Writing) of the Indians and of the Tamils in Particular

#### Part One On Languages

#### Section 1 On Indian Languages in General

The language spoken from the coast of Orissa to Cape Comorin, and up the Malabar coast as far as Cochin, is Tamil. Scholars in these parts of India compose in verse, making their work unintelligible even to those Indians who can read well.

On the coast Orissa they speak Talinga (Tilunjee or Telegu), a language that is different from Tamil in writing and pronunciation, although, when translated, the characters of both correspond to the same ones in French.

Yet another language, different from Tamil in writing and pronunciation, is spoken on the Malabar coast.

In the northern part of the same coast, travelling up toward Gujarat, the language is Hindu.<sup>316</sup> It has very little connection to Tamil, Talinga or Malabar, and can be compared to a corrupted Sanskrit.

All these languages, instead of improving, as would have been the case if these people had cultivated the sciences, have become so corrupted that one can hardly find any trace of Sanskrit in them; it is on the Orissa coast that some relics of the language have been better preserved by the learned Brahmins. They have entirely lost it on the Coromandel coast, and use a few characters of the ancient language only to compensate for the deficiency of their writing system which could not express many words.

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<sup>316</sup> In all likelihood, Sonnerat is referring to what became known as Hindustani, a language combining a variety of Hindi with vocabulary from speakers of Persian, Arabic, and Turkic languages. As a widely spoken language, it would also have its regional varieties.

Besides the language of the region, Moors and Farsi (Persian) are spoken all over India. These were introduced by the Mughals when they conquered the country. The merchants in the Coromandel coast almost all speak Talinga. All of the European trading posts still use an atrocious jargon introduced by the Portuguese when they settled in India.

Samscroutam, Samskret, Hanscrit or Grandon, is the most copious of the languages: its numerous characters making it ideal for expressing thoughts, which led Father Pons<sup>317</sup> to term it a divine language. Sanskrit was the ancient language of the Brachmans, and not, as M. Bailly claims, of an earlier people. The living languages of India have sufficient affinity with this ancient language that one might consider them its offspring, but corrupted by mixing with bad jargons.

The French language is no longer the same as the language of the Gauls. And in five hundred years it will have endured more changes than Sanskrit has suffered since the destruction of the Brachmans.

Talinga is a soft and pleasant language; it has less defects than any other idiom in India.

Without doubt Tamil the most deficient language, as each of its characters can be written and pronounced in different ways. One can get a sense of this from the summary I provide, which is based on a grammar printed in Tranquebar.

All these languages, however outrageous, are replete with strong expressions and lively images, which do not deviate much from nature. For example, in the description of a combat, the clanging of weapons is mimicked at the end of each verse by a rolling and flicking of the tongue repeatedly in quick succession.

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<sup>317</sup> \**Lettres édifiantes (Edifying Letters)*.