Introduction

What happens when you make up a word? Every language teems with unexpected innovations—whether made up by babbling toddlers, hip teenagers, or distracted adults—and most of these made-up words will quickly disappear. But every so often, an invented word can change history. This book examines three neologisms that transformed our ongoing struggle against colonialism and racism: “gitanjali,” coined by Rabindranath Tagore; “satyagraha,” devised by M. K. Gandhi; and “brownies,” deployed by W. E. B. Du Bois. Inheritors of a world shaped by colonialism and slavery, these three men chose the eccentric allegiances of internationalism over the essentialized loyalties of nationalism. Whereas nationalism claims its origins, internationalism champions an idealized future—and so they invented new words to make an interconnected future imaginable.

The novelty of the words examined here is somewhat disguised by their reliance on earlier concepts. “Gitanjali” is a recognizably Bengali amalgam; “satyagraha” is an ostentatiously Sanskrit term; and a brownie is an established figure in British folklore. In each case, however, the neologism acquired a very different meaning than its preexisting associations would suggest. Tagore reformulated “gitanjali,” which literally means “song offering,” into a pan-Asian approach to aesthetics. Gandhi redefined “satyagraha,” which lexically denotes holding to the truth, as meaning “passive resistance.” Du Bois recast the brownie, then famous as a White imperial sprite, as a magical mixed-race child. By
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strategically claiming their precedents, their creators disavowed radical innovation, even as they decisively transformed existing concepts through their unprecedented uses of these terms.

Print internationalism, in my theorization, names a strategy within the worldwide hegemony of the English language (signaled in the phrase “the global Anglophone”). This strategy works to create alternate geographies (such as “the Global South”) and to summon new collectivities (such as “people of color”) through the creation of new words. It is a phenomenon that is at once linguistic and literary. Periodicals are central to my study, but so are pamphlets, books, and published letters, for these are the genres that comprise the varied and exuberant world of early twentieth-century print culture.

Print internationalism was particularly influential in the early twentieth century, when activists from marginalized groups frequently sought worldwide solutions to the pervasive problems of racism and colonialism. The historical framework of this monograph begins with the South African War (also known as the Second Anglo-Boer War, 1899–1902), which led to the formation of an explicitly White South African state; it spans World War I (1914–18), whose unprecedented mobilization of African American soldiers led, on their return to the United States, to both antiracist mobilization and racist violence; and it ends with the advent of World War II (1939–45), when Japan’s aggressive expansion demolished hopes of a beneficial pan-Asian order. Given this bounded but eventful timeframe, the chapters are organized relationally, with significant chronological overlap. We begin with Tagore’s expansive rejection of nationalism and move, via their contentious public correspondence, to Gandhi’s harnessing of print internationalism in the service of an increasingly nationalist politics. Via Du Bois’s framing and publication of both Tagore and Gandhi, I conclude with Du Bois’s antiracist project as it was forged through print internationalism.

Situations of cultural intermixture frequently generated radical novelty, whether in linguistic terms or identarian ones. In centering on the new words of internationalism, coined chiefly by famous men, we encounter as well the women of internationalism, whose rapidly changing status in the currents of early twentieth-century feminist movements sometimes enabled their innovations across the boundaries of race and nation. Thus, Sonja Schlesin, a Russian Jewish woman, lived and worked with Indians in South Africa; Sister Nivedita, an Irish woman, converted to Hinduism and connected Bengali intellectuals with Japanese ones; and Jessie Redmon Fauset, an African American woman, tutored her young readers on
South and Southeast Asia. The worldwide interests and flexible identities of these women thus resemble the suspect philology behind many of these new words, which diverges from the focus on purity, authenticity, and inheritance often central to nationalism. In developing these observations into a feminist method, I encourage attentiveness to innovation—as seen in the new words coined by internationalist activists—rather than to origins or etymologies. By moving us from a focus on authenticity to a focus on novelty, I demonstrate a process of postcolonial reading that can concatenate textual surfaces in the pursuit of historical depths.

THE WORD AND THE WORLD

My argument builds on Benedict Anderson’s theorization of nationalism as an imagined community, an intervention that has transformed our studies of the novel and the newspaper. Given the familiarity of Anderson’s claims to many scholarly readers, I will use his argument here as a productive contrast to my own. His argument begins in the modern period, where the capacity of both time and space to be mapped and measured rendered them both potentially gridded and possibly knowable, features that were further developed by the print technologies of the newspaper and the novel. Through these two genres, as well as though nonprint technologies like the museum and the census, print nationalism generated an imagined community through the production of an imagined “meanwhile,” wherein readers imagined themselves as coexisting and interchangeable with their fellow citizens. Print internationalism, by contrast, produces the discrepant and unpredictable associations of a world that is invoked rather than graphed. Whereas print nationalism is fraternal, suggesting readers’ interchangeability, print internationalism is familial, emphasizing the natural reconciliation of significant differences. National print media asserts a homogeneous, empty time for the nation, producing simultaneity and the “meanwhile”; internationalist print media, acknowledging its spatial and historical discontinuities, emphasizes transformations yet to come.

Print nationalism’s key genres are the novel and the newspaper, generally purchased in the marketplace at a set price. Print internationalism’s central genres are the fictionalized history and the print periodical, both as likely to be sold in the market as to be acquired through subscription (not at a standard price, but with a pledge of support). These periodicals include the South Africa–based weekly *Indian Opinion* and
the U.S.-based monthly *The Crisis*, each of which, as we see in chapters 2 and 3, blurred the distinction between a newsletter—a publication promoting ongoing political activities—and a newspaper—a publication providing reportage. The fictionalized histories, such as Tagore’s *Talks in China* and Gandhi’s *Satyagraha in South Africa*, analogously blurred the boundaries between public evidence and personal experience, as discussed in chapters 1 and 2. Where newspapers are marked by regularity in their publication and circulation, the periodicals of print internationalism frequently reflect a more erratic temporality, published on an uneven schedule that also informs their pages. And whereas novels can encourage nationalism by providing characters who might seem just like us, the fictionalized histories of print internationalism encourage us to read historical personages differently. Through print internationalism, we learn to see them as the protagonists of ongoing struggles, whose goals, though possibly different, are nonetheless relevant to our own.

In contrast to the individualized reader of the imagined community, the reader of print internationalism is a social creature, approaching texts through collaboratively defined norms. Print internationalism in my theorization activates “an open network of people who share ways of reading texts”: that is, an interpretive community.² Famously associated with the work of Stanley Fish, the paradigm of an interpretive community emphasizes the role of implicit understandings, acquired through social participation, that inform every act of reading and render any text intelligible.³ Its social emphasis means that the interpretive community is strongly associated with arguments for cultural relativism, making it particularly apposite for the kinds of worldwide inquiry pursued here. While the term “interpretive community” remains familiar to many literary scholars, two closely related concepts are more widely used today: “discourse community” and “textual community.” Scholars of rhetoric and sociolinguistics are more likely to use the term “discourse community,” which describes a group of people linked by written communication and organized around shared goals. While the print internationalism that I theorize resembles a discourse community in its voluntary membership and its orientation around particular objectives, its members are more likely to share a general disposition—against racism, for instance, or against imperialism—than to “actively share goals.”⁴ (To the extent that the interpretive community is convened for particular political purposes, however, we might say that print internationalism creates an interpretive community that, if all goes as planned, might also become a discursive community.)
The interpretive community as developed here, moreover, does not necessarily emphasize direct interaction with written texts, as is the case in most models of discursive community. The “reader” of print internationalism may be not a direct reader at all but, instead, a nonliterate person who nonetheless participates in print culture through a social context. In this respect, it resembles what scholars of premodern literatures and cultures term a “textual community.” Often associated with the work of Brian Stock, a textual community is a form of social organization whose members find a prized text meaningful, even as they have varying levels of literacy. The print object thus forms a key aspect of these members’ lives, even though they may interact with it in a variety of ways. These participants in print internationalism might browse a publication primarily for its images and layout, using these to puzzle over what the words might say; or they might encounter the textual object when it is read aloud to them, positioning the interpretive community of print internationalism within existing social structures. For these reasons, my analysis in this volume will attend not only to words but also to formatting, photographs, and illustrations: print internationalism, as I demonstrate, creates new words by investing them in very particular published forms.

Readers who attended one of Tagore’s lectures in China, or heard Gandhi address a rally in South Africa, or encountered Du Bois at the Universal Races Congress in London likely left those events with an understanding of those thinkers’ politics. It would be their texts, however, that gave solidity to these conceptions, for the materiality of print rendered these ephemeral convergences tangible. The political movement—lived networks of interpersonal association and activism—provides an institutional context for reading, while the reading act in turn reinforces otherwise ephemeral interpersonal connections. The texts thus both benefit from and contribute to these socially constituted understandings: the print object, like the public convention, would inculcate the interpretive protocols that make internationalism both imaginable and desirable. Unlike nationalism, which must represent the nation (however conceived), internationalism predicates itself on a loosely defined expansiveness; if framed at all in representational terms, it highlights an existing conundrum, not a preexisting inheritance. By focusing on creating an interpretive community, print internationalism can build on shared political experiences without requiring a belief in their commonality of experience, for it works instead to cultivate a shared interpretive code.
The neologism of print internationalism demands new regimes of interpretation to render itself comprehensible, and it creates an interpretive community rather than, as with print nationalism, an imagined community. The distinction is important: despite its name, an interpretive community is hardly a community in our commonly used sense of the word, for it generally lacks the sense of commonality that we associate with the experience of community in our everyday lives. That imagined commonality, however, is precisely what can be generated by an imagined community, despite its inclusion of persons never to be known. While an interpretive community can be coterminous or isomorphic with an imagined community, this occurs only under specific circumstances.\(^5\) Neither shared experience nor imagined commonality is required, however, to be part of the interpretive community that can read a phrase and comprehend its most useful meaning.

To accomplish these pedagogical ends, print internationalism designs its strategies in accordance with the specific materiality of its printed objects, whether bound as a codex or published as a broadsheet. As these internationalists were well aware, literacies vary, and reading is a widely discrepant affair. In this context, the scriptive functions of a print periodical—copying, folding, and clipping—or of a printed book—turning pages, preserving wholeness, storing on a shelf—become key considerations in the writing process. As a consequence, I further situate print internationalism within the scholarship on everyday life and the material world. As we witness in the repeated didacticism of these authors, print internationalism frequently forged an interpretive community through explicit instruction. They wished to teach their readers how to interpret differently: first the printed text, then the historical record, and finally, thereby, the contemporary world. Insofar as our ability to follow a phrase requires understanding the objects involved, being part of this interpretive community necessitates apprehending a print object as a “scriptive thing,” a term Robin Bernstein has used to theorize an object that carries its own limited possibilities of manipulation, and hence its own implied instructions for our use.\(^6\) And being part of the interpretive community, moreover, requires a modicum of skill, rendering it akin to Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of a habitus: that is, a form of embodied history that indicates fully internalized knowledge. Consequently, the interpretive communities of print internationalism are created by modifying what Michel de Certeau theorized as the practices of everyday life, through the internalization of new practices not only of reading but also of clipping, circulation, and self-presentation.
To understand what “gitanjali,” “satyagraha,” or “brownies” means is not simply to have learned a new word but to have entered a new understanding of the world, and a new lived relationship to it as well.

An understanding of internationalism as generating interpretive communities carries with it spatial and temporal implications. Because every interpretation is already governed by an implied interpretive community of varying utility, the pedagogical impetus of print internationalism works to change the implied contexts that result in certain interpretations. Consequently, print internationalism reshapes its readers’ perceptions of the world, and of categories like the local, the regional, and the ethnic. It does not simply add an extra-national awareness to its readers’ existing national consciousness. After all, even the most seemingly particular nationalism makes broad though implicit claims about the world as a whole. As studies of nationalism have exhaustively demonstrated, nationalism frequently claims autochthony—that is, it claims to represent a community so essentially of that national territory that its members seem as though sprung organically from its rocks and soil. Yet these claims of local authenticity are themselves subtended by a worldwide imaginary: Each nation is authentic because nations themselves are multiple, even as each nation imagines itself distinctive in its own particular way. This vision of a world composed of coexisting nations was given institutional form after World War II, through organizations like the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund. In contrast to this official internationalism, which seeks to manage the inevitable rivalries among various nationally constituted communities, the print internationalisms of my inquiry seek to upend this national framework—that is, our now taken-for-granted vision of the world that makes nationalism appear both natural and inevitable. Whether criticizing the U.S.-led League of Nations or the British Empire, the print internationalisms of Tagore, Gandhi, and Du Bois seek to dismantle the typical rubrics for apprehending the world and replace them with new interpretive protocols.

Attending to the neologism, as I demonstrate in this monograph, provides several methodological advantages. By commencing my inquiry with an attention to new words, I shift our attention away from the border-crossing concerns of translation to the future-oriented dreams of linguistic innovation. In attending to words and their peculiar trajectories, as well as those of the famous men with whom they are associated, I situate the revolutionary work of great men within a larger social and intellectual milieu: one that is crucially peopled with
relatively forgotten women. Through this combination of formalist excavation and historicist contextualization, I propose a theory of print internationalism that originates in the shifting global dynamics of the early twentieth century, even as it evades the political structures that emerged from that period.

**READING PRINT INTERNATIONALISM**

Although this monograph is organized around three great men, the centering of each chapter around a particular neologism enables us to displace or at least suspend considerations of their intentions, accomplishments, and failings. Writing about celebrated icons, after all, poses a familiar peril: in many cases, the political urgency of the subject material intertwines with the extraordinary accomplishments of anticolonial icons to produce an account filled with heroes and villains. Hoping to avoid this well-trodden path, I undertook extensive archival research, interweaving my close analyses of famous texts with scrupulous readings of texts previously unstudied. These lesser-known materials were published, circulated, and still exist right beside those that are well-known today—and in many instances I found that the less-studied publications heavily reflect the authorial and editorial work of women. Drawing on these findings, I highlight how print internationalism among non-White peoples in the early twentieth century was crucially enabled by women, whose oft-indeterminate and rapidly shifting social standing meant that they could intervene, in surprising and strategic ways, in the transformation of an imperial world order. Thus an Irish convert to Hinduism, Sister Nivedita, oversaw the publication of an Asianist manifesto that closely resembled Tagore’s later politics; a Jewish woman, Sonja Schlesin, inscribed Gandhi’s South African practices; and an African American author, Jessie Redmon Fauset, edited Du Bois’s international children’s publication. In examining the interventions of these women as well as those of the more famous men with whom they collaborated, I rely on feminist methodologies for literary study, reading beyond narrow definitions of authorship and strict boundaries of genre. As this monograph demonstrates, once we approach texts as objects congealed within an ongoing flow of conversation and collaboration, a far larger cast of creative actors becomes evident.

Yet even as my research on print internationalism unearthed these treasured stories of women’s contributions, it also surfaced uncomfo-
able details of these print internationalisms’ substantial political limitations. Gandhi’s writing on South Africa contributes to Indian politics but sidelines South African concerns; Du Bois’s Indian interests are, in the end, African American in their priorities; and Tagore, despite his expertise, seeks China only to support his native Bengal. In approaching these less-than-admirable realities, I have drawn on recent disciplinary debates on reading, sometimes traced to the hermeneutic dichotomy described by Paul Ricoeur in his study of Sigmund Freud. In Ricoeur’s famous theorization, the hermeneutic field is organized around the poles of faith, which seeks to restore a fullness of meaning to the object under interpretation, and of suspicion, which works to strip it of false meanings and illusions. Ricoeur argues that these seemingly opposed hermeneutic poles are part of a single project, which he describes as the “never-ending task of distinguishing between the faith of religion,” which exists beyond human-made expressions, and “belief in the religious object,” which is human-made and hence fallible. Consequently, he explains, whereas the hermeneutics of faith may be seen as working from a naive faith in the object’s plenitude, the hermeneutics of suspicion instead “seeks, through interpretation, a second naïveté.” Thus, suspicion is not simply the opposite of faith but the pursuit of “faith that has undergone criticism, postcritical faith.”

Postcolonial studies has long sought this “postcritical faith,” interrogating its treasured narratives and figures in search of an optimism that might hold up to a “second naïveté.” But this critical disposition of attachment, care, and concern for the objects of postcolonial cultural production has coexisted, sometimes uneasily, with a strain of postcolonial studies that focuses on metropolitan and imperial cultural productions, where critical negativity often prevails. In the colonized culture, scholars find artworks that become the objects of faith, recollection, and reparation; in the colonizing culture, already-canonized texts frequently become objects for suspicious reading and demystification. The polarization that Ricoeur registers within the hermeneutic field thus maps onto the polarization that colonialism introduces to social life: a need to have faith in the culture that has been colonized, no matter how badly it has been disparaged in the official record, and a need to be suspicious of the colonizing culture, despite its status as both official and reasonable. In trying to navigate these poles, I want to suggest, the postcolonial critic frequently oscillates between a positive critical disposition and a negative one—between what Eve Sedgwick famously termed the paranoid and reparative critical modes.
Theorizing print internationalism offers a particularly rich context in which to navigate this polarity, which, as I have suggested, exists for the postcolonial critic simultaneously as a hermeneutic dichotomy and a geopolitical one. The works examined here, after all, are writing about at least two marginalized and dispossessed cultures at once: one to which they belong, which is inevitably treated with care, and one to which they do not, which is frequently instrumentalized. Tagore exoti-
cizes semicolonial China, and Gandhi primitivizes Black South Africa, yet they both do so in order to benefit colonized India, while Du Bois es-

ternalizes colonized India in order to benefit Black Americans’ struggles against racism. These texts, consequently, cannot be immediately allied to an exploitative culture nor to an exploited one: they call at once for our attachment and our demystifi cation.

The reparative impulse in Imperfect Solidarities is most evident in my pairing of the three central neologisms with a second triptych of much more recent coinages. The examination of Tagore’s neologism “gitanjali” is paired with an excavation of its role in what we now call “the global Anglophone”; Gandhi’s “satyagraha” is positioned within his recogni-
tion of the commonalities enshrined in our concept of “people of color”; and Du Bois’s “brownies” is considered alongside his understanding of what we know as “the Global South.” In each case, the insertion of a second term—each a neologism from the late twentieth century—serves two intellectual purposes. First, by naming the relevant framework with an intentionally anachronistic term, I highlight how our thinking about the past is necessarily expanded and restrained by the words of our own time. And second, by linking a key neologism of the early twentieth century to another coined nearly a century after, I suggest directions for further inquiry, for the politically urgent neologisms of our own time are likely similar in their operations to those of Tagore, Gandhi, and Du Bois a century ago.

In reading these works of print internationalism, consequently, I have heeded recent critical calls to attend scrupulously to the surfaces of texts, and I frequently examine references with a literal approach to that pe-
riod’s historical and social realities. I read these writers’ failures along the surface of these texts, which is to say that I read them for their rhetorical effects, rather than as symptoms of larger social realities. Despite such strong superficial attachments, however, this monograph remains firmly within postcolonial studies: a field which, as I understand it, is by definition incapable of turning postcritical. Consequently, my interest in a form of surface attention most closely resembles that of Anne Anlin
Cheng, for whom the surface is most interesting for its role in essentialized discourses of racial difference. The surface is essentially political; it is worthy of our attention precisely because it has been historically effective. *Imperfect Solidarities* situates Tagore’s exoticization of China within his dismissal of particular aesthetic differences in an artwork, analyzes Gandhi’s belittling of Black South Africans alongside his use of an allegorical narrative mode, and studies Du Bois’s evocation of caste prejudices as part of his strategy for wider U.S. readership. These are surface-focused explanations to complex political and historical failures, yet they are not already familiar in the scholarship. In avoiding a primarily symptomatic reading method, which would read these problems as indications (“symptoms”) of a larger social structure (such as “the political unconscious”), I have sought to avoid that which, here, is less unconscious than obvious. To argue instead, for instance, that these failures are symptoms of widespread racism in the early twentieth century, would be to provide a below-the-surface analysis whose conclusions are nonetheless already evident.

Despite this monograph’s tilt away from symptomatic reading methods, some readers may notice that each of the neologisms “satyagraha,” “gitanjali,” and “brownies” operates akin to a representative unit of ideology. Each neologism is arguably “the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes” that Fredric Jameson sought in *The Political Unconscious*—and which he named, in a worthy neologism of his own, an ideologeme. Much as the ideologeme in Jameson’s influential theory of symptomatic reading resolved the semiotic square and imbued stability to textual meanings, so too do these neologisms indicate a seemingly latent meaning that is a problem’s apparent resolution. These neologisms can thus serve at once as idea and as narrative: as both abstract value and structuring fantasy. My readings certainly follow what I see as Jameson’s foundational assumption: that in sites of textual rupture we can identify the constraining conditions of a particular historical moment. From there, however, I diverge from Jameson’s model. Instead of seeking what he famously termed the political unconscious, I read print internationalism as itself an agent of historical transformation. By thus embracing a print-cultural materialism, I read symptomatically, but with critical complicity rather than critical distance. Insofar as symptomatic reading still prevails in this monograph, it emanates from a presentist political imperative: *Imperfect Solidarities* thus reads most symptomatically when it reads for political guidance.
Jameson, like the New Critics before him, assumed a completeness within the individual work of art, whereas I approach the texts of print internationalism as an uneven yet interconnected realm. What kind of reading method applies when the text is not assumed as a discrete and continuous whole? The chapters presented here, while centering on a notable individual, take as their analytic point of coherence the new coinage itself. Neither the author nor the artwork is seen, in my method, as intrinsically contained, consistent, or stable. While my destabilization of the author here is theoretically informed by poststructuralism, my focus on writers from marginalized backgrounds means that I am interested not in the death of the subject but, rather, in recognizing that subject’s constitutive instability. I am uninterested in the death of the author but remain fascinated by the operations of the author function, and I consequently rely on a performative understanding of authorship: that is, I approach authorship not only as a question of creation but also as one of creative recognition.19

Despite much writing on its possible demise, close reading remains the method of literary studies, and of this monograph as well. Semiotic closure, central to the study of the political unconscious, remains central here as well, even as I detach the operations of narrative from always implying the novelistic plot. The work of narrative here coheres not only in the book-length texts under consideration, many of which rely on the fictionalization of history and politics—Gandhi’s Satyagraha in South Africa, Du Bois’s Dark Princess, Tagore’s Talks in China—but also in the ersatz historical narratives—of Africa, India, and China—that each of these intellectuals constructs.

Readers may notice here the resonance of a Foucauldian notion of discourse—popularized in postcolonial studies through the foundational work of Edward Said—even as the approach I have chosen prioritizes detailed accounts of localized albeit dispersed textual phenomena over magisterial accounts of historical transformation. I accordingly utilize a network model for the social, which has received much positive interest within recent literary studies.20 While the network is not a guiding metaphor for writers in the early twentieth century, an analogous metaphor does surface repeatedly in the print internationalism under consideration, perhaps most obviously in the first chapter: that of a web, then associated with spiders and not, as today, with the internet. Approaching print internationalism as a web is particularly apposite for this study, enabling us to grasp its unpredictable correspondences and complex allegiances without disregarding the gaps that make such con-
connections possible. This approach can recalibrate the completeness of the text as envisaged by New Criticism—wherein the aesthetic object attains considerable cultural powers—with the interwoven texts of New Historicism—wherein the text intertwines with its historical moment.

*Imperfect Solidarities* demonstrates how flawed connections across continents can, through the unpredictable medium of the global Anglophone, generate dramatic transformations in how we understand our world. In invoking solidarity, this book acknowledges the profound influence of Marxist internationalism, as well as Karl Marx’s concerns about the fluid nature of modernity. In the modern world, Marx famously decreed in 1848, “all that is solid melts into air.” That quote from *The Communist Manifesto* became the title of a now-classic study by Marshall Berman, who argued that the constant disappearance of solidarity is the defining feature of our modern condition. In Berman’s hands, Marx’s diagnosis is apt but his optimism is misplaced: writing in 1982, he argued that the solidarity of which Marx dreams will be “like everything else here, only temporary, provisional, built for obsolescence.”

In naming this monograph *Imperfect Solidarities*, I have sought to emphasize not only these allegiances’ ephemerality but also their imperfections. The epigraph for this book is taken from Mark Doty’s poem “Esta Noche,” first published in his 1993 collection *My Alexandria*. Doty’s poem summons the beauty and power of imperfection, from its Spanish title to its mainly English text, celebrating *la fabulosa Lola* as she moves between cultures and subverts conventions. In Doty’s vision, an evening—*esta noche*—becomes poetry through “the artifice of the awkward or lovely”: through a scene as temporary as it is transformative. In coining “gitanjali,” “satyagraha,” and “brownies,” the central figures in *Imperfect Solidarities* fell far short of perfection, but they did transform the world. Like *la fabulosa Lola* “shifting in and out of two languages like gowns / or genders,” they devised for us both “license / and calling”: they put on, we might say, “the only thing we have to wear.”

**TRANSLATION, PHILOLOGY, AND NEOLOGY**

Contemporary literary studies has often deployed translation studies to analyze cultural contact, yet that rubric, as this book demonstrates, is ill suited to the study of print internationalism. Translation—with its Latin root *translatio*, “to carry across”—is essentially a *spatial* practice: the translator shifts a set of meanings from one sign system to another,
whether linguistically (as from Japanese to English), mathematically (as when moving a shape), or metaphorically (as in “cultural translation”). Beyond a Latinate context, understandings of translation such as the Sanskritic anuvaad (literally, “to say again”) are often more attuned to its iterative—and hence temporal—implications, but in all cases the relationship to that which exists before translation is revolutionary by coincidence, rarely by intention. A “good” translation is faithful to the original language text, and not, as with the neologisms here, most concerned with possible political effects. Translation connects existing languages and renders them commensurable, and as a result, any act of translation impacts both languages in one way or another. However, this mutual transformation is generally seen as an associated effect of the act of translation, not as its guiding motivation. Even the individual who undertakes translation as part of a revolutionary politics, for instance, is most likely to see the revolutionary aspect of her efforts in the importation and dissemination of the concepts—that is, the signifieds. The recalibration of existing signs—or more precisely, the signifiers—is viewed as incidental.

Because translation emphasizes the carrying across of meaning between different languages (or, to be precise, differently articulated sign systems), it is poorly equipped to address this transformation of meanings within a discontinuous but connected world. It cannot, for instance, theorize the invention of a new and unprecedented language—a project epitomized in the period under discussion in the invention of Esperanto. The neologisms in this book, like Esperanto, dream of new language forms that might render the world better connected and thereby harmonious—but unlike Esperanto, which publicized its disruption of the existing order of national languages, these neologisms contain their disruptive novelty within the increasingly worldwide reach of the English language.

By flaunting their novelty, these neologisms—“gitanjali,” “satyagraha,” “brownies”—emphasize temporal disruption in addition to geographical motion, even when their disruptions are also those of etymology. The neologisms here are transportable from the first, proving not so much resistant to translation but beyond translation’s purview. This renders them decisively different from what Emily Apter has termed an Untranslatable, which she defines as “an incorruptible or intransigent nub of meaning that triggers endless translating in response to its resistant singularity.” While the work of translation requires us to attach existing signifiers to unfamiliar signifieds, the practice of coin-
ing neologisms demands the production of new signifiers. This is both an obvious distinction and a consequential one. As the very term for the coining of new words—"neology"—implies, the practice embraces a temporal orientation: the speaker or writer produces a term that has not previously existed, in the hopes that it will persist into an uncertain future. Failure, in this instance, is the risk of immediate obsolescence, because every neologism, at its inception, is simply a solitary errant usage. (We can compare this to the concept of a "failed" translation, which is usually defined by its failure to adhere to the meanings of the original text, no matter how lasting or consequential the translation itself may prove.) By tracing these neologisms back to their initial emergence, we witness a durational anxiety, and hence a historical one: between the new word, resonant with its possibilities, and the nonce-word, unremarkable in its transience.

My focus on neology—the coining of new words—proposes a new direction for the flourish of recent scholarly interest in philology—a love of words that is particularly attentive to their pasts. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the return to world literature in the U.S. academy sought to address the limitations of the comparative literature paradigm. Now, at the close of the second decade, a series of publications seek to return to philology, arguing that this earlier discipline can reinvigorate the humanities today. Philology has been declared “the forgotten origins of the modern humanities” and the “colonial foundation of the humanities”; it has been championed as a solution for the provincialism of literary studies, and it has been discouraged for encouraging racist fantasies of pure origins. Its political significance seems to be a matter of consensus, even if its political impact remains a topic of debate. Whereas philology orients us to the past of words, and to the histories contained within language itself, neology directs us, as its very name suggests, toward the future, intimating the latent meanings that are activated when new words are found. This book reflects the philological impulse to attend to textual fragments and seek linguistic origins; at the same time, the words at the heart of my inquiry are from the first beset with opportunism and impurity. Whereas philology, for better and worse, can reveal the ancestry of present words, the neology of my study dispenses with precise origins for the romance of unpredictable possibilities.

The neologism may be most familiar to the humanities scholar through its prevalence in contemporary scholarship, where new words are frequently coined to explain a research innovation. The neologism
thus points the way to future scholarly endeavors, much as the neologisms detailed here suggest internationalist activities yet to be realized. Despite this overlap, the scholarly use of the neologism is fundamentally different from the uses explored in this monograph. First, whereas the neologisms of humanities scholarship are carefully articulated in their philological associations, the neologisms of the intellectuals here display a pointed disregard for accuracy and antecedents. They rely on ersatz etymologies and opportunistic cultural borrowings, ignoring questions of authenticity for aspirations of political resonance. Instead of the professional humanist’s attentive engagement with preexisting scholarly conversations, these activist intellectuals dream of international conversations not yet in existence. The scholarly neologism usually advertises its innovation, in the hopes of being added to an existing critical corpus; the neologisms here disguise their disruption, in the hopes of creating an understanding readership—as I proposed earlier, an interpretive community—as though by accident.

These are not coinages like *différance*, carried into English by Jacques Derrida, or “womanism,” originating in the political philosophy of Alice Walker, whose originality is foregrounded and which remain strongly associated with their authors. Such new coinages contain a strong example of what Michel Foucault termed the author function, often through the incursion of the authorial first person. In the neologisms studied here, by contrast, the author fades away in order to strengthen the word itself. By removing the author, and rendering the word seemingly authorless, the textual incursion obtains the abstract validity of a commonly accepted truth. Think of terms like “neurotypical” and “cisgender”: neologisms that seek to transform lived experience by renaming it, and that hide their authorship, despite their recent provenance, in the pursuit of powerfully widespread social use. The forgetting of the provenance of the neologism through the erasure of authorship thus enables the new coinage to acquire the status of objective truth.

**Structure of the Book**

The print internationalisms studied here emerged in the context of two influential worldwide movements. The first movement is centered on the series of meetings known as the Second International (1889–1916), which comprised a vast array of activists seeking to unite the workers of the world through the analytics of Marxist internationalism. After the
First World War, that movement became subordinate to Soviet leadership with the advent of the Third International (or ComIntern, 1919–43). The second major worldwide movement of this period is international feminism, which in this period prominently featured the struggle for women’s suffrage. Because of the profound influence of these two movements on the words at the center of our story, I pay particular attention to the analytics of class and gender that formed the basis of Marxist and feminist internationalisms, respectively. The first, that of class, is evident in my discussions of Tagore’s desired unity between the folk and the elite, Gandhi’s changing views of “coolies,” and Du Bois’s ambivalent invocations of caste. The second, that of gender, manifests itself in the consideration of women like Sister Nivedita, Sonja Schlesin, and Jessie Redmon Fauset, whose editorial and authorial labors made these print internationalisms possible.

The first chapter offers a history of “the global Anglophone” by focusing on the internationalist poet whom I claim as its progenitor: Rabindranath Tagore. In his powerful deployment of English for the circulation and appreciation of Asian poetry, whether originally written in Chinese or in Bengali, Tagore offers, I argue, a provocative point of origin from which to articulate a robust conception of the global Anglophone. Tagore works to reconnect India and China by highlighting their shared spiritual linkage, which historically includes writing itself. Tagore’s persona was central to his reputation, especially outside India, yet as I demonstrate, his tour in China was much less effective than his circulation in print. This pattern will continue in the following chapter with Gandhi, whose writings about Africans can only be understood through his limited engagements with them, and with Du Bois, who argues that print circulation, and not personal exchange, can best build international solidity.

The second chapter excavates the development of the term “people of color” by focusing on an anticolonial internationalist whose impact has been cross-racial but whose antiracist politics were racially singular: M. K. “Mahatma” Gandhi. As the historical record shows, Gandhi demonstrated that the practices of nonviolent protest he named satyagraha were transportable, replicating his South African innovations in India and changing the course of world history in the process. Even though Gandhi’s strategies were later deployed by Black Americans, Gandhi’s record is often read, not without reason, as a cautionary tale of the difficulties of cross-racial solidarity. Gandhi’s early writings were sometimes derogatory of Black people, and his activism against anti-
Indian racism in South Africa largely ignored that directed against Black South Africans. Much as Tagore’s print internationalism reflected the limits of a civilizational claim for constructing internationalist solidarity, Gandhi’s reflects the limitations of one based on the experience of racism alone.

The third chapter creates a longer history for the concept of “the Global South” by focusing on the antiracist internationalist who is frequently championed as its visionary: W. E. B. Du Bois. Through his careful incorporation of Indian politics in both his fiction and nonfiction writing, Du Bois facilitated a print internationalism that could simultaneously articulate the oppressions of racism and colonialism (in keeping with his vision of “the global color line”). In doing so, however, he subordinated Indian politics to African American priorities, frequently invoking caste as an indication of India’s degeneracy—and drawing on time-worn Orientalist tropes in the process. In this manner, Du Bois’s print internationalism prefigures both the potential and the pitfalls of our contemporary category of “the Global South”: its ability to consider multiple interlocking systems of oppression across the world, as well as its inability to give all regions equal priority.

Whereas these chapters of Imperfect Solidarities explore print internationalisms to which we might be broadly sympathetic, in the conclusion I turn briefly to a print internationalism that was unambiguously abhorrent: what Hannah Arendt termed, in 1945, the “fascist international.” In ending on this darker note, I explore how the print internationalism of the early twentieth century continues to have implications for our understandings of the early twenty-first. Print internationalism, as this study demonstrates, can be a powerful force in the world: It is my hope that it will be a force for good.