Full reference: Bornet, Philippe, "From Comparative to Connected Religion: Translocal Aspects of Orientalism and the Study of Religion", *Translocal Lives and Religion: Connections Between Asia and Europe in the Late Modern World* (P. Bornet ed.), Sheffield: Equinox, 2021, p. 3-32.

From Comparative to Connected Religion: Translocal Aspects of Orientalism and the Study of Religion

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Abstract
Introducing the notion of "connected history" and situating it among other related approaches ("global history", "comparative history", "entangled history", "cultural transfers", etc.), the chapter examines the potentialities as well as the challenges it presents for the comparative study of religions. Building on recent considerations about a critical "comparative religion", it is argued that a "connected religion" approach has the potential to both criticize classical taxonomies and construct alternative ways to think about concepts and practices about religion. In order to assess the approach, two examples are introduced and contrasted: Looking at F.M. Müller's involvement with Bengali (Dwarkanath Tagore, Debendranath Tagore, Keshub Chandra Sen), Marathi (Behramji Malabari) and Japanese scholars (Nanjo Bunyu and Kenjiu Kasawara), it is argued that the orientalist project is not only better understood when re-contextualized in this global context, but that it also had consequences beyond the scholarly world, offering opportunities to all involved actors. The second example explores the encounter of a Swiss missionary, Jakob Urner, with specialists of the Vīraśaiva literatures such as Channappa Uttangi. In so doing, attention is paid to the often discordant and oppositional dynamics constitutive of political and religious processes, to the development of scholarly representations (mainstream or marginal), and to their impact on the study of religions as an academic discipline. It is also suggested that such an approach is better carried out in a collaborative framework, since it generally involves dealing with sources that stem from various cultural, institutional or linguistic backgrounds.

Keywords: Connected history, Connected religion, Comparison, Max Müller, Orientalism, Asia and Europe

<1> Translocal, Transnational, Entangled, Crossed, Connected, and Other Kinds of Histories[1]

In recent years, much attention has been devoted to issues related to the study of "transnational" or "translocal"[2] topics in history, with a particular interest for flows of people, objects, ideas or practices across geographical and political boundaries. This renewed interest is evident in the apparition of a flurry of labels such as "transnational history", "entangled history" (Mintz 1985), "cultural transfers" (Espagne 1999), "crossed history" ("histoire croisée", Werner & Zimmermann 2006), "symmetric history" ("histoire à parts égales", Bertrand 2011), along with "guide books" and their "companions" (Iriye and Saunier 2009). Even if this is nothing entirely new, considering early attempts at weaving historical narratives over vast spatial areas such as early histories of the so-called silk-roads (Herrmann 1910) or Fernand Braudel's classical study of the Mediterranean (Braudel 1949), these different approaches result from historiographical debates of the late 20th century that can be considered as a "transnational turn". They perceive themselves as various, though not always clearly distinguished from each other, antidotes to the epistemological implications of territories being divided along borders that reflect the modern formation of nation-states.[3] Despite typical objects of the study of religions being often "translocal" or "transnational" – whether pilgrims, books or relics – the significance of this turn for theorizing about religion might not have been fully acknowledged yet. In this introduction, I would like to explore a few implications of recent reflections about "entangled" or "connected" histories for the study of religion before assessing the program it invites us to through two examples.

<2> From comparative history to connected histories

In his essay on comparative history published in 1928 (Bloch 1928), the French historian of the Annales school, Marc Bloch (1886–1944), distinguished a type of comparison that works on distinct societies in time and space from another type that presupposes mutual relations between neighbouring societies – a kind of comparison that is actually not "really" comparison, since in the end, the compared elements are shown to belong to a single

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[1] I thank Prof. M. Burger, P. Schreiner and all participants to the panel "Transnational encounters and religion: Following the threads of connected histories (19th–20th centuries)" at the IAHR Erfurt congress for insightful comments on previous versions of this text.

[2] "Translocal" has been preferred for the volume's title, because it does not necessarily imply contacts across national borders and suggests interactions accross other types of borders (language, race, socio-economical class, religion) within a given political or spatial entity.

[3] As Bayly *et alii* (2006, 1441–1442) observed, the shared purpose of these different types of history is to "break out of the nation-state or singular nation-state as the category of analysis, and especially to eschew the ethnocentrism that once characterized the writing of history in the West." Bayly's (2004) own attempt at writing a revised "global history" of the modern world is a good illustration.

historical process (Bloch 1928, 17–19). Mentioning J.G. Frazer's *Golden Bough* as an instance of the first type, Bloch prefers the precision of the second. He goes on with a comparative study of the "individualization" of agrarian exploitations in early modern England and France, and shows the benefits of the comparative method for both discovering documents on a local scale and for their interpretation. He concludes that historians should expand the spatial area of their interests and move further away from national frames.[4]

This conception of comparative history – itself followed by an impressive number of case studies – has come under criticism in the last two decades, especially among historians specializing in the one or the other style of "transnational history". For example, Michel Espagne noted that in many comparative studies, there is a tendency to discard the diachronic dimension to the profit of an imagined synchrony of the compared constellations. He added that the comparative process almost inevitably freezes the poles of the comparison and reifies the very political or social entities it is supposed to deconstruct (Espagne 1994, 112–115). In the end however, Espagne does not substantially diverge from Bloch: he insists on the one hand on the necessity to break away from the national framework, emphasizing that "only a focus on the genealogical mechanisms that led to the reification of oppositions can define a supra-national historiographical space" (Espagne 1994, 119). On the other hand, he recommends an approach reminiscent of Bloch's work on societies that have been in contact. Espagne's own contribution to the debate is his theorization (with M. Werner) of "cultural transfers", a concept which invites historians to "privilege phenomena of re-appropriation and re-semantization of an imported cultural good, considering what this process reveals about the context of importation and paying a particular attention of the socio-cultural background of mediators." (Espagne 2005).

Equally critical of both national and comparative history, Serge Gruzinski writes that

> Comparative history appeared for a long time as a workable solution and it was at the origins of fruitful exchanges. The perspectives it brings to light, however, are sometimes only illusions: the choice of objects to compare, the selected frames, criteria and determinisms ..., the interpretative frameworks of underlying problems ... still rely on philosophies or theories of history that already provide the answers to the raised questions. In the worst case, comparative history is only an insidious resurgence of Euro-centrism. (Gruzinski 2001, 86)

As a way out of the issues of comparative history, Gruzinski and Sanjay Subrahmanyam introduce a notion of "connected histories" which consists in "reconnecting" records that

[4] "Therefore, the most evident, and perhaps, necessary teaching of comparative history is that it might be time to think about breaking the outdated topographic compartments in which we pretend to encase social realities." (Bloch 1928, 44, my translation).

have been artificially separated by historiographical (often nationalist) preferences. Focusing on events occurring in distant geographical spaces or between historical records of a same event kept in distant archival spaces, the program is not entirely at odds with that of "cultural transfers".[5] It however comes with a few specificities of its own. The most important is (1) a focus on *micro-histories* that are re-contextualized into a larger, global framework: this contrasts with "world history" or "global history" in the sense that it does not attempt to write single events into a general (and often diffusionist) narrative. It also contrasts with "purely" local histories, since they are shown to be an aspect of wider processes.[6] A second specificity (2) is an attention to change as observed in various *situations of interaction*: often working at a biographical level, connected histories entail not only the study of networks centred on specific actors, practices, ideas, but also a study of how these practices and ideas are modified, re-semanticized in the various contexts they travel to or in.[7] Thirdly (3), the approach generally requires a *multiple contextualization* to shed light on the divergent local or regional dimensions of an object (or a person) in movement.[8] Since archives have often been constituted in specific political or religious configurations, they implicitly tend to mirror and reinforce the institution they represent. As Deacon *et al.* (2010, 3) noted, in order to retrieve the "messiness" of individual trajectories, one needs to work "in the interstices of the archive". From an historiographical point of view, this is all the truer when dealing with connections between distant areas whose records were kept by distinct historiographical regimes. The challenge is then to work across different archives, places, documents, languages, to bring them together into a single scholarly output, much in the sense of Romain Bertrand's "symmetric history" (Bertrand 2011) or Sujit Sivasundaram's "cross-contextualization" (Sivasundaram 2010).

This is of course not an attempt at producing a "neutral narrative" or at constructing an Archimedean point of objectivity, but rather an effort at multiplying perspectives and

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5 To my knowledge, the first use of the expression "connected history" goes back to Strayer's collective work (Strayer 1989). Methodological implications are set forth in the works of S. Subrahmanyam (1997) and S. Gruzinski (2001).

6 Potter and Saha (2015)'s plea for "connected histories of empire" goes in the same direction. The authors stress that "Connected histories of empire grounded in specific places and concerned with particular individuals might help us avoid the simplifications encouraged by the planetary scale of analysis that absorbs many Global historians." Examples of historical narratives focusing on individual trajectories inscribed in larger settings include works of historians of the *microstoria* school, such as C. Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* (Ginzburg 1980) or E. Grendi's studies about the city of Genoa.

7 This is different from the study of the circulation of commodities, which constitutes the main topic of S. Mintz's "entangled history" of sugar (Mintz 1985).

8 This is akin to Sivasundaram's notion of "cross-contextualization" (Sivasundaram 2010, 154, in particular: "[F]or a more globally representative history of science to emerge, it is necessary to experiment with divorcing sources from their usual sites of contextualization so as to take them to quite different contexts, at a distance from their obvious authors and readers.")

reconstructing the different, often diverging, sides of a single event or biographical trajectory. Since the selection of relevant documents is entirely left to the scholar, the corpus will necessarily reflect his or her position and invites to reflexive comments and revision. A typical example of connected history is Subrahmanyam's study of Vasco da Gama (Subrahmanyam 1998) in which the standard, nationalist, narrative of the Portuguese explorer is re-evaluated in the light of a wide array of sources. Re-contextualizing the expedition into the larger setting of Indian Ocean and South Indian history, Subrahmanyam's study provides a welcome correction to nationalist retellings of the same. The approach also encourages the integration of scholars who happen to be more familiar with some corpuses or with some languages rather than with others on a collaborative mode: this is then an invitation to internationalize an academic discipline such as history or the study of religions.

<2> From early to late modernity

If the notion of "connected history" has been originally developed in the framework of the "early modern period", it can be extended well beyond the 18th century. As Subrahmanyam puts it:

> It is true that this approach is essentially confined to works dealing with the period from the 16th to the 18th century. It did not have much effect yet on the 19th and 20th centuries, especially because of the control exerted by national history, much stronger for this period. ... If done for the 19th and 20th centuries, I imagine that this would be called "transnational history" or something similar. I do not care: the way one calls it does not matter; the approach does. (Subrahmanyam 2012, n.p.)

A major difference between the early modern and the late modern period, however, is that in the latter case (and with the possible exception of studies working on the relations between two or more European regions in contact, such as Espagne 1999), the approach will almost inevitably encounter debates marked by postcolonial studies. In the wake of Edward Said's seminal book *Orientalism* (1978), two different sets of attitudes emerged: on the one hand, studies have analysed different contexts in which Western representations have maintained and reinforced structures of power, through various mechanisms and in various registers, from architecture, law, medicine to political institutions and religion (for example Inden 1992, Cohn 1996 or Dirks 2001). On the other hand, out of critical observations formulated shortly after the publication of Said's essay, studies outlined processes of interaction (Kopf 1980), exploring the "dialogical" construction of historical situations (Irschick 1994), the contribution of non-European history to the construction of European modernity (Bayly 2004) or the different modes of the circulation of knowledge (Raj 2007).

Each array of studies comes with its specific risks: in putting an emphasis on the

power imbalances between the "West and the Rest" (S. Hall), analyses are exposed to a certain one-sidedness, focusing the attention on the agency of Western actors with the unintended effects of silencing their local interlocutors and reifying the poles of the interaction, such as Europe – Asia / Africa, colonizers – colonized etc. (Stoler & Cooper 1997, 9). The second set of approaches has been criticized for not giving sufficient consideration to the asymmetries of power and presenting as a "dialogue" what should rather be described as a monologue forced upon dominated groups (Dirks 2001, 303-315).[9]

Connected histories are of course closer to the second set of approaches, but do need to take seriously the concern of irenicism and the fact that in forced encounters, not all possible actions are available to all agents (Asad 1993, 15–16). There is certainly a possible middle way between the quasi deterministic character of Foucault's "discourse" (which leaves little space to individual agency or movements of resistance) and a view that would optimistically emphasize the agency of individual actors, ignoring all of the external socio-political factors affecting (but not determining) their actions.[10]

<1> Connected histories of "religion" and religion

<2> Conceptual boundaries in the study of religion

What can we learn from this for the study of religion specifically? How does this relate with current conversations about theory in the discipline? Like history has its evils, so does the study of religion, in at least two related domains. There is first a tension that is consubstantial to the project of a non-religious history of religion. As Bruce Lincoln observed (Lincoln 1996, 225), religious traditions tend to present themselves in transcendent and unchanging terms and have generally a teleological conception of their own history – in a way similar to nationalist narratives, except, arguably, for the added reference to a transcendent authority. Conversely, history as a discipline insists on disruptions, changes, processes of borrowing, thus running almost inevitably against a "religious" point of view. For the study of religion, there is then a basic need to question the conceptual boundaries erected by the traditions themselves – particularly so because many of them have efficiently organized their own archives and constructed narratives about their past, be it in the form of Sri Lankan Buddhist chronicles (on which see Bornet 2019) or Christian ecclesiastical history.

The second tension can be felt in the academic study of religions itself, with

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[9] These risks are evident in Subrahmanyam's analysis (2007, 43–44) of the opposed readings of B. Cohn and W. Pinch about the encounter of the British ambassador Thomas Roe (1581–1644) with the Mughal emperor Jahangir.

[10] This "middle path" seems to be the perspective taken in recent studies, for example in Peabody's study of the Rajasthani kingdom of Kota (2003), in the work of Dodson (2007a) on the "double practices" of Hindu Sanskrit scholars to the service of the East India Company, or in that of Manjapra (2014) on the cultural relations between Indians and Germans, and their position towards the British.

tendencies to compartmentalize or isolate the objects along boundaries such as institutions (Christianity, Islam, etc.), regions, languages or ethnic groups. It can be the result of a scholarly appropriation of religious, "emic" discourses, as in the case of "world religions" with their implied exclusivity and homogeneity, resulting in grouping together material meant to belong to a specific tradition while excluding what is thought to belong to others (Masuzawa 2005 and Fitzgerald 2000). A similar process is at work in "orientalist" works that tend to reify and categorize Asian traditions, often creating artificial oppositions and boundaries (King 2006 and Bornet 2014b).[11] More pragmatically, it can also be an effect of the organization of departments (with chairs either specialized in areas or in "religions"), it can be related to linguistic difficulties (sticking to the language one is familiar with and not looking beyond) or to epistemological preferences, such as C. Geertz's notion of "religion as a system of symbols" which paves the way for an apprehension of religions as discrete and stable institutions, encouraging scholars to look for causes and consequences of religion within the same system (and not, for example, in political or social realms).[12]

<2> Comparative and connected religion

Against such biases, comparison certainly offers potential ways out, provided it is done with a minimum of carefulness. In one of several essays on the topic and echoing Bloch's distinction, J. Z. Smith differentiated between "analogical" and "genealogical" modes of comparisons (Smith 1990, 47). He warned against the risks entailed by genealogical projects that compare two historically related objects: while in principle workable and usefully undermining claims about the "purity" of a given tradition, a genealogical approach might conceal the scholar's own "interests and activities" and reconstruct teleological pedigrees.[13] For Smith, the analogical project, consisting in comparing two unrelated sets of data, remains the best way to critically contribute to the discipline. Giving up entirely the search for similarities to be explained by a common origin, and interested in both similarities and differences, analogical comparison can lead to critical contributions on the conceptual and theoretical level, and works as an antidote against ethno-, Euro-, Christian-, and other

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[11] For example, Smith (1995) and Prothero (2010) defend opposite views but share a same conceptual framework made of reified, and thus "disconnected" religious traditions.

[12] Asad (1983) severely criticized Geertz's notion of religion as a "system of symbols". More recently, Bornet (2016a) proposed a critical assessment of a model of religion based on C. Geertz in the light of Ram Mohan Roy's views about religion.

[13] Smith (1990, 51) observed that "'genealogy' disguises and obscures the scholar's interests and activities allowing the illusion of passive observation". In an afterword to a book on comparison in the study of religion, Smith noted that preconditions for a sound "genealogical comparison" are "not fulfilled in the usual comparison of religious phenomena, but [added that] there is nothing, in principle, to prevent [a] successful deployment." (Smith 2000, 238)

centrisms.[14] The main difficulty lies in the need to master not only the languages relevant to each context, but also two unrelated socio-historical frameworks, so as to avoid the "freezing" and de-historicizing effect pointed out by Espagne. It implies to work inductively from sources that are precisely contextualized, so that the comparative project becomes a comparative study of two sets of documents.[15]

Without contesting the virtues of the analogical approach, I contend that there is a possibility for a viable instantiation of a genealogical project.[16] Analysing the various inputs that constitute a specific situation on a "genealogical mode", an approach of "connected religion" – as one might call it – challenges the claims of actors about the purity or unchanging nature of their tradition. Looking at processes that construct a tradition from different angles and involving a multiple contextualization (as does the framework of "cultural transfers"), it addresses the concern about de-historicizing the data. Moreover, the single operation to bring together documents that were not meant to be read in the light of each other plays a role similar to the intent behind Smith's analogical comparison[17]: it disturbs the stability of each document taken separately and draws the attention on the scholar's own intellectual operations. By rewiring separate historiographical traditions, a "connected religion" framework acts as a powerful antidote against the reproduction of narratives that sedimented along the lines of the archives they are part of. In this sense, working at the level of sources, this particular type of genealogical work is precisely able to counter teleological tendencies and not to reinforce them. Its difficulties are similar to the ones noted above about the analogical perspective (mastering languages, socio-historical contexts etc.), making it equally well suited for collaborative work.

Given this, there are at least two levels of analysis where a "connected religion" approach can be particularly relevant. First, one can follow the journeys of categories, classifications, practices, theories formulated by actors with a notion of "religion" (or "sacred", "mysticism", "ritual" etc.), paying a special attention to processes of

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[14] With a similar idea, Lincoln (1989, 172) observes: "[T]he only alternative to comparison is one brand of parochialism or another: That is, the stance of those who privilege the data with which they happen to be familiar while ignoring, and thus remaining ignorant of, the rest. Among the most prevalent brands are ethnocentrism, androcentrism, Eurocentrism, and the other centrisms as yet unnamed (e.g., those of class, temporality, and genre), all of which yield generalizations of a highly prejudicial nature – and not accidentally so."

[15] On this "weaker" type of comparison as a tool to "de-provincialize" the study of religion, see Holdrege 2010, Bornet 2010, Lincoln 2012 and Bornet 2016b.

[16] This conception of "genealogy" is close to Bergunder's "genealogische Praxis" (Bergunder 2011, 46 and 54).

[17] Smith 2014, 180: "[I]f I am right, what we do with comparison is to take something out of its place, something else out of its place, and put them in a place that is in our head. … Our way to doing it is by putting them by neighbours that they never intended to have and to see what happens."

appropriation, re-semantization, hybridization etc. It is then possible to re-evaluate the narrative of categories manufactured in metropolitan centres before globally spreading – more often than not, along the lines of colonialism and Christian missions – under a more dynamic light: not only the history of uniquely Western categories being consistently (mis-)applied to non-Western contexts, but also (or, rather) a complex history of appropriations, rejections, and subversions on a global scale, in processes that could be described as dialogical (Irschick 1994) rather than unilateral. This could be called "connected 'religion'", with quotation marks around "religion", indicating that the conceptualization of data as "religious" is the work of the actors under study ("religion" as an emic category) and not that of the scholar.

Second, and removing the quotation marks, one can follow the circulation of religious currents, worldviews, practices on a global scale, across traditional labels, committing to one or the other working definition of "religion".[18] There is certainly no need to limit oneself to ideas and practices labelled as "religious" by their actors. On the contrary, studying religious discourses, ideas and practices expressed by various terms in different vernacular languages (and their transformations when moving across cultures, languages and political formations) is, as Michael Pye noted, crucial for fighting Eurocentric tendencies in the field (Pye 2003).[19]

Here, one can begin by observing that religious communities are among the oldest "translocal communities" and that processes of globalization are by no way specifically modern but were largely anticipated by religious actors: Buddhist, Christian, Jaina or Manichean monks, Christian or Muslim pilgrims, Buddhist and Christian missionaries represent excellent examples of actors whose activity went across geographical and political boundaries since the beginnings of their respective institutions. Examples of "connected religion" in this perspective include Wilhelm Halbfass's masterly work on the relations between India and Europe (Halbfass 1981), Silk Road studies dealing with the various changes religious ideas and practices underwent while moving spatially (Klimkeit 1998 and Foltz 1999), the study of works conceptualizing religious diversity in the context of their redaction, such as the 17th century *Dabistān-i-Maẕāhib* of Mubad Shah (Behl 2010), Subrahmanyam's study of millenarist currents in Eurasia around 1500 across linguistic, political and religious affiliations (Subrahmanyam 1997), examinations of the early

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[18] One will naturally be careful as to how the concept is formulated. The important point is that, as a heuristic device, it is not bound to be designed after a specifically Christian or European model. This position has been convincingly argued by Sweetman (2003).

[1919] In this perspective, Pye (1994), 122 analyzed use of the Japanese term *shūkyō* as an equivalent of "religion" in Tominaga Nakamoto's work (18th century). The discussion about extra-European concepts functionally and semantically similar to that of "religion" has been clearly framed by Kollmar-Paulenz (2012 and 2013) and is further elaborated in the research group "Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities" (<http://www.multiple-secularities.de> [accessed 8 August 2018]).

encounters between Portuguese administrators and Buddhists in colonial Sri Lanka (Berkwitz 2013), or micro-studies about ancient or early modern contacts in the Indian Ocean (Singh & Dhar 2014).

The neat theoretical distinction between religion with and without quotation marks, however, is not entirely unproblematic, especially considering the fact that categories and discourses easily move from one level (i.e. scholarly) to another (i.e. practical), so that "religion" becomes religion and conversely, for example when groups redefine themselves and their practices with reference to "scholarly terms" or when scholars are influenced by elite religious practitioners. At least from the 19th century on, it is not possible to strictly distinguish between the two perspectives, since scholarly categories and discussions about religion travelled widely along with practices and doctrines. This "fluidity" is particularly evident in re-evaluations of the role of missionaries as mediators of scientific conceptions in the Pacific Ocean (Sivasundaram 2005), in interactions between British (Evangelical) orientalists and Muslim scholars in colonial contexts (Green 2015), or in the history of religiously (and politically) engaged transnational and scholarly movements such as Theosophy (Burger 2014 and Yoshinaga 2009).

For both levels of analysis, the most interesting actors are different mediators who regularly crossed borders, such as missionaries, members of diaspora communities, monks, pilgrims, scholars, tourists, translators, or travelling revolutionaries, who all played key roles in disseminating and reconfiguring notions and practices about religion. Looking at various appropriations at an individual level, the approach pays a particular attention to creative reinventions, change and discontinuity.[20] As explored in the present book, the lives of individuals can represent valid entry points into processes that connect local and global dimensions, provided one does not lean into the linearity and teleological tendency of autobiographies, but rather emphasize discontinuity, change and strategies that construct identities through a multiple contextualization (Bourdieu 1986).[21]

If the focus is on "primary actors", it should not obliterate the role of "secondary" players in the encounters: interpreters, language teachers, local informants, or diggers working on the behalf of Western archaeologists, whose agency has often been downplayed because they are largely absent or marginal in the records – a phenomenon that Tavakoli-Targhi aptly termed "orientalism's genesis amnesia," calling for studies that examine actors

[20] The focus on the aspect of individual appropriations echoes recent analyses about "lived religion" (McGuire 2008 and Rüpke 2016).

[21] Different cases presented by Deacon, Russell and Woollacott (2010) present a similar conception of religious dynamism at the level of individuals. In the present volume, the cases explored by Bocking (*infra*, p. 163) and Menezes (*infra*, p. 104) emphasize the fluidity of identities, perceptible in the way individuals chose pseudonyms for themselves so as to gain consideration among certain circles.

from "peripheral zones" or subaltern actors (Tavakoli-Targhi 1996).[22] By multiplying historiographical perspectives on a given topic and retrieving archival documents that have been left unexplored, a "connected religion" framework increases the chance that such figures re-emerge.[23]

<1> Two connected histories of religion

I would like now to exemplify the approach through two actual examples: the case of a rather sedentary scholar, Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900), and that of a Swiss missionary to India, Jakob Urner (1887–1965).[24]

<2> A non-travelling literatus: Max Müller (1823–1900)

In her biographical study of Friedrich Max Müller, Tomoko Masuzawa observed that "Müller never left the great libraries of Europe to experience in his own person 'the real India'" concluding that in this "somber nave of his biblioworkshop ..., he continued to contemplate the possibility of pure, literal signification, free of figures, beyond all names" (Masuzawa 1993, 59; 75). It is absolutely correct, of course, that Müller never travelled to India and it could seem at first that he is the worst possible example for an experiment in "connected religion". However, even if Müller indeed accomplished most of his career in European libraries, studying a textualized India and calling the Veda "his friend" (Müller 1899a, xii), there are signs suggesting that his contacts – certainly not with any "real India" – but with a few Indian scholars from select elitist circles, exerted at least some influence on his own views. In addition, his works were widely translated and moved along the transnational networks of major British publishers, deploying effects well beyond European and American academic circles. The ivory tower might be more porous than what has sometime been asserted.

In an autobiographical volume, *Auld Lang Syne: My Indian Friends* (1899), Müller writes that when in Paris, in 1844, as he was working with Eugène Burnouf (1801–1852), he met an important member of the Brahmo Samaj, Dwarkanath Tagore (1794–1846), grandfather of the better-known Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941). With him, Müller no doubt discussed Brahmo Samaj views about religion and differences between Indian and Western cultures.

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[22] With a similar idea, Bornet & Gorshenina (2014a) encourage to look at what they call an "orientalism from the margins", and Green (2015, 103–138) sheds light on the crucial role played by a number of lesser-known "co-operators" of Western scholars.

[23] For example, Subrahmanyam's study of Vasco da Gama pays a particular attention to the crucial roles played by Gama's Gujarati (?) pilot embarked in Malindi or by the convert Gaspar da Gama (Subrahmanyam 1998, 123–128 and 147–154) – figures largely ignored in nationalist retellings of the expedition.

[24] The second case has been studied in the framework of a project on the relations between India and Switzerland in the 20th century, directed by Prof. M. Burger (Lausanne) and Prof. A. Malinar (Zurich) and funded by the Swiss National Fund (SNF 147342).

We know at least about one particular encounter, staging Müller playing the pianoforte and accompanying Tagore who was singing French or Italian classical songs. Upon Müller's repeated requests, Tagore played "real Indian music", provoking the perplexity of the German orientalist. Seeing his reaction, Müller tells us, Tagore expressed the following thoughts:

> You [Europeans] say our religion is no religion, our poetry no poetry, our philosophy no philosophy. We try to understand and appreciate whatever Europe has produced, but do not imagine that therefore we despise what India has produced. … And if you would study our poetry, our religion, and our philosophy, you would find that we are not what you call heathens or miscreants, but know as much of the Unknowable as you do, and have seen perhaps even deeper into it than you have!" (Müller 1899a, 7–8)

Müller added: "He was not far wrong", implying that for him, any abstract definition of "religion", "poetry" or "philosophy" should be sufficiently ductile to account for Indian instantiations of the category. In his later work, Müller took the Indian material as a source of inspiration for his own theorizing, as he clearly states in his *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion* (1878):

> I do not think therefore that I am exaggerating when I say that the sacred books of India offer for a study of religion in general, and particularly for the study of the origin and growth of religion, the same peculiar and unexpected advantages which the language of India, Sanskrit, has offered for the study of the origin and growth of human speech. It is for that reason that I have selected the ancient religion of India to supply the historical illustrations of my own theory of the origin and growth of religion. That theory was suggested to me during a lifelong study of the sacred books of India; it rests therefore on facts, though I am responsible for their interpretation. (Müller 1878, 135–136)

Even if based on a comparison between linguistics and religion that would be problematic by today's standards, Müller's theorization about religion is described as inductively rooted in the study of "the ancient religion of India". Of course, Müller tends to represent himself as having reached his conclusions independently, through his own philological work. By taking a closer look, however, it appears that Müller's views about religion were very similar to those circulating among Brahmo Samaj circles, such as the priority given to personal intuition in experiencing religion or the theistic postulate of a higher power,

perceptible in all religions, and particularly so in ancient Indian traditions.[25]

The vehicles for the circulation of such ideas would not be hard to identify. After the early encounter with Dwarkanath Tagore, Müller remained in epistolary contact with leaders of the Brahmo Samaj (and its various offshoots), such as Debendranath Tagore (1817–1905), Protap Chandra Majumdar (1840–1905) and particularly Keshub Chandra Sen (1838–1884) from their encounter in London in 1870 until his death in 1884.[26] In the address he gave in 1883 for the 50th death anniversary of the Brahmo Samaj founder, Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833) in the Bristol museum, Müller calls himself Roy's "sincere follower" (Müller 1884, 2–3).[27] Rhetorical effect of the declaration aside, he shows a real admiration for the "originator of the Indian Reformation", noting in particular his rejection of "idolatry" and his interest for the Veda, largely concordant with his own (Müller 1884, 30–31). Throughout the address, Müller displays a profound knowledge of Roy's life and work. Several notes indicate that he was in personal contact with Sophia Collet, a "real follower" of Roy in Great Britain who was then collecting material on him and subsequently published a biography (Collet 1914 [1900]) that became standard (Müller 1884, 14, 15 and 24).

In his later days, Müller developed a strong interest for Ramakrishna (1836–1886) and demonstrably became one of the earliest figures accountable for the spread of ideas about the Ramakrishna movement among Western audiences (Müller 1896 and Müller 1899b). Not expressing any criticism at this stage and operating a careful selection in Ramakrishna's works, Müller presented him as "an authentic expression of the sublimest form of India's

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[25] See Müller (1879, xxxvii–xxxviii): "Our powers of perceiving, of reasoning, and of believing may be more highly developed, but we cannot claim the possession of any verifying power or of any power of belief which they did not possess as well. … The question is, whether there is or whether there is not, hidden in every one of the sacred books, something that could lift up the human heart from this earth to a higher world, something that could make man feel the omnipresence of a higher Power, something that could make him shrink from evil and incline to good, something to sustain him in the short journey through life." Compare with Sen (1876, 4 and 10): "If you search the ancient scriptures of the Hindus, you will find there the most sublime and beautiful conceptions of the Great Spirit will meet with sparkling texts pointing to Him Unseen. … The Infinite Father above and the eternal home before, meet in one focus in the eye of faith, and may be said to be apprehended together in the intuitive consciousness."

[26] On Sen's controversial figure, Kopf (1988, 107–108) observed: "Keshub, Rammohun Roy, Rabindranath Tagore, to name but three of the intellectual giants who emerged out of the so-called Bengal renaissance, underwent extreme changes of identity because they were neither simplistic Westernizers nor rabid nativists, but were highly-sophisticated cosmopolites with subtle, eclectic or synthetical intellects. … In my judgment, only when we view Keshub as an interpreter of East-West encounter – and a very sensitive one at that – can we begin to appreciate his apparent aberrations and contradictions in their larger significance."

[27] In a letter sent to B. Malabari in March 1879, Müller writes: "I should like to write a life of Rammohun Roy. I have many materials for it, but I want more. He was a really great man, much greater than the world imagines, and we here in Europe have to learn from him quite as much as you in India" (in Müller 1902, 62). Even if Müller did not produce a book-length life of Rammohun Roy, he wrote a biographical essay in 1883 (Müller 1884, 1–46).

heritage – Vedanta". This was a bidirectional relation since, as Beckerlegge noted, "Müller's interest was seen by members of the Ramakrishna movement as a significant indication of the recognition now being given to their master, and, of course Müller's standing as a scholar assured an attentive reception for his researches among academics" (Beckerlegge 2000, 8–9 and 15).[28]

Judging in which measure Roy's, Sen's, Majumdar's or Ramakrishna's views percolated in Müller's conceptualization of religion is a tricky task, since these views are themselves already a blend of European Enlightenment ideas about religion (independently shared by Müller), reinterpretations of Upanishadic notions, as well as of early 19th-century Christian, Muslim, or even Parsi conceptions about religion (Halbfass 1981, 200–216 and 223–227, Mitter 1987, 189–196), to the point that the threads of influence might be impossible to disentangle. It is however clear that this context played at least some role and that traditional intellectual biographies of Müller might be in need of some revision.[29]

In the opposite direction, Müller's works found an important echo in India.[30] In particular, three works need to be mentioned in that context: (1) the edition of the *Ṛg Veda*, (2) philosophical works on religion such as the above-mentioned *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion*, and (3) his essay designed as a compulsory reading for civil servants about to serve in India, *India, What Can It Teach Us?* (1883). Müller's edition of the *Ṛg Veda* (first edition in 1849–1875) brought many reactions: after the publication of the first volume (1849), Müller received a letter from a Bengali scholar – another non-traveling scholar – Radhakanta Deb (1784–1867), who had published the famous Sanskrit lexicon, *Śabdakalpadrumaḥ* (1821) and was head of a conservative Bengali party, the *Dharma Sabhā*.[31] He wrote that even if himself and Vaidika Pandits found it curious that a *mleccha* from Great Britain released an edition of the *Ṛg Veda* on the banks of the Thames rather than those of Ganges (what he took as an evident sign of the Kālīyuga),[32] he was glad that such a text was

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[28] As a sign of the rapid spread of the ideas published in Müller's book on Ramakrishna (Müller 1899b), see Sylvain Lévi's review the same year (Lévi 1899) and the influence of Müller's exposition of Ramakrishna on Romain Rolland (Bridet 2014, 226).

[29] For example, Kippenberg's otherwise very well-informed handbook does not make any mention of the contacts Müller had with Indian intellectuals altogether (Kippenberg 1997, 60–79).

[30] On the reception of German orientalist scholarship in India, see Van der Veer (2001, 116–122).

[31] On this episode, Müller (1899a, 27) writes: "Among the first to recognize my edition of the Rig-Veda was the Râjah Râdhâkânta Deva, and his recognition was all the more important to me as he stood at the head of the strictly orthodox and conservative party in Bengal." Halbfass (1981, 343) gives a good overview of the *Dharma Sabhā* and similar parties in early 19th-century Bengal.

[32] As Radhakanta Deb wrote in a letter of November 1851: "It is surely, a very curious reflection on the vicissitudes of human affairs that the descendants of the divine Rishis (prophets) should be studying on the banks of the Bhagirathi (Ganges), the Yamuni (Jumna), and the Sindhu their Holy Scriptures as published on the banks of the Thames by one whom they regard as a distant Mlechchha, and this Mlechchha, the descendant of the degraded Kshattriyas (noblemen), according to our Shastras, and claiming a cognate origin

now available to the pandits (letters of 1851 and 1855).[33] Incidentally, the second edition of Müller's *Ṛg Veda* edition could be published thanks to the patronage of the Maharaja of the Princely State of Mysore, Chamarajendra Wadiyar X (1863–1894) who also sponsored Vivekananda's travel to Chicago in 1893 (Müller 1899a, 158–159).[34] Müller's work thus enjoyed a certain popularity in contemporary Indian elitist circles, providing them with a version of the *Ṛg Veda* that was printed and endowed with the prestige of Western science.[35] At the same time, Müller perceived himself as a kind of reformer, opening up to the multitude a tradition that had been so far restricted to the few:

> For years, for centuries, nay for thousands of years, this Veda on which their whole religion was founded had been to them a kind of invisible power, much as the Bible was in the early centuries of the Papacy, when the privileged only were supposed to know it and were allowed to interpret it. In discussions between Brahmans and Christian missionaries, this Veda had always been the last stronghold to the Brahmans. … And now the book was there, handled by everybody, and set out more or less successfully by anybody acquainted with Sanskrit. (Müller 1899a, 44–45)

Comparing his own work on the Veda to Luther's translation of the Bible, Müller considered that he was contributing, in a more or less direct way, to the development of a movement of reform in India. Adding actual evidence to this, Müller mentioned Brahmins from Pune who "called an assembly in which a man, not a Brâhman, read out my edition, and all the Brâhmans corrected whatever MSS. they possessed, according to the text as settled in the distant University of Oxford." (Müller 1899a, 25). One could of course question whether this

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with the Hindus, according to the investigations of the modern philologists, who will ere long rise to the rank of a Veda-Vyâsa (arranger and revealer of the Veda) of the Kaliyuga. … As Yavanacharya (a Greek teacher) gave to the Hindus his system of astronomy many centuries ago, so the German Bhatta (Doctor) is now giving them his edition of the Rig-Veda, and will, as he promises, furnish them with his commentaries upon them." (in Müller 1899a, 32–33)

[33] Dodson (2007b, 52–53) mentions several critical responses such as Pramadadasa Mittra (active around 1860–1880) and Siva Prasad. Among the major critics were of course Dayananda Saraswati and prominent members of the Ārya Samāj, about which Dodson (2007b, 56) writes: "But the most ardent critic of European interpretations of the Vedas in the late 19th century was Guru Datta Vidyarthi (1864–90), leader of the 'Gurukul' wing of the Hindu reformist organization, the Arya Samaj. Dayananda Sarasvati accused Max Müller of being largely ignorant of Vedic Sanskrit."

[34] In the preface of the *Ṛg Veda* edition, Müller writes that the work is not meant for the "general scholar, but only for those who make Sanskrit their special study, and for those among the natives of India who are still able to read their own Sacred Books in the language of the original." (Müller 1890, viii, my translation)

[35] Van der Veer (2001, 107) noted the same, emphasizing the use of philology in India as "an authoritative science for the transformation of Hindu traditions."

anecdote can really be taken as illustrative of the publication's broader effect in India – in its double dimension of altering textual practices and upturning hierarchies. Given the persistence of traditional Vedic schools with a teaching strictly based on the oral tradition, this is rather unlikely. It is however clear that the edition was received in India and that it contributed to open the text to people external to the traditional circles of its transmission such as women and lower castes.

Other works such as the *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion* found a wide audience in India, with more direct effects. The text exposes the notion of religion as a "sense of the infinite", frontally opposing the Hume-De Brosses line of argument on the polytheist or fetishist origins of religion.[36] On the one hand, it is deploying a "proto-phenomenological" program that can be read as heretic (or very liberal) Christian theology. On the other hand, the text could be employed not only as a pamphlet against evangelical mischaracterizations of "Hindu traditions" as more or less elaborate forms of savagery, but also as a way to confirm the core doctrine of several movements of reform, such as, precisely, the Brahmo Samaj.[37] A figure who engaged himself in different social struggles and published a number of articles to this end in several Indian periodicals, the Parsi Behramji Malabari (1853–1912), contributed to spread this text widely in India: he translated it in Gujarati (Müller 1881) and organized its translation in yet other languages, Bengali, Hindi, Tamil and even Sanskrit.[38] Müller himself was sympathetic to these efforts and wrote the following to Malabari:

> I am deeply interested in the effect which my Hibbert Lectures will produce in India. When writing them I was often thinking of my friends in your country more than of my audience at Westminster.

And in a letter of February 1882:

> I wanted to tell those few at least whom I might hope to reach in English, what the true historical value of their ancient religion is, as looked upon, not from exclusively

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36363636 Müller (1901 [1878], 186) acknowledges clearly the role of the Indian case for his theorizing about religion: "I have selected the ancient religion of India to supply the historical illustrations of my own theory of the origin and growth of religion. That theory was suggested to me during a lifelong study of the sacred books of India; it rests therefore on facts, though I am responsible for their interpretation".

3737 Gidumal is the author of a biography of Malabari (1892) with selected added texts from him. Even if this is arguably difficult to check, both Malabari (1903) and Menant (1907) emphasize the influence of Müller's Hibbert lectures in India.

38 Müller sent Malabari a copy of his essay (Müller 1902, 61–62) and was then informed about the initiative (1902, 126–127). Of the mentioned languages, only the Gujarati (Müller 1881) and the Hindi versions were ever completed.

> European or Christian, but from a historical point of view. I wished to warn against two dangers: that of undervaluing or despising the ancient national religion, as is done too often by your half-Europeanized youths; and that of overvaluing it, and interpreting it as it was never meant to be interpreted, of which you may see a painful instance in Dayananda Sarasvati's labors on the Veda.

Finally, other figures active in the national freedom struggle made a strategic use of Müller's views about India, especially those that could be construed as speaking of a consubstantial relation between colonizers and colonized. In this context, the essay *India, What Can It Teach Us?* (1883) received a great deal of attention. Müller wrote for example that

> If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions of some of them which well deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant, I should point to India. (Müller 1883, 24).

The phrase caught the attention of M. K. Gandhi, who used it as an argument in legal procedures against the colonial government, for example when underwriting petitions to extend Indian interests. In his writings about religion, Gandhi equally re-used Müller's views on "Aryanism", emphasizing the racial and spiritual proximity between Indian and British peoples (Chidester 2014, 49–50).

While these cases only relate to India, Müller's auto-biographical writings also signal privileged contacts with other regions and actors, such as the Japanese Buddhist monks Nanjo Bunyu (1849–1927) and Kenjiu Kasawara (1851–1883) who stayed in Oxford and worked with Müller (Müller 1884, 178–219). In particular, Nanjo Bunyu had an extremely influential and prolific activity after his return to Japan in 1884, using the skills learned in England to edit and print an important number of Chinese and Sanskrit Buddhist texts. There would be ample material for further research as it is clear that the collaboration had long lasting consequences and that Japanese scholars were an important part of Müller's wide and eclectic epistolary network.[39]

As Rabault-Feuerhahn well demonstrated (Rabault-Feuerhahn 2008), oriental studies in the 19th century were largely organized as transnational networks, and India as well as China were definitely part of this network, next to France, Germany and Great Britain. It is not unreasonable to assume that the same "orientalist networks" channelled conceptions about religion traveling, as the scholars, in both directions. In this framework, and in spite

[39] Cf. the contribution of M. Zhang, *infra*, p. 140, for further elements on Nanjo Bunyu in the context of a connected history of Chinese Indological studies.

of the fact that he did not travel himself beyond Europe, Müller appears as an important actor of a connected history of religion(s) between Asia and Europe. Of course, the relationship is fraught with asymmetry in the sense that he was in a more powerful position to impose his views than his interlocutors – notably through privileged relations to prestigious editors with a wide, though certainly not global, diffusion, and through personal relations with high rank British officials. As already mentioned, a "connected religion" approach does not obliterate power dynamics in any way. It encourages on the contrary a close analysis that looks at situational constellations of power and knowledge moving across boundaries with actors and books.[40]

<2> A travelling literatus: Jakob Urner (1883–1961)

Jumping now to the 1920s, let us focus on the region around Dharwad, Karnataka for a case that is strikingly symmetrical to Müller's. In this post-war period, German missionaries of the Basel mission had been forced to leave the territory and their Swiss colleagues remained alone on the field, giving an increasingly large share of their responsibilities to Christian Indians. Among these Swiss missionaries, one figure – Jakob Urner (1883–1961) – stands out, because he developed a strong interest for the Vīraśaiva tradition and its texts, along with the necessary linguistic skills. His time in India coincides with a period of deep changes on the local level, with the deliquescence of the mission as a white European institution and the emergence of nationalist and regionalist movements (and notably, in that region, the revival of the Vīraśaiva tradition) – illustrating the process of groups that redefine themselves according to borrowed terms that are soon not felt borrowed anymore.

Whereas one would typically imagine that, as a missionary, Urner relentlessly tried to press his views on his interlocutors, a closer examination shows that even if there was indeed such an intention, practical circumstances made the whole enterprise much more precarious and ambiguous. The "failure" of the evangelical prospects had however creative effects that are seen for example in the figure of the missionary's language teacher (*munshi*), Channappa Uttangi (1881–1962), from whom Urner learned the Kannada language.[41]

This encounter had at least two important lasting consequences: (1) Working on Kannada reading exercises, Urner became particularly interested in the so-called *vacana* literature of the Vīraśaivas, finding what he perceived as astonishing similarities between

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[40] Chidester (2014, 51) expresses a similar view: "Gandhi's use of imperial theory was situational, deploying Max Müller's research on religion within local and colonial struggles over Indian citizenship and trading rights in South Africa. Imperial theory, therefore, was not always controlled by the metropolitan center."

[41] For further elements reconsidering the positive effects of "failed projects", see Bocking's contribution, *infra*, p. 161.

these texts and his own theological views. These texts – which since then became crucial in the identity construction of modern Karnataka – seemed to support an egalitarian, anti-caste ideology, as well as a religious practice centred on the individual devotion to a single divinity. A full collection had been published in 1923, edited by one important actor of the local revivalist movement, Phakirappa Gurubasappa Halakatti (1880–1964) (Halakatti 1923).[42] Supposed to date back to the 12th century, the corpus was actually a collection of texts belonging to different places and times, selected for their progressive ideology and fitting to the beginning of the 20th century.[43] First imagining a Christian influence, Urner progressively developed a genuine interest for these texts and as soon as 1923, translated a series of them in English and German, probably helped by his language teacher.[44] In the end, he came to see in them a roadmap for social progress for Karnataka and possibly for India as a whole, a roadmap that was particular since it was not only not Christian, but also largely deviated from the standard Vedāntic conception of Indian religions that was then gaining a prominent status. In this sense, Urner largely echoed the views of his language teacher. (2) A second effect was that the *munshi* learned from Urner how to apply a philological approach to the texts, and discovered through him the work of an important *vacanakāra* named Sarvajña. Uttangi embarked on a major work of manuscript collection and edition, and became a recognized reference in the domain. Later, he developed a syncretic theology, conciliating his Christian identity with regionalist and nationalist views, partly using to this end works in comparative religion that had been sent to him by Urner such as William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1901–1902).[45]

<1> In conclusion

By contrast to Müller, Urner was in contact not so much with a Westernized, Indian elite, but with non-elite groups fighting for recognition in the political and religious arenas of both the region and the nation. The situation in their respective contexts of activity mirrors this difference: whereas Müller was in a dominant position, Urner was clearly marginalized: in his "home country", he was in the margins of academic Indian studies; in India, he was never part of the local political dynamics that composed the context of his work, and he was not particularly successful in accomplishing evangelical goals either. Another difference is in the relation to the language: Urner learned Kannada "on the field", with a

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[42] A few of Basava's *vacanas* were published in the *Indian Antiquary*, edited and translated by Halakatti and another Christian missionary, John Nicol Farquehar (Halakatti & Farquhar 1922).

[43] Boratti (2010) gives a good description of the constitution of this corpus and of the underlying interests that framed it.

[44] The texts are kept in the archives of the Basel Mission, BMA C-10.89.

[45] Sebastian (2005/6) provides a useful analysis of Uttangi's intellectual and political profile.

local scholar, whereas Müller learned his Sanskrit with European scholars and in European libraries.

Nevertheless, Müller and Urner both acted within specific transnational institutions (academia for Müller, Christian mission for Urner) that were dealing with issues of religion. Both also produced important effects on the local context, calling for a multipolar contextualization of their work, ideally pursued in different languages (English, German, Bengali, Gujarati, Kannada, Sanskrit etc.). In quite unexpected ways, they both mirror, in their respective works, powerful local political and religious dynamics (Brahmo Samaj / Vīraśaiva revivalism) of which they somehow became spokespersons, almost on a ventriloquist mode, while of course not giving up entirely a normative standpoint (confidence in the superiority of science for Müller, desire to propagate Christianity for Urner). Both cases also show well how easily scholarly discourses about religion can move across different epistemic levels or genres, from "religion" to religion and the way back.[46] Finally, it is noteworthy that the "actual travel" of actors is not a necessary prerequisite for a "connected history", considering other kinds of structuring networks, such as that of the circulation of books, letters or messages. In sum, the "connected religion" approach helps to see Müller not as a recluse in his library, but as an important node in a transnational network which channelled conceptions of religion. Similarly, Urner appears not only as a missionary imparting and preaching a religious doctrine on future converts, but also as an actor whose views were themselves altered by the situation of contact.

To conclude, the proposed framework opens new ways into the historiography of the study of religions, to be reconsidered under the lens of interactions with different circles of religious (and non-Christian) actors, texts or practices on a global scale. The approach is able (1) to develop alternative perspectives on topics that have already been studied by bringing together separate historiographical traditions; (2) to criticize a "world religions" model and stereotyped conceptions about "oriental religions" by focusing on processes of changes and individual appropriations; (3) to bring nuance to historical accounts of the study of religion and to intellectual genealogies which often remain exclusively confined to Europe. Müller's case shows – I contend – that intellectual genealogies focusing on a specifically European tradition in the study of religion (Gladigow 1995) might greatly benefit by widening their scope outside of Europe. It becomes then possible to go beyond a mere criticism of the "orientalism" that has characterized much of the early production in the comparative study of religions and towards a less Eurocentric conception of the discipline's own genealogy – and, one hopes, of its future.

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[46] In that sense, the traditional narrative of the history of the study of religion is in need of some revision, to frame it in a more global context than usually acknowledged and to take into account the contribution of actors involved in religious agendas (see Habermas 2010, for an argument about the contribution of missionaries to the construction of a secular "science of religion").

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