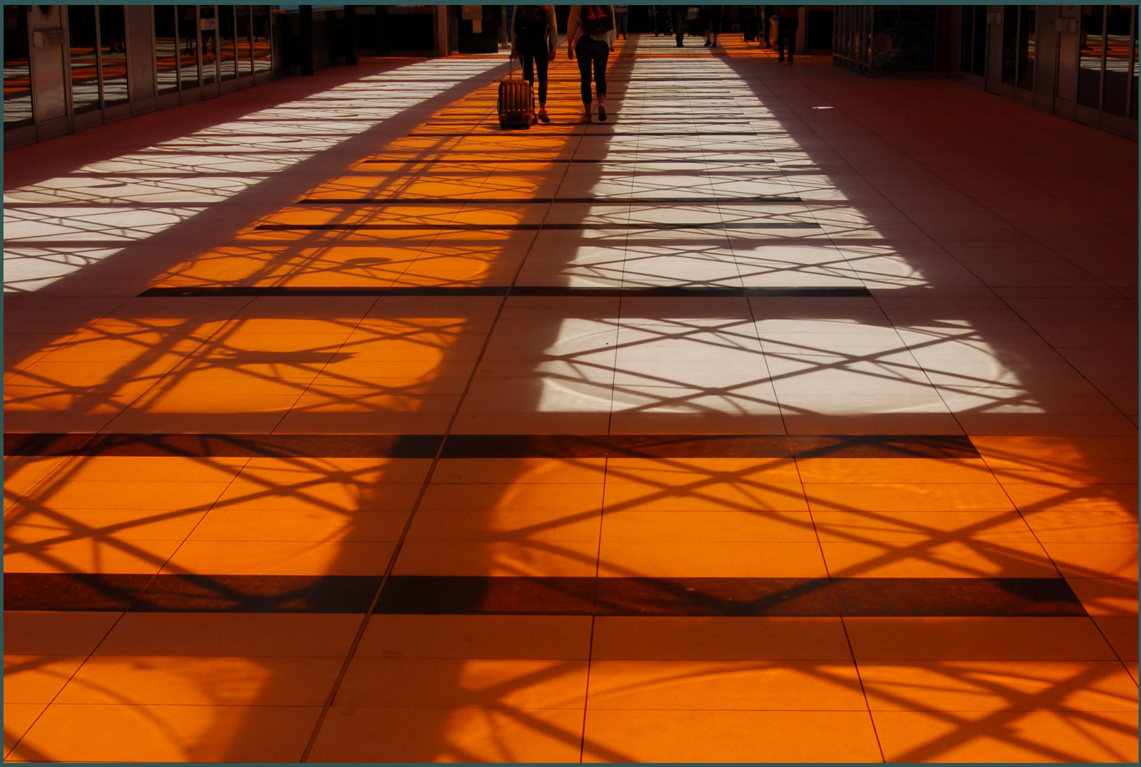
Crossing the Shadow Lines: Essays on the Topicality of Amitav Ghosh's Modern Classic

edited by
Esterino ADAMI, Carmen CONCILIO and Alessandro VESCOVI



«QuadRi»
Quaderni di RiCOGNIZIONI

The scholarly essays which are gathered in this issue of “QuadRi. Quaderni di RiCognizioni” have been selected as a result of a call for papers among those presented at the International Conference on *The Shadow Lines* Thirty Years After, held at the University of Milan and the University of Turin on 12-13 November 2018. New contributions have also been added, due to the enormously rich and rewarding response. We thank the Italian Association for the Study of Cultures and Literatures in English (AISCLI www.aiscli.it) for sponsoring both the conference and the present publication, which is published thanks to the co-funding by Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Straniere e Culture Moderne and the Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici dell’Università di Torino.

Crossing the Shadow Lines: Essays on the Topicality of Amitav Ghosh’s Modern Classic. E. Adami, C. Concilio and A. Vescovi (eds), Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Straniere e Culture Moderne, Università di Torino, Torino 2020 – ISBN 9788875901738.

Cover image: Going Away and Coming Home, courtesy of Pikist.com

Graphic project and editorial layout by Arun Maltese: Progetto grafico e impaginazione: Arun Maltese (www.bibliobear.com)

«QuadRi»
Quaderni di *RiCOGNIZIONI*
XI

2020

I «QUADERNI DI *RICOGNIZIONI*»

«QuadRi» – Quaderni di RiCOGNIZIONI è la collana curata dal Comitato scientifico e dalla Redazione di *RiCOGNIZIONI. Rivista di lingue, letterature e culture moderne*, edita online dal Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature Straniere e Culture Moderne dell'Università di Torino. La rivista e i suoi *Quaderni* nascono con l'intento di promuovere ri-cognizioni, sia trattando da prospettive diverse autori, movimenti, argomenti ampiamente dibattuti della cultura mondiale, sia ospitando interventi su questioni linguistiche e letterarie non ancora sufficientemente indagate. I *Quaderni di RiCOGNIZIONI* sono destinati ad accogliere in forma di volume i risultati di progetti di ricerca e gli atti di convegni e incontri di studio.

ISSN: 2420-7969

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Via Sant'Ottavio, 20, Torino
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RiCOGNIZIONI. Rivista di lingue, letterature e culture moderne
SITO WEB: http://www.ojs.unito.it/index.php/ricognizioni/index
E-MAIL: ricognizioni.lingue@unito.it
Issn: 2384-8987

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Università
di Torino

Dipartimento di
Lingue e Letterature straniere e
Culture moderne

The published contributions have been submitted to blind *peer review*.
The editors are responsible for this procedure and testify to its validity.

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INTRODUCTION

THE TOPICALITY OF *THE SHADOW LINES*

Bordering Texts and Foreshadowed Contexts

Esterino ADAMI*, Carmen* CONCILIO*, Alessandro* VESCOVI

Amitav Ghosh's second novel, *The Shadow Lines* (1988), was notoriously conceived in 1984, in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination, when Delhi was upturned by bloodthirsty mobs that attacked the Sikh community killing, raping, and looting. This was the "madeleine" that brought the would-be novelist (he was halfway through writing *The Circle of Reason*) back to 1964, when a similar mob attacked Hindus in Dhaka, where Ghosh, then a child, was living with his family. Thus *The Shadow Lines* became a historical novel about Bengal in the Sixties, a portrait of post-Independence India, a *Bildungsroman*, or indeed a *Künstlerroman*, about a young Bengali, an Indian reply to both *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1915) and *Remembrance of Time Past* (1922) that enthused a generation of Indian intellectuals. Indeed, *The Shadow Lines* is the first and so far only novel by a living author to be included in University syllabi all over India. Unsurprisingly this is, among Ghosh's books, the most written about, especially in South Asia.

At the beginning of the 1980s, *Midnight's Children* (1981) recounted the story of Indian Swaraj in a kind of mock-heroic poem that sardonically encompassed several decades in hundreds of pages virtually launching that mode of writing that Linda Hutcheon would later categorise as historical metafiction. Rushdie's novel problematised the possibility of writing history through his famous metaphor of chutney. Like fruit in a chutney jar, historical facts can indeed be preserved for the future, but only a whiff remains of their original taste. Nonetheless, they may be delicious in their new way. *Midnight's Children* reacted to the corrosive critiques of the very possibility of writing history presented by Nietzsche and his disciple Foucault. History is teleological, Nietzsche would argue, always written by the winners to magnify the present. Every historiography is but a narrative that connects odd facts chosen in order to prove a certain theory, mostly that the present is better than the past, and the present rulers have a moral right to be in their position. Thus the English narrative in the XIX century implied that India was going through a decadent period when the British arrived and rescued it, helping Hindus to regain their old splendour. Nothing could be better for Indians than the British Raj, which guaranteed peace, equality (among subjects), legal rights, and the liberty to cultivate ancient Indian wisdom and philosophy. Nationalism exposed the hypocrisy of this view but appropriated the English ability to manipulate history and created the Partition, the secession of Bangladesh, the fighting over Kashmir, the War with China. The generation of intellectuals born after the Partition had to deal with a very discredited notion of history. Instead of refashioning history in a postcolonial way, Rushdie chose to mock historiography, thus weakening the prosopopoeia of nationalist discourses. Nothing seems able to resist Rushdie's deflating prose. Few readers have noticed that Rushdie's short story "The Prophet's Hair," collected in *East and West* (1994), tells the same story of the stolen relic that triggers the riot in *The Shadow Lines*. Completely ignoring the tumults, Rushdie imagines that the purloined relic turns those who come into contact with it into religious zealots, no matter how secular they were.

Aside from Rushdie's undisputable bravura, mocking history was a comparatively easy task for someone based in London and speaking from the position of an English-educated expatriate. At the end of the Eighties, writing from Delhi, Ghosh faced the same problem with history and its biases, but he could not express himself in the same sardonic way – though his previous novel, *The Circle of Reason* (1986), had been closer to Rushdie's magic realism. Ghosh was conscious that words, or the lack thereof, in that situation, could cost lives. He wanted to deflate Hindu nationalism and to deprecate violence, without making a mythology of violence. Writing this novel was like treading on eggshells. Ghosh strove to find a new poetics that could accommodate his different compulsions. As a result, *The Shadow Lines* is a historical novel without the details of history, a novel on memory without the vagaries of memory, a novel on communal violence without the actual violence, a *Künstlerroman* without a *Künstler*, a political novel without politics, a love story without lovers. Long before Calvino wrote his *Memos for the New Millennium*, Ghosh had found his own way to lightness. The novel carries the emotional weight of traditional genres, but it deftly avoids the pitfalls of hackneyed literary *topoi*. Unlike Ghosh himself, who used to play the violin in his young years, the protagonist of the *Shadow Lines* does not play any instrument, and yet the entire novel is like a musical composition. The enigmatic character of May, a musician turned social worker, may reflect the author's perplexities.

May is not the only reflection of Ghosh's complex views. The protagonist, a Calcutta boy slightly older than himself, is another alter ego, and so is Ila, the daughter of a diplomat, who spends her childhood and teens living in different countries – just like Amitav himself. Robi, who studies in faraway Delhi, and, of course, Tha'mma, with her emphasis on discipline (it takes a lot of discipline to complete a novel like this) and her nostalgia for the simple heroic times when there was only one recognised enemy, and, last but not least, the intellectual bookworm, Tridib may all be considered author's reflections. All these characters exhibit signs of the different intellectual and psychological compulsions that prompted Ghosh to write the novel. Thus the novel does not capture the plight of Ghosh's generation only in the young and clumsy protagonist. All characters somehow partake in the bewilderment of those who were born after Independence and had to strive to find an identity that was neither shaped by nationalism, nor by antinationalism, neither by religion nor by Western liberalism. An identity that was secular and yet deeply rooted in *ahimsa*, firmly attached to the town of Calcutta and yet cosmopolitan.

The Shadow Lines has gained enormous resonance in postcolonial studies as it touches upon some of the major issues in the fields of colonial history, national identities, memory, and borders. Likewise, the novel has been seminal in the definition and discussion of a postcolonial geography that challenges the current cartographical order. Indeed, it has inspired reflections even outside the field of postcolonial studies, as in the case of border theory. The scenes of Tha'mma's bewilderment as she is going to fly over the border bound to Dhaka, and the final scene, when the protagonist is toying with an atlas and a compass, have been cited countless times, and our readers will see that they have not exhausted their meanings yet. Besides, the novel has been studied from the perspective of trauma studies, as an attempt to move beyond the trauma of 1984 Delhi riot, which recalled Dhaka 1964, which in turn recalled the 1947 Partition trauma. Indeed, all these episodes are offshoots of the India-Pakistan Partition. Other scholars have tackled *The Shadow Lines* from a feminist perspective, highlighting cousin Ila's plight as a postcolonial woman and Tha'mma's patriarchal stance. Informally talking with Indian students, one may come across never published stern critics of the novel too. Young millennial women complain that Ila is given the stereotypical position of a sexy but vain coquette, and eventually poetic justice punishes her for not being like the male protagonist. Dalit students complain that the novel magnifies the urban upper middle class, as if it exhausted all that India has to offer and addressed all of Bengal's major problems. Surely, they have a point when they complain that it is a pity that books by Mahasweta Devi have not won the same position as *The Shadow Lines*, which, however, certainly never aspired at addressing all of India's problems. Ironically, another eminent Bengali scholar has criticised Ghosh for not upholding and defending the *bhadrasamaj*, namely the social class to which Ghosh himself belongs, together with Tagore and Satyajit Ray.

Three years ago, as the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of the novel was approaching, the three editors of this collection were discussing the influence of *The Shadow Lines* after one generation. We realised that the novel could be tackled from different viewpoints, other than those mentioned above. We also reflected upon the novel's topicality and its position in the subsequent production of the author. What has been the literary impact of *The Shadow Lines* on Indian literature in these decades? How can it help us read Ghosh's later production, and how can later novels help us read *The Shadow Lines*? Can new ways of reading be applied to this postcolonial classic? What books, even outside the Anglosphere, have influenced or have been influenced by *The Shadow Lines*? An international conference issued from our questions. It was celebrated at the Universities of Milan and Turin in November 2018. Among the keynote speakers were Silvia Albertazzi, Supriya Chaudhuri, Anna Nadotti (Ghosh's lifelong friend and Italian translator), and John Thieme, while speakers convened from Europe and South Asia. As we dealt with one novel only, each paper responded to the next, and each received the deserved attention. We also informed Amitav Ghosh, who kindly sent us a memoir on the novel printed for the first time following this introduction. Besides, Ghosh sent us some typescript pages of the novel that are also included and discussed in this collection.

Most of the essays that follow originate from the discussions that took place on those two days and engage *The Shadow Lines* as a classic: in its genesis and its topicality. We have divided the essays into two sections entitled "Bordering texts" and "Foreshadowed contexts". The former deals with literary techniques and texts that have influenced the author, or that have been somehow influenced by this novel. Philology, intertextuality, narratology, and rewriting are the focus of the research. The second section discusses several of the themes brought up by the narrative both in the context of the 1980s and in the present through cultural studies, postcolonial studies, and more recent research fields such as world literature, literary geographies, and ageing studies.

Bordering Texts

The first section begins with Supriya Chaudhuri's reflections upon the title and its resemblance to Joseph Conrad's novella *The Shadow-Line* (1917), which can be seen as a sort of shadow behind Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988). However, some textual clues should be noted, for example the omission of the hyphen in, and the plural form of, Ghosh's title. As the scholar argues, the devices of psychic hyphenation, and reflexive self-duplication, as used by Conrad to depict the career of his hero, are transferred in Ghosh's novel to the Indian subcontinent, rather than the history of any single individual. Thus, the shadow lines of Ghosh's title divide populations and territories, and yet, like the border between India and Pakistan, cannot actually be seen. They may also refer to the web of relations and interconnections between persons and events, generating a network of broken or fractured lines where the conjunctions (the hyphens,) must be supplied by the indefatigable memory-work and research of the unnamed narrator (who is himself like a hyphen in his linking function). However, for Chaudhuri, Ghosh's decision to omit the Conradian hyphen is deliberate because it opens up the title to nuance and ambiguity, and disclaims investment in hyphenated identities as such. Ultimately, as the scholar holds, the novel encourages us to go beyond borders and identities, and to learn to live together.

The focus of Alessandro Vescovi's article lies not only in the consideration of the text as a quarry of meaningful elements, but also in the genetic process by which a narrative text achieves its final, and official, version. In scrutinising the digital version of some of the original pages of the typescript of the novel, Vescovi applies a rigorous genetic methodology to track down the multiple variants (and lives) of the story, and its significant transformations through Ghosh's corrections, substitutions, and changes. The results of this exploration are then discussed with reference to three specific critical frameworks. The first deals with the implication of naming, and a look at the pathway that leads to the choice of particular names for characters; Tridib, Ila and Tha'mma, for example, reveal an interpolation of Sanskrit and other references, but also illustrate and problematise the logic of perfect binaries. The second framework is concerned with the key role of plot construction through its kernels and satellites, or scaffolding and fillers in Moretti's terminology, whereas the third illuminates the stylistic patterns that operate at the micro-level of the sentence, and that originate from the changes made on the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes.

Eleonora Sparvoli is one among various scholars who tackle the aspect of the influences on Ghosh's writing. In particular, she envisions *The Shadow Lines* as somehow indebted to but also throwing new light on Proust's *Recherche*. If Ghosh claims that Proust showed the way for an alternative Modernism, Sparvoli detects how the narrative-within-the-narrative, or narrative mediation, is a key function of this "Proustian method". Consequently, both places – and place names – and actions – historical ones as well as private ones – resonate in a sort of *déjà vu,* both in Proust and in Ghosh. Furthermore, Sparvoli illustrates how the paradigm of the *désir triangulaire* discussed by René Girard is a working device for both authors. A reality effect is reached by both of them through the narrations of others, but never fully nor satisfactorily. Similarly, it remains ultimately also beyond the reader's grasp.

Another form of influence is investigated by Vishnupriya Sengupta, who considers Amitav Ghosh's admitted debt to V. S. Naipaul. While considering nation-building narrative as a project for both authors, she claims that the main difference between them is recognisable in Ghosh's universalist faith in humanity. In particular, the scholar concentrates on Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (1967) in relation to *The Shadow Lines* to show how these novels offer contrary perspectives on the imagined nation and underline man's inherent aptitude or inaptitude of inhabiting diverse cultures with unconditional tolerance.

By adopting a stylistic and narratological perspective, Federica Zullo investigates the shapes of "mind style" elaborated by Ghosh in his novel, with particular regard to the idea of terror and its narrative rendition. As a matter of fact, since his first novels and essays written in the early 1980s, Amitav Ghosh has shown a keen interest not in war itself, but in its more varied and contemporary version, that is social and political turmoil, small conflicts, communal violence, "incendiary circumstances" (Alexander 2003). *The Shadow Lines* brings to the fore the fear of the mob, together with the fear of the Other, of the terrorists, of the poisoning, or no fear at all: the diegetic development of these issues affects the reader thanks to the use of effective stylistic devices such as parallelisms, alliteration, repetitions and similes, and the over-lexicalisation of certain words. The analysis intends to show Ghosh's aim while writing *The Shadow Lines*: to find a suitable literary form and, at the same time, a suitable literary and linguistic form to illustrate social and political dramatic situations, with the intent of providing the reader with alternative trajectories, across the possibilities of language.

According to Asis De and Nirmalendu Maiti, the main nucleus of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* lies in a philosophical understanding of the significance of borderlines between nations and their people on politico-cultural levels. The political and ethno-religious contexts of post-Partition Bengal, in the eastern part of India, is the means to bring home the cultural significance of the "Partition" between the Bengali-speaking people of two different religions across the border of two nations. Through the analysis of Ghosh's narrative, the two scholars interrogate the very meaning of national borders (which Ghosh likes to describe as "shadow" line) in post-Partition Bengal, paying attention to the ideology of the Other. From this angle, the concept of the border becomes plural and can also be applied to the distinction between the human and the non-human, or the human exploitation and the violence exerted on the non-human and the environmental anxiety, which significantly reverberates in later works by Ghosh, both fictional and non-fictional, such as *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *The Great Derangement* (2016).

Lucio De Capitani's essay closes the first section focussing on this type of environmental anxiety and on the representation of riots in *The Shadow Lines.*The author convincingly argues that this establishes a narrative mode in Ghosh's corpus, where crowds, mobs, and collective agency are perceived as dangerous, threatening and violent. De Capitani detects traces of this "pessimistic" portrayal in other texts by Ghosh – both essays and creative works. Analysing and connecting this view to the more recent representations of environmental movements in Ghosh's critical works on the subject matter of climate change, De Capitani critically questions the fault lines of Ghosh's substantial scepticism towards the effectiveness of politically engaged activism.

Foreshadowed Contexts

The second section opens with John Thieme's essay. The British scholar contextualises the pervasive metaphor of the Lacanian mirror in Ghosh's novel. Amitav Ghosh deploys an extensive use of the metaphor, characterising divided spaces – a house and a country; Calcutta vs. Dhaka; India vs. England – while doubling up characters – the protagonist and Nick, the protagonist and Tridib, Ila and May, old Tha'mma and old Jethamoshai. The journeys back and forth from Calcutta to Dhaka and from Calcutta to London best represent geocriticism, while drawing new topographies and exposing the entanglements of colonial history and its consequences after decolonisation. The encounter between Self and Other cannot be, in the end, but a recognition of a mirror image.

Silvia Albertazzi considers *The Shadow Lines* as a compendium of postcolonial crucial issues such as identity, the need for independence, the difficult relationship with colonial culture, the rewriting of the colonial past, the impulse to create a new language and a new narrative form. Departing from Conradian echoes, Silvia Albertazzi critically elaborates on Salman Rushdie's ideas on frontiers and homelands to reach a deeper scrutiny of *The Shadow Lines*. In the text, she detects a central concern in searching for and in providing the meaning for historical violent events and their effects on individual lives. The power of invention and imagination seems to be the sharpest tool in the hands of postcolonial writers, in dealing with that kind of postmemory.

Binayak Roy's contribution adopts a located perspective by mapping out the notion of *adda*, which is – in the Indian and Bengali cultural context – a kind of a hobby, a pastime pursued for its own sake, or a kind of collective talk in a group of intimates. As the scholar demonstrates, *The Shadow Lines* is deeply rooted in the Bengali literary tradition in its examination of the multifaceted nature of *adda*. The range of Tridib's intellectual interests, for example, is matched by the fluidity of his personality and performativity in his Gole Park *adda* sessions. *Adda* as a form of speech contributes to the consolidation of group identity/community. In that sense, *adda* is an oral performance involving self-enrichment and emerges as a powerful narrative stratagem, which permits to evaluate issues like the post-liberal political economy and disintegration of the Indian nation-state. As the narrative recognises the place of *adda* in modern-day Bengali society and its key role in the identity formation of diasporic Bengalis, its effects also indicate a process of hybridisation of modes of expression. Though *adda* is primarily a Bengali institution, the use of English codes and contexts make it transcend its Bengaliness and become transnational.

Carmen Concilio selects a comparative approach to explore the similarities between Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and Caterina Edwards's *Finding Rosa* (2010) by resorting to Border studies and Ageing studies. Despite temporal and geographical distance, the two novels denounce the effects of a geography disfigured by history. Partition in India and the question of Istria in Italy turned the homes of hundreds into a foreign country, due to contested borders. In the two novels, two elderly women, one old and confused, the other suffering from Alzheimer's, embody the displacement and disorientation of migrants and expatriates. Their linguistic and sentimental attachment to their homes is particularly dramatic because of ageing, partial memory loss and cognitive impairment.

In her paper entitled "Significant Geographies in *The Shadow Lines*", Francesca Orsini argues that approaches to world literature are often orchestrated as binaries of local/global, major/minor, provincial/cosmopolitan, taking them as given positions on a single world map. However, in *The Shadow Lines* Ghosh seems to adopt a more complex and interesting view of space, the world, perception, and narration. In the novel's multi-layered narration, space, time, and the self are always mirrored through other people, times and spaces whilst places, too, acquire reality and meaning only after they are first narrated and imagined, often several times, and before they are experienced directly. From this scenario a type of positioning emerges with deep existential and epistemological implications that reach beyond the mere critique of colonial and national border-making. From this perspective, the article aims to chart how (and which) spaces become "significant" in the novel, and how the novel's approach to space can be productive for thinking about world literature.

Like Binayak Roy, Sumit Ray reflects on what might be called a glocal anthropological paradigm: the Bengali *bhadralok* or the genteel Bengali class that emerged from the influence of colonial education in the nineteenth century. The genealogy of the *bhadralok* goes back to Raj Rammohan Roy, and includes such intellectuals as Rabindranath Tagore and Satyajit Ray. One distinguishing feature of the *bhadralok* is his cosmopolitanism and hence his partiality to travelling, which Ghosh himself shares. The essay convincingly argues that Tridib is framed by this mode of representation in *The Shadow Lines*. Travels across borders and nations and globe-trotting in general are major *topoi* in this kind of narratives, so typical of Bengali literature and culture, but easily exportable and above all so infectious for all the characters in that same novel.

Last but by no means least is Anna Nadotti's essay, written almost entirely in Italian, which she means as a homage to Amitav Ghosh's achievements in that language, as she explains in her introductory paragraph in English. We differ with her choice of not using the English critical koine, but not to the point of depriving our Italophone readers of this contribution, which is also a valuable testimony. In her role as official Italian translator of Amitav Ghosh's works for the past forty years, Anna Nadotti writes about her experience in reading, besides translating, Ghosh. She first underlines the author's attention to, and recreation of, languages and idioms which characterise his aesthetic research, while reaching its apex in the *Ibis* trilogy. In relation to *The Shadow Lines*, Anna Nadotti follows a chain of suggestive cross-references and "quotations" from both Indian cinema and Hollywood's films and stars. Particularly, she concentrates on the iconic episode taking place inside a bombed London cinema: a *mise en abym* of a love scene as if feebly lit by a light beam coming in from a hole in the half-demolished wall, where the projecting machine had stood.

Acknowledgments

This project was born out of a common, intense experience in reading Amitav Ghosh's works over the years, as well as a need for professional cooperation and intellectual proximity, that in times of Covid-19 has become even more urgent than ever. Thus, beginning with the invitation of Indian, Italian and European scholars, some of them good friends, some of them good colleagues, more often than not both, and mostly critics we deeply esteem, we managed to organise an – almost unique – itinerant joint-conference between the University of Milan and the University of Turin, with scholars, students and translators travelling to and fro. More recently, as editors of these selected contributions stemming from that intellectual encounter and debate around a founding text in the field of Anglophone literatures in its thirtieth anniversary, we have produced a critical collection which is a homage to one outstanding anglophone contemporary writer, intellectual and essayist, who speaks to three continents and is justly globally recognised.

We heartily thank all the participants in the conference, all the participants in the present publication, and we thank Amitav Ghosh for constantly inspiring and surprising us all.

Torino and Milano, December 2020

A LETTER SENT TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN *THE SHADOW LINES THIRTY YEARS AFTER*

Amitav GHOSH

The Shadow Lines emerged out of my experience of living in New Delhi the 1980s. This was a time of bitter religious and ethnic conflicts culminating in the horrifying anti-Sikh pogroms of 1984. It was in the wake of that trauma that I began to think about the ways in which riots and communal violence have shaped my own life.

At that time those conflicts seemed to be a feature of what the late V.S. Naipaul used to call 'half-made societies.' But the linear, teleological assumptions of the 20th century no longer hold. On September 11, 2001, in Brooklyn, looking across the East River, at the smoking towers of the World Trade Center, I recalled vividly that November day in Delhi, in 1984, when I had stared incredulously at the columns of smoke that were rising above that city.

In the years since, as religious conflicts and terrorism have proliferated around the world, I have often felt as though I were living through a reversal in time: it is as if the condition of being "half-made" were now becoming universal. This is perhaps one reason for the longevity of *The Shadow Lines*: perhaps there is something in it that leads readers to recognize a predicament that is unsettlingly contemporary.

For me the long career of *The Shadow Lines* has been both a blessing and a puzzle. At the time of its publication the book received very little attention: reviews were sparse, and the sales so paltry that the book seemed, as the publishing industry likes to say, to have "sunk like a stone". That is not the least of the reasons why it now seems miraculous that *The Shadow Lines* has not only endured for thirty years but is still finding readers – especially since this is a time when the shelf life of most books has dwindled to a matter of weeks. This longevity is due, I am sure, not only to the novel's merits, but also to the fact that it has been kept alive by those who have supported it and passed it on to their students: in other words, many of you who are here today.

For a single novel to have an international seminar dedicated to it is indeed an extraordinary privilege and I cannot but be humbled by it. While I am grateful to everyone who is participating in this conference I would particularly like to thank those who were responsible for planning and organizing it: Silvia Albertazzi, Supriya Chaudhuri, John Thieme, Carmen Concilio, Esterino Adami, Carlotta Beretta, Anna Nadotti and last, but by no means least, Alessandro Vescovi.

Brooklyn, October 19, 2018

I.

BORDERING TEXTS

THE ABSENCE OF A HYPHEN

Borders, Crossings, Identities in *The Shadow Lines*

Supriya CHAUDHURI

ABSTRACT • The title of Joseph Conrad's novella *The Shadow-Line* (1917) stands like a shadow behind that of Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988). The essay begins by noting the omission of the hyphen in, and the plural form of, Ghosh's title. It goes on to argue that the devices of psychic hyphenation, and reflexive self-duplication, as used by Conrad to depict the career of his hero, are transferred in Ghosh's novel to subcontinental history, rather than the history of any single individual. The shadow lines of Ghosh's title divide populations and territories, yet, like the border between India and Pakistan, cannot actually be seen. They may also refer to the web of relations and interconnections between persons and events, a network of broken or fractured lines where the conjunctions, the hyphens, must be supplied by the indefatigable memory-work and research of the unnamed narrator (who is himself like a hyphen in his linking function). However, I argue that Ghosh's decision to omit the Conradian hyphen is deliberate: it opens up the title to nuance and ambiguity, and disclaims investment in hyphenated identities as such. Rather, the novel urges us to go beyond borders and identities, and to learn to live together.

KEYWORDS • Joseph Conrad; Shadow-line; Double; Hyphenation; Delayed Decoding; Jaques Derrida; Amitav Ghosh.

A Conradian Echo

No reader of *The Shadow Lines* could have failed to hear a Conradian echo in the title, however muted by its plural form and missing hyphen. Conrad's novella, *The Shadow-Line: A Confession*, written between February and December 1915, was serialised in the *New York Metropolitan Magazine* the following year and published in book form in 1917. It is not, on the face of it, very similar to Amitav Ghosh's second novel, which appeared in print some eighty years later. Yet Ghosh may have intended the allusion as an act of homage if not as an act of imitation, since both pieces of fiction are about borders, crossings, and identities. Conrad's novel was dedicated to his son Borys and "all others who, like himself, have crossed the shadow-line of their generation"; the narrator himself speaks in it of a critical moment of early adulthood, a stage of transition, when "one perceives ahead a shadow-line warning one that the region of early youth, too, must be left behind" (Conrad 1917, dedication page and p. 4). Repeated in the text of the book itself, the hyphen in Conrad's title appears studied and deliberate, though its function, between two substantives, is less than clear: does Conrad mean a "shadowed line", "the shadow of a line", or the "line of a shadow"? Most readers would be content to assume that it is a line that, though present, is somewhat indistinct and shadowy: a boundary or limit set between youth and adulthood, appropriate for a "coming-of-age" narrative.

A hyphen was similarly inserted between two words that could either be taken as two nouns or as an adjective followed by a noun in the title of Conrad's earlier novella "The Secret Sharer," published in two instalments – corresponding to the two parts of the story in later editions – in August and September 1910 in *Harper's Monthly Magazine* (Conrad 1910: 349-359 and 530-541). But it was deleted when the story featured in a collection of "three tales" titled *'Twixt Land and Sea* brought out by J. M. Dent & Sons in 1912, and Conrad may have done this himself, since there was no hyphen in his own holograph manuscript that is now preserved in the Berg Collection in the New York Public Library. It is therefore usual to regard the hyphenated title of "The Secret-Sharer" in *Harper's Magazine* as an intrusive American quirk of punctuation, ending up by making the title more, rather than less, difficult to understand. *The Shadow-Line* was also serialised in America, and shortly thereafter in the *English Review* (1916-17); in book form it was published by J. M. Dent in London (March 1917) and Doubleday in New York (April 1917). Conrad explained in his "Author's Note," (1920) written for the Heinemann collected edition of 1921, that he had first conceived of the story under the title "First Command," and refused to expand on the "origins of the feeling in which its actual title, *The Shadow-Line*, occurred to my mind" (Conrad 1920/2003, "Author's Note", p. 111). Reiterated in the text as in "the actual title," the hyphen here cannot be viewed simply as a typically intrusive specimen of American spelling; it is present in his composite manuscript-typescript, now preserved in the Beinecke Rare Books Library at Yale University and was not removed in any of the early editions.[1]

Doubled and Hyphenated Identities in Conrad's *The Shadow-Line*

Conrad described "The Secret Sharer" and *The Shadow-Line* as his two "Calm-pieces" – that is, studies of seamanship when the ship is becalmed – but both are also, obviously, rites-of-passage narratives, with a young captain coming through a situation of enormous danger to regain self-belief (Conrad 1920/1947 p. ix). If "The Secret Sharer" draws upon the idea of the double or *doppelgänger*, *The Shadow-Line,* a longer and more complex story, ends by bringing its captain through an ordeal reminiscent, if anything, of Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". At the start of the novella, the unnamed

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[1] The composite MS-TS of *The Shadow-Line* was sold by Conrad to the American collector John Quinn. It was his last transaction with the American collector, Conrad preferring thereafter to sell his MSS to the English bibliophile (and forger) Thomas J. Wise. See Conrad, *Collected Letters*, vol. vii (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 134. In August 1916, Conrad had offered the complete corrected TS of *The Shadow-Line* to Quinn, but the transaction did not go through and the corrected TS is now lost: see *Collected Letters*, vol. v (1996), p. 633; *'My Dear Friend:' Further Letters to and about Joseph Conrad*, ed. Owen Knowles (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), p. 81.

I-narrator, a young seaman who rashly gives up his position as first mate on an "excellent sea-boat" without any plans for the future, unexpectedly gains his first command on a British ship in Bangkok harbour, replacing its dead captain. The hyphen of the title is a reminder, if anything, of his own hyphenated state, the "twilight region between youth and maturity in which I had my being then" (Conrad 1917: 37). In this condition, our captain is typically unmindful of others, painfully slow to understand what is going on around him, self-absorbed to the point of narcissism yet unsure of his own abilities, liable to make mistakes but prepared to put himself through extremes of suffering for others he has under his care. His elevation to captain's rank propels him into a nightmarish experience with a becalmed vessel ("as idle as a painted ship/ upon a painted ocean")[2] in the Gulf of Siam, with the island of Koh-Rong (which Conrad calls Koh-ring) looming ahead. He must cross the shadow-line of the entrance to the Gulf, at 8 degree 20 minutes, a line haunted (so his First Mate thinks) by the ghost of his murderous predecessor whose body was committed to the sea at that point. This physical, though invisible, line is symbolically equated with the line that he crosses in his psychic life.

Meanwhile, his crew succumb one by one to tropical fever, probably malaria. His first mate, Mr Burns, barely recovered from his illness, is obsessed with the notion that the ship and its crew are under the curse of the eccentric, probably insane, former captain, who died at sea and not only passed on his disease to the crew, but adulterated the ship's supply of quinine. The young captain, anxious on the one hand to affiliate himself to a line of professional seamen living by a maritime code of honour and loyalty, finds himself on the other hand surrounded by examples of deviance, irresponsibility, and malevolence – the craven drug-taking Steward at the Officers' Sailors' Home, the sponging, dishonest Hamilton, the violin-playing, homicidal former captain of his ship, the half-crazed first mate Burns. The best seaman he has on board is the ship's cook, Ransome, whose weak heart ("our common enemy it was his hard fate to carry consciously within his faithful breast"), does not allow him to carry out a sailor's duties, though he assists the young captain heroically during their nightmare voyage (Conrad 1917: 197). Like the Ancient Mariner, the captain carries an enormous, almost unexplained and exaggerated burden of guilt, having insisted on taking the ship out to sea disregarding the fever warnings, and without checking the ship's stock of quinine. In the end, when he brings the ship into harbour after having been on deck seventeen days with barely a few hours sleep, all that stands between him and madness is duty:

> My heart would sink awfully at the thought of that forecastle at the other end of the dark deck, full of fever-stricken men – some of them dying. By my fault. But never mind. Remorse must wait. I had to steer. (Conrad 1917: 185-186)[3]

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[2] Coleridge, 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', Part II, lines 35-36.

[3] There is a parallel here with Singleton in Conrad's novella *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897; New York: Doubleday, 1914), p. 106: "He steered with care."

At a critical point in the narrative, the captain boards his new ship, and sitting in the captain's chair in the wood-panelled saloon, he anticipates long, testing days at sea, and "searching intimacy" with his own self. It is a moment of self-examination as both self and other, a process helped by the captain's viewing of himself in a mirror, and becoming aware of being watched. As he looks at his image he realises that there is someone else looking at him, his chief mate, Mr Burns, a sick man who later goes mad and has visions of his murderous late captain:

> Deep within the tarnished ormolu frame, in the hot half-light sifted through the awning, I saw my own face propped between my hands. And I stared back at myself with the perfect detachment of distance, rather with curiosity than with any other feeling, except of some sympathy for this latest representative of what for all intents and purposes was a dynasty, continuous not in blood indeed, but in its experience, in its training, in its conception of duty, and in the blessed simplicity of its traditional point of view on life.
>
> It struck me that this quietly staring man whom I was watching, both as if he were myself and somebody else, was not exactly a lonely figure. He had his place in a line of men whom he did not know, of whom he had never heard; but who were fashioned by the same influences, whose souls in relation to their humble life's work had no secrets for him.
>
> Suddenly I perceived that there was another man in the saloon, standing a little on one side and looking intently at me. The chief mate. His long, red moustache determined the character of his physiognomy, which struck me as pugnacious in (strange to say) a ghastly sort of way. How long had he been there looking at me, appraising me in my unguarded day-dreaming state? I would have been more disconcerted if, having the clock set in the top of the mirror-frame right in front of me, I had not noticed that its long hand had hardly moved at all. (Conrad 1917: 76-77)

Initially, as we note, the captain's view of his self-duplication is comforting rather than alarming: he sees himself as one in a line of seamen, carrying out a familiar and traditional set of tasks. But Mr Burns – for all that he is not a villain, and re-appears as a boring but loyal subordinate in the later story "A Smile of Fortune" – is a hugely troublesome presence once his obsessions take over. An unsuccessful candidate for the captain's own command, an easy prey to illness and fantasy, a superstitious, persistent reminder of the captain's homicidal and possibly lustful predecessor, Burns "shadows" the captain, offering alternative possibilities of the seaman's life. Thus the captain of *The Shadow-Line* is also a hyphenated figure in the sense that he carries his double with him, like others who appear in Conrad's fiction – Marlow-Kurtz, Jim-Stein, Nostromo-Decoud, and of course the captain-fugitive in *The Secret Sharer.* In a note to his essay on "The Uncanny" (1919), referring to an experience reported by Ernst Mach, Freud describes a moment rather similar to the captain's reverie before the looking glass in *The Shadow-Line*. It is productive of deep, if causeless, disquiet to Freud, who was travelling alone by train when, he says:

> I was sitting along in my *wagon-lit* compartment when a more than usually violent jolt of the train swung back the door of the adjoining washing-cabinet and an elderly gentleman in a dressing gown and travelling cap came in. I assumed that in leaving the washing-cabinet, which lay between the two compartments, he had taken the wrong direction and come into

> my compartment by mistake. Jumping up with the intention of putting him right I at once realised to my dismay that the intruder was nothing but my own reflection in the looking-glass on the open door. I can still recall that I thoroughly disliked his appearance. Instead, therefore, of being *frightened* by our "doubles," both Mach and I simply failed to recognise them as such. Is it not possible, though, that our dislike of them was a vestigial trace of the archaic reaction which feels the "double" to be something uncanny? (Freud 1999: 371)

But the uncanny – *das Unheimliche* – is also, as Freud recognises, familiar: it is the stranger in the glass, the refugee in the cabin, the madman on deck, unsettling but profoundly known, profoundly recognised. In each example, the viewer is compelled to acknowledge a deep connection to what turns out to be a reflection or a psychic extension, a kind of projection that is as much from the *other* to the *self* as from *self* to *other.*

Narration and Hyphenation in *The Shadow Lines*

How is Conrad's story relevant, if at all, to Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*? Its title certainly casts its shadow upon the later work. But is anything carried over beyond the device of the unnamed I-narrator, a feature of Ghosh's novel that often goes unnoticed? Yet this is a feat considerably more difficult to accomplish in the insistently familial, name-ridden atmosphere of Ghosh's novel than in Conrad's much shorter narrative of accidental encounters and professional dealings. At least the narrator in *The Shadow-Line* has a designation, so that we can refer to the captain as holding the centre of the narrative, crossing the shadow-line into maturity at the close, even though Ransome provides a reminder that life itself is a kind of hyphenation between birth and death, and we never really cross *that* line until we die. By contrast, the narrator of Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* insists on subordinating himself to the lives of others, and the shadow lines are not primarily part of his own psychology, but traced by politics and history on physical space, the space of a subcontinent. The devices of psychic hyphenation, and reflexive self-duplication, as used by Conrad to depict the career of his hero, are transferred in Ghosh's novel to subcontinental history, rather than the history of any single individual.

Interestingly, as a simple word search shows, the phrase "shadow lines" never actually appears in the text of the novel, it is only used in the title. Most commentators have interpreted it, therefore, with reference to the narrator's grandmother, Tha'mma, asking whether she will be able to see, from the aeroplane, the border that now divides India from Pakistan: "But if there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then?" (Ghosh 1988: 251). When she meets her Jethamoshai in Dhaka, the old man asks querulously "suppose when you get there [i.e. India] they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then?"' (Ghosh 1988: 215). The shadow lines of Ghosh's title are the lines that divide populations and territories, yet cannot be seen: the core reference, clearly, is to the Partition of India in 1947. At the same time, precisely because Ghosh refuses (unlike Conrad) to provide a specific application for his titular phrase, we might see all kinds of shadow lines – between person and person, between time and time, between place and place – proliferating in his novel. History too casts shadows, like lines, drawing individuals together or separating them.

Though Ghosh's narrator, like Conrad's captain, is a young man, the novel is not so much about a specific phase in his transition to adulthood as about a whole succession of phases: boyhood, adolescence, youth, early adulthood, with memories and events attached to each. All this builds up the composite picture of an intricate network of relations, lines connecting families across geographical space and political borders, and linking individual histories to national ones. However firmly Ghosh places the intrusive Conradian hyphen under erasure, we may be nagged by the sense that *The Shadow Lines* is haunted by a hyphen – perhaps the shadow of a hyphen – in its composition as well as its content. For the hyphen, a lexical term of pure, though late, Greek origin (ἡ ὑφέν), means “in one; together” but it also indicates a break needing to be joined up, at the end of a line or between two words. Whether we trace the network of shadow lines crossing borders and joining families, or if, alternatively, we view the border itself as a species of shadow line that fractures the subcontinent and its connected histories, Ghosh’s novel is surely also about line-breaks, ruptures held in place by a mark of separation that is also a mark of conjunction – that is, by a hyphen. Suvir Kaul, in one of the best essays on the novel, speaks of it as marked by “separation anxiety,” a narrative of the nation held together by a narrator who has constituted himself the “repository and archivist of family stories,” bringing together the private and the public, his own autobiography and a national biography (Kaul 1994: 125).

I want to start by thinking about the unnamed narrator of *The Shadow Lines*, a considerably odder figure than he is sometimes given credit for being, a collector of memorial relics fully as devoted as the eccentric Kemal Basmaci in Orhan Pamuk’s much later novel, *The Museum of Innocence* (2008). In some ways the narrator of *The Shadow Lines* is not entirely unlike the narrator of *The Shadow-Line.* A careful reader would note his obsessiveness, his obtuseness, his failure to see what is so clearly present before him, and his taking a peculiar, unwarranted psychic responsibility for others’ lives. For all that we accept the young narrator’s devotion to his brilliant uncle Tridib, for all that we sympathise with his unrequited love (or lust) for his beautiful cousin Ila, there is something quite clearly unbalanced about someone who commits every detail – including addresses, street-directions, and minor daily events – of his uncle’s wartime stay in London to memory. This stay, on Tridib’s part, lasted just a year, from 1939 to 1940, at the age of eight. The unnamed I-narrator in Ghosh’s novel learns about Tridib’s experiences in London when he is only nine himself, and when he meets Tridib’s London “family” seventeen years later, he insists on repeating all the details, including the street-directions, to them. In some ways, as we come to recognise as the narrative gathers pace, the uncanniness of the narrator’s memory is not even intended to be a realistic device: it is a non-naturalistic trope that reminds us of the unnaturalness, even impossibility, of the narrative act itself.

As Ghosh’s narrator picks up the threads of the past, he constantly baffles and bores others (especially Ila, who is typically offhand in her attitude to such matters) with the desperate cry, “*don’t you remember?*” Kaul (1994: 126) sees this cry, this appeal to memory, as generating “the form of the novel: its partial answers, its digressions, its looping, non-linear, wide-ranging narrative technique.” But as the narrator constructs his accounts of human beings and history, through a peculiar blend of prolepsis and recollection, we are led to reflect upon the improbability of literary representation itself, trapped in the illusion that life can be caught, related, recounted, through the all-purpose net of memory. Indeed, as a kind of dustbin (Kaul's "repository") of memories, the narrator of *The Shadow Lines* seems to be our only hope of keeping the histories of his own family, including his puritanical grandmother, her sister Mayadebi and her three sons, their families, the Prices in London, the relatives in Dhaka, together. In his endless curiosity and hunger for connection, he seems like a kind of travelling hyphen, placing people and events side-by-side.

It is worth noting that Amitav Ghosh appears already to be tired of this requirement of realist fiction. In a recent book of essays, *The Great Derangement*, he begins with precisely this problem: that the novel has constructed a quite imaginary notion of the human person within a knowable community, situated this construction with great care in a setting furnished with "realist" details, founded its "naturalism" upon a monstrous denial of all that is strange, irregular, cataclysmic, in Nature, privileged a bourgeois banality of everyday life (something that the poor, accustomed to life on the brink of extinction, do not have the luxury of experiencing) and, in sum, produced an illusion that it persists in calling "realist" though nothing could be farther from reality (Ghosh 2016: 22-32). Ghosh feels that this illusion can trick us no longer, however adequately it may have served the novel in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in a period when Western imperialism was able to impose its self-image upon colonial subjects deceived into thinking that the novel form itself *required* this intense focus upon the *minutiae* of the bourgeois everyday, from Flaubert to Virginia Woolf.

But we have now been overtaken, Ghosh argues, by the vast presences, the immense forces, of non-human Nature, listening and waiting, and now about to engulf us in a catastrophe so unimaginable that the novel form cannot conceive it. To him, the novel as a genre seems to have played a kind of confidence trick upon its adherents, making them believe in a relatively safe, ordered, banal world, principally inhabited by human beings intent on money, property and sex. Among his examples are Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's first (English) novel, *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864), where Bankim devotes immense care to the kind of realist object-description that seems to "ground" the novel as a genre – and which he could equally have found in the first example of the genre in Bengali, Pyarichand Mitra's *Alaler Gharer Dulal* (The Spoilt Son of a Rich Family, 1858) (Ghosh 2016: 24). Ghosh also cites, more unexpectedly, Advaita Mallabarman's Bengali novel *Titas Ekti Nadir Nam* (Titas is the Name of a River, 1956), where he finds the novelist evoking the power and terror of the mighty rivers that flow into the Gangetic floodplain only to clear a space "through a series of successive exclusions" for the relatively tranquil rhythms of life beside the Titas. Yet, as he says, the Titas is but one strand of the tangled locks of Mahakal, or Shiva the destroyer, one of an immense network of rivers, and its flow – in the novel, it is drying up – is "necessarily ruled by the dynamics of the landscape." But it is "precisely by excluding those inconceivably large forces, and by telescoping the changes into the duration of a limited-time horizon," says Ghosh, "that the novel becomes narratable" (Ghosh 2016: 80-81).

Delayed Decoding: Joining up the Breaks

The Shadow Lines specialises in a form of what is technically called (after Ian Watt) "delayed decoding", so that with all the events firmly in the past, the narrator is also the principal conduit of a set of recognitions that take place long after the actual events on which they are based. Commenting on Conrad, Watt described "delayed decoding" as the process by which the reader is put

> in the position of being an immediate witness of each step in the process whereby the semantic gap between the sensations aroused in the individual by an object or event, and their actual cause or meaning, was slowly closed in his consciousness. (Watt 1981: 270)

Conrad's *The Shadow-Line* offers several instances of delayed decoding, a typical element in Conrad's characterisation of the narrator, who is wilfully obtuse and dilatory in his interpretation of events and persons. But the most celebrated instance of delayed decoding is in *Heart of Darkness*, with Marlow's account of a man being killed on board ship by a spear launched from the shore:

> Something big appeared in the air before the shutter, the rifle went overboard, and the man stepped back swiftly, looked at me over his shoulder in an extraordinary, profound, familiar manner, and fell upon my feet. […] the end of what appeared a long cane clattered round and knocked over a little camp-stool. It looked as though after wrenching that thing from somebody ashore he had lost his balance in the effort. […] but my feet felt so very warm and wet that I had to look down. The man had rolled on his back and stared straight up at me; both his hands clutched that cane. It was the shaft of a spear that, either thrown or lunged through the opening, had caught him in the side, just below the ribs. (Conrad 1973: 65-66)

In Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, the narrator, proudly showing off to Nick and Ila his intimate, unreal knowledge of the circumstances of the death in an air raid of Nick's uncle Alan during the war, provides his own triumphant imagining of a fatal epistemological gap, a delayed decoding that leads to the death of Alan's friend Dan:

> Dan flinched as a high-pitched metallic shriek tore the air, but then it went suddenly silent, so he relaxed and drew on his cigarette. If it had happened a little later in the blitz, when the city had developed its collective wisdom about bombs, he would have known, because of that silence, that it was going to be close. […] But it happened too early, right after the bombing had begun. He was standing right beside the window when the blast shattered the panes into fine, sharp splinters and blew them into the room like a curtain of needles. When the men from the Heavy Rescue Service carried his body out, every last inch of it was tattooed with the fine, clean perforations of the scalpel-sharp slivers of glass that had been blown through him by the blast. (Ghosh 1988: 102-103)

Dan fails to decode the message of the "silence" in time, and this imagined episode – indeed *imaginary*, for how can the narrator know what Dan did not know before he died, even if Tridib, eight or nine years old at the time, made up a version to tell his nine-year-old nephew twenty years later – serves as a classic example of the epistemological gap, the broken line that causes delayed or missed recognitions. Among the events that take place within the novel's own time-span (if there can be such a term) there are several such delayed realisations. Of these the most important is the narrator's long-delayed understanding that the anti-Muslim riots he was caught up in as a schoolboy in Calcutta in early January 1964 were related on the one hand to the protests in Srinagar, Kashmir, over the theft of the Prophet's hair from the Hazratbal shrine, and to the anti-Hindu riots in Khulna and later Dhaka, in East Pakistan, in which Tridib died (Ghosh 1988: 220-224). I too was a schoolchild in Calcutta at the time, and I remember the riots, though as a politically conscious family that had migrated from East Bengal at Partition we also discussed their causes and consequences threadbare. But the narrator's finding out about these events many years later is characteristic of history itself as a process. The discipline of history specialises in constructing the past (that might otherwise simply be a random assemblage of incidents) in the form of a narrative that can be assigned a causal sequence and logic. The fractures and lags in the narrator's awareness create breaks in, and therefore hyphenate, historical continuity. Retrospectively, we become aware of webs of connection, shadow-lines of cause and consequence, linking political and individual histories.

In *The Shadow Lines*, both the narrator's conscious memories, and his unconsciousness of their meaning, generate lines and line-breaks. It is through his tireless pursuit of the truth about historical events, about known but not-understood episodes, that we are able to piece bits of the past, like bits of a jigsaw, together. It is he who conveys to us his frustration at finding nothing about the 1964 Calcutta riots in the newspapers. In fact, there was a scrupulously observed embargo, at the time, on reporting on communal disturbances in the national press, but the riots were reported on BBC radio, which we all listened to. But quite apart from this labour in the archive, carried out in order to make sense of a long-past incident that the narrator himself witnessed, the I-persona also has to pick out thirty-one days from a time-span of forty-one years (1939-1979) to piece together his account of the connected lives of his cast of characters. (It is worth reflecting on those who get omitted, such as Tridib's widowed grandmother who lives with him in the Ballygunge Place house). He thus pulls off the almost impossible feat of both tracing the shadow lines of history and inserting the breaks that *prevent* our seeing their connectedness until he joins them up. This is a task usually undertaken by the writer of novels of suspense or detection, where events have a hidden cause and chronology that cannot be revealed until the detective exercises her or his prerogative of doing so.

The Image in the Mirror: Looking-glass Shadows in The Shadow Lines

There is another respect too, in which the missing hyphen of the title casts its shadow upon the text. Conrad's novella makes influential, and critically important, use of the tropes of the looking-glass and the double. The captain, inhabiting a "twilight region between youth and maturity", feels himself to be self and other, hyphenated and duplicated, his own person and his image in the mirror of the sea (another of Conrad's phrases).[4] For all that Conrad himself set such value on the seaman's code that is the only saving recourse for his heroes – like Singleton in *The Nigger of the "Narcissus"*, Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, the captain *The Shadow-Line* – there can be no doubt that the characters are themselves fatally divided, as the captain is, from his looking-glass self. The confirmation of one's own identity by a form of external reflection back to oneself is productive of a deep sense of alienation. As Lacan suggests in his exposition of the mirror stage, the formation of the bodily ego, involving both idealisation and identification, is also a form of misrecognition, or *méconnaissance* (Lacan 1988: 5).

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[4] See the epigraph from Baudelaire in *The Shadow-Line,* p. 3: '*D'autre fois, calme plat, grand miroir / De mon desespoir,*' and Joseph Conrad, *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906).

For Ghosh in *The Shadow Lines*, too, mirroring is an important aspect of how borders and identities are understood. Not only do the characters in the novel – beginning with Tridib – produce "reflections" of themselves that never quite fit, so that they appear to be trapped in the space between what they are and what others think they are, but nations too face each other across borders, insistent on reflecting acts and events back across the shadowy line of division. Most potent of all fears, the narrator tells us, is "the fear of the war between oneself and one's image in the mirror" (Ghosh 1988: 204). The Bose family in Dhaka, divided by jealousy, hatred, and unresolved legal squabbles, building a wall right through their house, anticipate the larger political decision to divide Bengal into two Bengals, and India into two nation-states. The narrator's grandmother, Tha'mma, on her tragic rescue mission, finds her senile but crazily malevolent uncle, Jethamoshai, still facing her balefully across that wall of division. Without wanting to read the fractured domestic topography of the Bose house in Dhaka precisely as an allegory, it is worth noting that the zeal shown by Jethamoshai in inviting Muslim tenants – or squatters – to fill up the space vacated by his brother's family is uncannily reminiscent of the story behind Bengal's Partition. As Joya Chatterji has shown, not only the Hindu right, represented in the Hindu Mahasabha led by Shyamaprasad Mukherjee, but also the Bengal Congress, led, among others, by the senior Gandhian Prafulla Chandra Ray, supported the Partition of Bengal because they feared Muslim rule in an undivided, Muslim majority province. To a considerable extent, these fears had been realised when, in April 1946, the Muslim League won the state elections, and Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, a man popularly associated with the death of millions in the Bengal famine of 1943, formed a ministry and became Prime Minister of Bengal. Suhrawardy was also blamed for the bloody communal riots following from the League's "Direct Action Day" on 16th August 1946 (though both Hindus and Muslims took part in the killings). Effectively, then, the pro-Partition campaign forced Hindus to vacate their ancestral homes in East Bengal so that those spaces could be filled up by Muslims – in return for a Hindu majority state (West Bengal) that would remain in India (Chatterji 1994: 240-259). More than collusion and passive victimhood, this active movement for the division of their homeland, driven, as Chatterji (1994: 254) says, by "a strong calculation of economic self-interest", remains only one of the many tragedies of Bengal's Partition, which left two nations staring at each other, as at a looking-glass image, across the "wall" of their borders.

Just over twenty years later, a parallel demographic, if not religious, compulsion was to lead to the breaking up of Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh. When the East Pakistan-based, Bengali-dominated Awami League, (founded 1949) led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, won the first independent parliamentary elections in 1970, capitalising on their numerical majority in the more populous East, they set out a 6-point demand for provincial autonomy, and claimed the constitutional right to form a government. The demand was rejected by the political elite in West Pakistan, which enforced a brutal military crackdown in the East on 25th March 1971. Next day, Bangladesh declared its independence, and fought a protracted Liberation War ending on 16th December 1971, with victory and nationhood for Bangladesh. These events are not part of the narrative of Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*. Yet the narrator, imagining Mayadebi's house in Dhanmundi, Dhaka, in the 1960s, through the stories he heard about it from his cousin Robi, makes a place for it in his "own secret map of the world, a map of which only I knew the keys and the coordinates, but which was not for that reason any more imaginary than the code of a safe is to a banker." (Ghosh 1988: 194). Upon this imaginary cartography is superimposed an event from a decade later, when the country's map had radically altered. For it was in Dhanmundi that Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, first President of the newly formed republic of Bangladesh, was killed in his own house by the leaders of an attempted military coup, on 15th August, 1975. In the Seventies, the narrator tells us, one could not escape hearing about Dhanmundi. It is as if the shadow lines of a later history are traced upon the mental map of childhood, so that Robi's memories of their cook Nityananda, slaughtering chickens in the courtyard, uttering the Hindu cry of propitiation to the goddess, mingles with the imagined scene of Mujib's killing, and "the old man's body crashing to the driveway, leaking blood" (Ghosh 1988: 195). And it is from this mingling of past and present – or two pasts – that the narrator continues to the most critical of the novel's juxtapositions, the riot he experienced as a schoolboy in Calcutta, and the nearly simultaneous riot in Dhaka where Tridib was killed. It took him, he says, fifteen years to discover that these events were connected, but the connection, the hyphen between them, had been silenced (Ghosh 1988: 218).

History, Iterability and Living Together

"There is no history without iterability," said Jacques Derrida (1992: 64). Much has already been written about Bengal's repeated and unbearably protracted partitions, and Derrida's cryptic axiom suggests that history may indeed repeat itself tragically without collapsing, as Marx thought, into farce. In a deliberately indirect, nuanced way, Amitav Ghosh's novel, which is not actually a Partition narrative, re-invokes the cruelty, violence and trauma that is caused by the separation of populations inhabiting contiguous land, and the pain of these unhealed wounds in the body of the nation-state. The shadow lines of Ghosh's title are scars that run across the geographical expanse of the subcontinent as much as they are lines of connection between families and friends, linking Kashmir and Bengal, Calcutta and Khulna, silence in the archive and terrified children in a school-bus. In one of the most memorable sequences of the novel, the narrator, now grown up, tries to trace circles and lines on Tridib's old school atlas. He begins by calculating the distance (a line) from Srinagar to Khulna and finds they are 2000 kilometres apart. He then tries to use the compass to draw a circle with Khulna at the centre and Srinagar on the circumference, and finds that south Asia would not hold it: he has to switch to a map of Asia to trace the circle that runs from Srinagar, and through western Punjab:

> through the tip of Rajasthan and the edge of Sind, through the Rann of Kutch, and across the Arabian Sea, through the southernmost toe of the Indian peninsula, through Kandy, in Sri Lanka, and out into the Indian Ocean […] passing within sight of the Great Wall of China, through Inner Mongolia and Sinkiang, until with a final leap over the Karakoram Mountains it dropped again into the valley of Kashmir.
> It was a remarkable circle: more than half of mankind would have fallen within it. (Ghosh 1988: 31-32)

The narrator draws more "amazing" circles on the map, and learns, with Tridib, as it were, watching over him, how distances and propinquities are cancelled out by the drawing of border-lines on a map: people close together are separated, people far apart are included in a single space, or "state". Turning back to his first circle, he is struck with wonder that there had really been a time when people thought that "there was a special enchantment in lines … something admirable in moving violence to the borders." As W. H. Auden put it in his brief, bitter poem on the Partition of India, they believed that the "The only solution now lies in separation".[5] They had drawn their lines, "hoping perhaps that once they had etched their borders upon the map, the two bits of land would sail away from each other like the shifting tectonic plates of the prehistoric Gondwanaland". But these lines are only shadows, insubstantial, without the capacity to produce a real separation: what was produced was not a separation but an irony, "the irony that killed Tridib":

> that there had never been a moment in the four-thousand-year-old history of that map, when the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines—so closely that I, in Calcutta, had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka; a moment when each city was the inverted image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free—our looking-glass border. (Ghosh 1988: 233)

Here, in a single, crucial passage in Ghosh's novel, we have circles, lines, borders, maps, the geological substrate, and the image of the looking-glass, or the doubling of an image in the mirror, together. The idea of a line that might set "us", Hindus or Muslims, Indians or Pakistanis, free, is repeated in his conversation with Robi in London, as Robi recalls the scene of Tridib's death, and the idiocy of those who say:

> we have to kill you for our freedom. It would be like reading my own speech transcribed on a mirror. And then I think to myself why don't they draw thousands of little lines through the whole subcontinent and give every little place a new name? What would it change? It's a mirage; the whole thing is a mirage. How can anyone divide a memory? (Ghosh 1988: 247)[6]

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[5] W. H. Auden, "Partition" (1966), line 7.

[6] I am grateful to my discussant Dr. Alessandro Vescovi for recalling this passage and others in the context of "shadow lines."

It is in the overlapping sentences and images of these two passages, I would suggest, that Ghosh attempts to draw the threads of the narrative together. He urges us to be attentive towards the ironies of history, to borders as shadow lines, to looking-glass wars, but also to circles, to circumferences traced over the circularity of the earth and all that it contains.

Just over thirty years later, as we celebrate Amitav Ghosh's novel today, the subcontinent is in crisis. Not only are the Indian and Chinese armies staring at each other across the Line of Actual Control (LAC) which serves as a shadow-border in the Galwan valley, but within the country, too, rifts and dissensions have multiplied. With the protests against the passing, in the Indian parliament, of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA, 11th December 2019), which proposes to expedite Indian citizenship to various groups of refugees but excludes Muslims, there are new and urgent concerns about the defining of a secular Indian nation.[7] Earlier, on 5th August 2019, the government of India had issued a constitutional order abrogating Article 370, which had given separate status and a measure of autonomy (especially with respect of ownership of land) to Jammu and Kashmir within the Indian union. Not only was the state brought under the general constitutional provisions, it was also divided into two "union territories," separating Ladakh from Jammu and Kashmir. Anticipating protests, the government also placed prominent Kashmiri political leaders under arrest, shut down the internet and various forms of media reportage, and enforced a military lockdown of the state which, though somewhat relaxed now, continues. Meanwhile, state-specific versions of the iniquitous Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) are still in force in Kashmir and in the north-eastern states, and the government has arrested anti-CAA protestors and Dalit and minority rights activists under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), as well the colonial sedition law. These repressive measures of the Indian state are part of a worldwide increase in xenophobia, communal hatred and racism, targeting migrants, refugees, Muslims, Jews, or black people. The extent to which these prejudices are systemic is only emphasised by the renewed intensity of the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement in the wake of George Floyd's death in police custody in the USA, and the *#RhodesMustFall* protests that began in South Africa. India's anti-CAA protests, by contrast, have been dampened, even suppressed by the pandemic-driven lockdown and state repression. It is in this context, thinking of the larger meanings of a novel like *The Shadow Lines*, that I would like to conclude with some final observations on being-with, or being-together. The hyphen in these philosophical collocations is, as always, silent.

The idea of living together came to absorb Jacques Derrida in his late writing, including reflections on his own childhood and upbringing, where he ranged over memories of friends and colleagues, immediate political questions, and, sometimes, the location where he had been called to speak. In a 1998 lecture called "Avowing – the Impossible" which was first delivered at a conference of Jewish intellectuals assembled in Jerusalem to discuss the question "How to Live Together," Derrida examined his own difficulties with the question, given the numerous, and intersecting, colonial exclusions by which his life was formed (Derrida 2013: 18-41). These are questions that he also explored in *Monolingualism of the Other,* where he wrote: "1. We only ever speak one language 2. We never speak only one language." (Derrida 1996: 10). Cut off by his education from the languages of his birthplace, notably Arabic, Derrida felt himself, nevertheless, to be not "native" to French. Mindful of his own hyphenated Franco-Maghreb self, he reflected on the "nature of that hyphen", a lexical mark (as in "The Shadow-Line") which one cannot hear, although it remains in writing, betraying a *disorder of identity*, or as a reminder of attempts to build a bridge across a division:

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[7] See Supriya Chaudhuri, "Reading Pasts, Thinking Presents: Reflections on the Nation, Representation, and Mourning", in *Revue des Femmes Philosophes* No 4-5 (2018), 278-291; and ibid., "La question de la 'nation hindoue' est au cœur des manifestations", *Le Monde*, 23 December 2019, accessed June 16, 2020 at https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2019/12/23/inde-la-question-de-la-nation-hindoue-est-au-c-ur-des-manifestations_6023874_3232.html

> The silence of that hyphen [Franco-Maghrebi] does not pacify or appease anything, not a single torment, not a single torture. It will never silence their memory. It could even worsen the terror, the lesions, and the wounds. A hyphen is never enough to conceal protests, cries of anger or suffering, the noise of weapons, airplanes, and bombs. (Derrida 1996: 11; see also p. 14)

Derrida's discomfort with the hyphen seems to have persisted: in a later set of two political essays, *Rogues*, he wrote "I say Arabic and in turn Islamic so as to avoid the often abusive hyphen in Arab-Islamic" (Derrida 2005:28). (By contrast, Bruce Lawrence makes a strong case for the enduring relevance and ubiquity of the hyphen in an "an embedded cosmopolitanism throughout parts of Asia," arguing that "what is crucial here, as elsewhere, is the defining function of hyphens: they make connections that are often occluded") (Lawrence 2020). Derrida is more distrustful of the hyphen's function, and of the making of hyphenated identities, in situations of religious, ethnic and linguistic division and exclusion. He suggests, instead, that the only solution was to live well together: "Il faut bien vivre ensemble".

What does Derrida mean by this statement? Clearly, he does not use the word *ensemble* to describe a totality that is already closed, but adverbially, living together as a mode of being together (*être/ vivre ensemble*). This would refer us back to his writings on hospitality, playing on the double sense of the French word "hôte", meaning both host and guest, and derived from Latin *hospes* (etym. *hosti-pet* from Proto-Italic *hostipotis*, a compound of *hostis* "stranger, enemy," and *potis* "able, having power." For Derrida, the presence of not just host and guest, but stranger and enemy, within the etymological conjunction of *hôte-hospes-hostis-hospitality* allows for a series of reflections on hospitality and his philosophical coinage, "hostipitality" (Derrida 2000: 3-37). Understanding the notion of the stranger (*étranger*) is at the core of Derrida's ethical philosophy, especially in so far as it is influenced by Emmanuel Levinas. For both, absolute hospitality is the unconditional welcoming of an unexpected, even unwanted, guest, even if such strangers should appear to be enemies. "One cannot not 'live together,' even if one does not know how or with whom, with God, with gods, men, animals, with one's own, with one's close ones, neighbours, family, or friends, with one's fellow citizens or countrymen, but also with the most distant strangers, with one's enemies, with oneself" (Derrida 2013: 23).

Is there is a lesson we can take from these reflections on hyphens, and from Conrad's or Ghosh's practices, here? Perhaps we should recall, in Conrad's case as in Ghosh's, the political context. It is impossible to ignore the fact that *The Shadow-Line* is in many ways a deeply racist, sexist and misogynistic work, a work that thrives on exclusions and denials. The white crew of his new ship, the white men from whom he receives benefits, are a constant reassurance to the insecure captain's sense of self, and he is consistently dismissive of other races – the charitable Arab owner of his earlier vessel, the Chinese and Bengali seamen who hang about the harbour. The captain's hyphenated identity, like that of his counterpart in "The Secret Sharer," has parallels in Conrad's own. When Conrad fell out with his publisher Pinker and had a nervous breakdown after finishing his most Dostoyevskian novel, *Under Western Eyes* (1911), he wrote bitterly (23rd May 1910) that the last time they met Pinker had said that "I [Conrad] did not speak English to you" (Conrad 1983/2007: 334). Domiciled in an adoptive land, writing in an adoptive language, Conrad may have felt, as his memoir *A Personal Record* (1912) suggests, like a hyphenated being, Polish-English, seaman-writer. The silence of the hyphen, an ambiguous marker of union as much as a sign of separation, would not have cancelled out the strain of forced conjunctions, or the pain of involuntary division. In the story, the captain, crossing the shadow-line between youth and maturity, using the bridge of duty to leave behind his own anxious, naive, racially insecure self, is also someone who has finally won his place in the long line of seamen – unmistakably white and male – whom he desires to emulate. As a refugee and alien, making his home in a language not his own, already a British master mariner, Conrad also wanted to take his place in the British literary tradition.

The postcolonial politics of nation, identity and language do not require Amitav Ghosh to make the same choice. *The Shadow Lines* is a profoundly Indian novel, and the fact that it is written in English does not reduce its stake in subcontinental history, even if that history is one of partition, betrayal and mistrust. Ghosh traces the shadow lines that divide nations and communities, while also indicating the intricate web of interconnections between events, persons, and histories. In some important ways, his narrator functions, as we have noted, like the invisible hyphen bringing all these elements together, setting them side-by-side, making "connections that are often occluded" (Lawrence 2020, and Chaudhuri 2018, 2020).[8] History – the history of the nation-state – is indeed hyphenated, ruptured yet connected across rifts and breaks. At the same time, Ghosh's decision to omit the Conradian hyphen is deliberate. Neither the narrator, nor Ghosh himself, is invested in a hyphenated identity, an identity *formed* across the hinge of a break or division. Rather, by getting rid of Conrad's titular hyphen, by opening up the "shadow lines" to their full range of ambiguity, indistinction and nuance, Amitav Ghosh suggests that we need to think beyond borders and crossings and identities, and about the spaces that we collectively and surprisingly inhabit in the circularity of the earth, within the circumferences traced by the narrator's rusty compass. Like Derrida, he too might have said that, divided and thrust apart by politics, by religion, by fear, we must live together well: "Il faut bien vivre ensemble". Human beings are fallible, self-deceived, fragile: May has arrogated to herself the responsibility for Tridib's death, though she knows, in the end, that his sacrifice belongs to no one else but himself. If that sacrifice is to teach us anything, it can only enforce the truth W. H. Auden uttered on the eve of a global conflagration: "we must love one another or die."[9] The narrator, having worked tirelessly to sift through the detritus of history, to piece together and join up the lives of others, stands at the end of the novel on the threshold of a final redemptive mystery. Amitav Ghosh leaves us in no doubt that this mystery is love.

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[8] See Lawrence, quotation and note 36 supra.

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[9] W. H. Auden, 'September 1, 1939,' Stanza 8, line 11.

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THE SHADOW LINES AS A WORK IN PROGRESS

A Genetic Approach to some Pages from the Typescript

Alessandro VESCOVI

ABSTRACT • This paper presents some pages from the original typescript of *The Shadow Lines*. The typescript has been transcribed in order to make it available to scholars. A few comments have been added about the differences between the typescript and the final version. The differences here discussed refer to changes in the plot, in the characters' names, and to stylistic choices.

KEYWORDS • Amitav Ghosh; Shadow Lines; Typescript; Genetic Criticism; Naming.

At the time when a group of scholars from Milan and Turin were organising a Conference to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the publication of *The Shadow Lines*, we wrote to the author to ask if he could give us his blessings and contribute a few welcome words for the attendees. Ever kind, Amitav Ghosh mailed us the lines that open this issue of *QuadRi*. Furthermore, he also sent the digital version of a few pages from the original typescript of the novel. This essay therefore consists of two distinct parts: the first is a philological transcription of the typescript, the second a critical discussion of some variants.

The Typescript

The typescript consists of nine sheets that were revised, xeroxed and then once more revised bearing witness to the way the author, and possibly his editors, worked all the way to the published version from the original manuscript. I have transcribed the typescript tracing three different levels of revision, which are marked here with the capital letters A through C. The first revision of the typescript (A) includes the correction of some typos and other amendments made with the typewriter itself, often between the lines. The second revision (B) is written in pen and was made on the original typescript before it was photocopied. The third revision (C), apparently by a different hand, is made in blue, working on the xeroxed version. The first two sheets, which carry no corrections, were evidently re-typed after much B revision in order to offer a more polished text. This looks evident from the third sheet, which contains a much-revised passage completely crossed out and rewritten in the first two sheets. Therefore the subsequent revisions can be thus ordered chronologically: typescript A (from sheet 3 to 9); manual notes B (sheets 3 to 9);

typescript B_1 (sheets 1 and 2, which do not contain any handmade notes); manual notes C (made on a xeroxed version of typescripts A). Both the typescript A and the hand notes B show instances of indecision and corrections, while manual notes C appear to be a revision carried out once most decisions had been made.

Hereafter I offer a transcript of the text marking variants between angular parentheses (<xyz>) followed by a capital letter pointing at the time of intervention. Deletions are transcribed with strikethrough characters. All annotations and corrections in pen are made over the line, and must be intended to be so unless otherwise specified. Arrows pointing left or upwards indicate that the annotations are made above the line (used only for typewritten corrections) or in the left margin. A square around a word stands for a circle – used only in C. A word between two daggers (†xyz†) is my guess when the original is unreadable, while the comments within square brackets are my own.

We know that Ghosh was living in a Delhi *barsati*[1] at the time when he wrote *The Shadow Lines* and typed the manuscript on sheets that probably exceed the ordinary letter format of photocopies (even now in India several different paper formats coexist); this may account for some missing words from the B revision that were written on the margin.

For copyright reasons it is not possible to republish the corresponding part of the final version, which, however, is not necessary as every reader may peruse the two texts against each other. However, as a further aid to comparison, I have underlined the parts of the typescript that remain in the printed version. This does not necessarily mean that the underlined sentences are identical in both versions, as some words have sometimes been added. The underlining therefore does not reflect anything that is in the typescript but is meant to offer a synoptic view of what has not changed between the typescript and the printed version.[2]

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[1] A *barsati* is a Delhi rooftop studio apartment, then usually reserved for the lower classes. It has become fashionable lately thanks to the extensive introduction of A/C. See «Amitav Ghosh and the Sea of Stories.» 2019. *Mint*, Jun 15. See also the snapshot of the author at his typewriter allegedly writing *The Shadow Lines* published by Jon Mee in his "After Midnight. The novel in the 1980s and 1990s".

[2] I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my friend and colleague at the Department of Foreign Languages in Milano, Andrea Meregalli, without whose vast knowledge of philology I would never have been able to complete this task. It goes without saying that the responsibility for any mistakes and shortcomings rests solely on myself. For the section on names I am likewise indebted to my another friend, the first class scholar of Hinduism Cinzia Pieruccini for her patient explanations and bibliographical suggestions. Also in this case the faults that remain in that section of the present paper are only my own.

Borders[3]

Some time in the early sixties the Shaheb was posted to Dhaka as Counsellor in the Indian Deputy High Commission. It was thought to be something of a minor coup as far as his career was concerned: he had risen in rank and besides, professionally, East Pakistan was acknowledged, in the Service, to be one the most challenging posts in the world. It was a sign, or so the family said to outsiders, of the Shaheb's success as a diplomat.

But my grandmother wasn't deceived. He drinks, she said, which was something nobody in the family had ever said aloud before, and when she said it her profile grew spiky with contempt in exactly the way it did whenever she spoke of weaklings and sadhus and men who went to nightclubs.

Later she often argued about this with my father, who, in his own way, liked the Shaheb, and was, besides, much beholden to him because of the hospitality he had received from him in so many parts of the world. So what if he drinks ? he would say to my grandmother. Ma, you're living in another century; nowadays everyone drinks. That has nothing to do with it; he's a very successful man.

But once, when they were alone in their bedroom, I heard him telling my mother that the Shaheb had been superceded [sic] twice by men junior to him. If it weren't for Leela-mashi, he said, who knows where the Shaheb would be ? He laughed: Mogadishu ? La Paz ?

And yet in his arguments with my grandmother on the same subject it was taken for granted that he would at some stage announce with absolute finality that it didn't matter whether the Shaheb drank or not, he was still very successful. When this announcement came my grandmother would fall silent for he was, after all, the head of the house, even if he was her son. But my father, who knew his mother no better than sons usually know their mothers, would read into that silence an acquiescence while actually it was not [2nd sheet] even intended as a parody of it, like those hopeful silences with which people receive newspaper reports of wartime casualties; it could not be for in essence my grandmother's contempt for the Shaheb had nothing to do with drink at all: it was founded on the same iron fairness which prompted her, when she became headmistress of the school she had taught in for twenty years, to dismiss one of her closest friends from her job because she knew her to be by nature unpunctual – at bottom she thought the Shaheb was not fit for his job, he was weak, his character was weak, it was impossible to think of him being firm under threat, of reacting to a difficult or dangerous situation with that controlled accurate violence which was the quality she prized above all others in men who had to deal with matters of state.

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[3] Underlined in the typescript; there is no such chapter division in the final text.

[3rd sheet]

be for in essence my grandmother's contempt for her brother-in-law had nothing to do with drink at all: it was founded on the same iron fairness that made her dimiss [sic] one of her best friends <~~from her job~~ A> <~~in the school~~ B> when she became mistress <of their school B> – <↑at bottom A> she thought the Shaheb was not fit for his job, he was weak, his character was weak, even his body was weak (for her there was no real difference between the two), it was impossible to think of him being firm under threat, of reacting to a <↑difficult or dangerous A> situation with <that controlled B> accurate, <~~controlled~~ B> violence, <~~the ability to do which she admired above almost all others <attributes A>, not just in a man, but just in all human beings.~~ B> <which is the quality she prized above all others in who had to ‡deal with‡ matters of State.[4] B> But for all this she merely despised him. She distrusted him in equal measure and the reason for that was that she knew instinctively what my father <~~knew~~ A> <had learnt A> through the extensive circle of his acquaintances: that it was her sister Leela [C] who took his decisions, who virtually did his work for him, who <had B> politicked and manoeuvred with all the resources of her enormous intelligence to salvage something of his career; and therefore, imagining him to be nothing but a dim <~~i~~ A> irradiation of her own sister, [B] she distrusted him, for, knowing her sister as she did, she could not believe that he loved his country enough.

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[4] All text from the beginning of the third sheet to this point is crossed out.

It was not that she disliked the Shaheb: she merely distrusted and despised him in a mildly amused sort of way, and she would have done neither <~~had he~~ A> if, as she often <~~sq~~ A> said, he were doing something else, though what that something was I was never sure, for she certainly would not have tolerated him as a school—teacher or revenue inspector: perhaps she would have liked him best had he been a hotelier or <maybe B> an artist, for <~~it was~~ B> professions such as those <~~which~~ B> were to her synonymous with <eclecticism B> <↑cosmopolitanism A> which she <~~detected in her own sister~~ A> so much distrusted in her own sister.

And yet, when she heard of his appointment something flickered within her, one of those tiny currents which suddenly fill a pool with <~~long settled~~ A> <a cloud of B> silt, and from the way her mind kept going back to the subject I <~~knew~~ A> could tell that the news had left her deeply, profoundly [4th sheet] excited. <~~++++~~ A> More than a year later I thought I knew the reason why when Leela-debi [C] wrote asking her to visit them in Dhaka.

After a week's hesitation my grandmother decided to go, and after that <~~all the~~ †some† of those B> little everyday household rituals, [B] like having the floors washed and the ceilings cleared of cobwebs<, ~~which were more than a religion with her~~ B>[replaced by undecipherable long writing], slipped from her mind, and I would catch her with her schoolbooks spread out in front of her, staring into space<~~:~~;B ~~or~~ and sometimes B>, at night, I would see her climbing out of our mosquito netted bed to go to the window and look out through the shutters at the black emptiness of the lake across the road. [Paragraph break added in B]

I watched her with delight. It was the first time in my ten-year-old life that she had presented me with response I could fully understand and approve, which was <~~nod~~ A> no different from <~~g~~ A> the way I, or any of my <~~ten-year-~~ A> classmates would have responded: <~~to me~~ B> who had never been on aeroplane, <~~it seemed the most natural thing~~ B> in the world <~~it~~ A> that she should lie awake at night at the thought of a first flight.

So it always puzzled me that the questions she asked my father never had anything to do with the kind of information I thought she would find useful. For instance, she wanted to know whether one could really see the border from the plane. When he laughed and said, why, did she really think it was a long black line with green on one side and red on the other like it was in the maps on her school room wall, she was not offended but puzzled. That wasn't what she had meant, she said, of course not, but surely there was something, trenches, or soldiers, or guns pointing at each other, or even just barren strips of land ? But he only laughed again and said, no, she wouldn't be able to see anything, except perhaps some green fields and a few clouds.

This time she was angry, not because of what he had said, but the way he had said it. Be <~~q~~ A> serious, she snapped, don't forget I'm your mother, not one of your <~~chums~~ yaars B> in the office.

He was offended himself now, because he didn't like her to [5th sheet] speak to him sharply in my hearing. That's all I can tell you, he said shortly. That's all there is.

My grandmother thought over this for a while and then she said: But if there aren't trenches or soldiers, how are people to know ? I mean where's the difference then ? How can it be ? If there's no difference both sides would be the same; it'll be just like it used to be before when we used to catch a train to Dhaka in the morning and get off in Calcutta next <~~n~~ A> day, without anyone stopping us.

The difference isn't on the border nowadays Ma, my father retorted in exasperation. The border isn't the same thing as a frontier <~~nowadays~~ any more B> : the border's inside, you'll see, when you have to fill in all those disembarkation cards and forms and things.

At that my grandmother grew very nervous. What forms, ?[5] she said. What do they want to know about on those forms ?

Let me see, he said, scratching his head; they want your nationality, <~~you wo~~ A> your date of birth, place of birth, that kind of thing.

~~<My grandmother stiffened suddenly and the schoolbooks slid off her lap and lay around her feet in a tidy fan.~~ My grandmother's eyes suddenly widened and the schoolbooks slid off her lap and lay around her feet in a tidy fan B>. What's the matter ? My father said, but she only shook her head,and [sic] so it fell to me to ask my father for all the important information about aeroplanes that I felt she ought to know <about B>, like what button one had to press if one wanted the seats to tilt backwards, how do buckles were fastened on seat-belts and whether it was really true that the pilot kept parachutes hidden under his seat and everyone had to run up and snatched them from him if it seemed as though the plane was <~~really~~ A> going to crash, and in my anxiety for her safety I tried hard to make sure that she took it all in. It wasn't until many years later that I realised that it had suddenly occurred to her <then B> that she would have to fill in 'Dhaka' as their birthplace on that form and that the prospect of this worried her in the same way that dirty schoolbooks worried her, because she liked <~~things to be neat and in place~~ B> [6th sheet] things to be neat and in place, and for a moment <†even† B[6]> she <~~could not~~ had not been able to B> understand how her place of birth had come to be so messily at odds with her nationality.

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[5] Apparently, the question mark was inserted at a later moment in the space between the preceding comma and the following word.

My father smiled, for he could see that the forms were <†~~so~~† B> worrying her: Don't worry, you won't have to do anything; the moment they hear you speak they'll know you were born there and they'll be so pleased they'll take you straight through.

She smiled but my father knew that something was still nagging at <~~her~~ B> obscurely <at her mind B>. But Ma, he said, teasing her; why are you so worried about this little journey ? You have been travelling between <~~co~~ A> countries for years without knowing it. Don't you remember ? When I was a child.

She was puzzled for a moment and then she understood: my father had been born in Mandalay when my grandfather was an engineer in the railways, and every year, of the ten she had spent there, my grandmother had taken him back to Dhaka to stay with her family for two months in winter.[7]

But it wasn't the same thing, she said, shaking her head. It was easier then. When you were a child we just had to take a steamer and a train and within a week we were back hom<e B>

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[6] A word has been clearly inserted between "moment" and "she", but it is very difficult to read; "even" looks like a possible interpretation. In the final version this word has been expunged.

[7] This paragraph has been excised in the printed version, yet a similar one was inserted a hundred pages earlier in the context of Tha'mma's youth. The final version points to some analogies between Tha'mma's attitude towards travelling and Ila's.

in Mandalay. And when we were children, every now and again my father would say - Let’s go to visit your uncle – <~~ti~~ A> and we would all go off, and when we <~~e~~ A> wanted to come back, <~~home,~~ A> we’d take a train and a day later we were back home in Dhaka.

I laughed, delighted at having caught my schoolmistress grandmother out. <~~Didu, didu~~ Tha’ma, Tha’ma [sic] B>, I cried, pounding on the arms of the sofa; <~~didu~~ Tha’ma B>, you don’t know the difference between coming and going. How can you ‘come’ to Dhaka ? You don’t know whether you are coming or going. For me that phrase was to become as intimate and inseparable a part of my grandmother as the jingling of the keys which hung knotted to her sari on her shoulder. I teased her with it for years: [7th sheet] <~~for example,~~> if she happened to tell me that she was going to take a lesson in Bengali grammar, <for example, B> I’d burst out laughing and say: But <~~Didu~~ Tha’ma B>,[8] how can you teach grammar – you don’t know the difference between coming and going<~~.~~ ? B> Eventually the phrase passed on to the whole family and became a part of its secret lore; a barb in that fence we used, like every real family, to demonstrate our uniqueness to others. So for instance, when Ila was in Calcutta, if we happened to meet an acquaintance who asked her: When are you going back to London ? we would launch at once into a kind of practised patter : But she has to go to Calcutta first; Not if I’m coming to London; Nor if you are coming to Calcutta… And at the end of it, sobbing hysterically with the laughter which must have seemed as affected as it was inexplicable to all those who heard it, I would say: You see, in our family we don’t know whether we are coming or going; it’s all my grandmother’s fault.

But the fault wasn’t hers at all. It lay in the language. Every language assumes a centrality, a fixed and settled point to go away from and come back to , while what my grandmother was looking for was a <~~verb~~ word B> for a journey which is not a coming or going at all but the search for that fixed point which will permit the <~~prp~~ B> proper use of verbs of movement<~~,~~: ~~and~~B> <(B>I cannot reproach her for not finding one for <~~(~~ B> [← C maybe †print†] <I do not know of one myself [underlined in B].) B>

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[8] Here “Didu” is capitalized, while it is not in the previous occurrences.

It turned out that my grandmother need not to have worried about travelling to Dhaka alone. A few days later my father had a letter from Leela-debi which threw our whole household into excitement, but me more than anyone else: and my grandmother was to have two companions on her trip and both of them were to stay with us for a few days before going on to Dhaka one was Leela-debi's second son, who<←m C> I had never seen, because he had been away for years at an American University, but with whom I had the same kind of wondering familiarity that I had with Angkor Wat and Quetzalcoatl partly because of his name,which [sic] I had once seen on the fly-leaf of a book a beautiful ringing name from another century, [8th sheet] Radhikaranjan, which I would roll around my tongue like sugar syrup; and partly because, like those distant places, I knew him through photographs, though not his own, but those of his grandfather, the High Court Judge, to whom he was said to bear an uncanny resemblance<, B> because of which nobody ever spoke of him by his real name but as Judge-da[9]: for that reason any mention of him was, for me, always tinged with an intense disappointment, but therefore also a curiosity, much as I would have felt had Quetzalcoatl been renamed Pyramidville. [Paragraph break added in B]

The other, who was to arrive first, was Miss [sic] Price's niece. My father told us many things about her, that she was twenty and had recently taken a Bachelor's degree in Art History at Edinburg<h B> University, that she was travelling around India for a few months before going on to join an art college in London and so on, but of all these only one interested me and that was her name, which was May. It had never occurred to me that a person could be named after a month, and puzzling over it, the only answer I could find was that she probably looked like a buttercup, for I had read in some primer of botany that in England buttercups flowered in May. After that curiosity about her appearance burned in me like a flame, mainly because I had never seen a buttercup, but also because I longed to know <~~what~~ how B> a person <looked, B> who might so easily have been called March or October had she <at all B> resembled a sweet-pea or a begonia. <~~looked like.~~ B>

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[9] Circled in C; on the margin a question mark is written with the same pen.

<~~But when~~ When B> I first saw her at the station she looked nothing at all like I had expected, though to me, with a short, brown hair, her long, oval face, so pale that you could see the veins beneath the skin, and her transparent, melancholy blue eyes, she looked so utterly unfamiliar, so exotically beautiful that it made really, [sic] no difference. Long afterwards, <~~when she had already become Ila's aunt~~ ↑?>[10], Ila said to me: She's got the air of provincial mayor's daughter who's gone down to London on a weekend return to 'do' the National Gallery: all that blue-eyed eagerness. I said nothing then, because Ila was the sophisticate, the one who had seen the world, but to me May's endless questions, [9th sheet] the bewildered curiosity with which she regarded the world, seemed a sign of a kind of [blank space] unworldly and forthright<~~,~~ ↑innocence A>, which I had never before seen in a woman, for among my female relatives <(I knew no other women) B> I could think of none who was wholly free of that particular worldliness which comes from <~~manoeuvring~~ making— [unreadable word] B> within <a B> large <~~families~~ family B>, at which seems to grow, in those women, in direct proportion to the degree to which they are secluded from the world.[11]

One morning, two days after May had arrived, my father suggested that she go to see the Victoria Memorial and that I go with her. I was delighted because for me a trip to the Victoria Memorial was a treat associated with festivals and holidays. But May hesitated, perhaps because she had grown tired of having me following her around the house and staring at her. I caught her hand and pleaded and then she smiled ruefully and agreed. But she would not let my father send a car. No, she said; we'll go in a taxi. That worried my mother because for her taxis were symbols of all the shadowy and unnameable dangers of the outside world from which it was her duty to protect her family. Still, after a short argument she agreed, although I knew that all the time that we were away she would be waiting and worrying.

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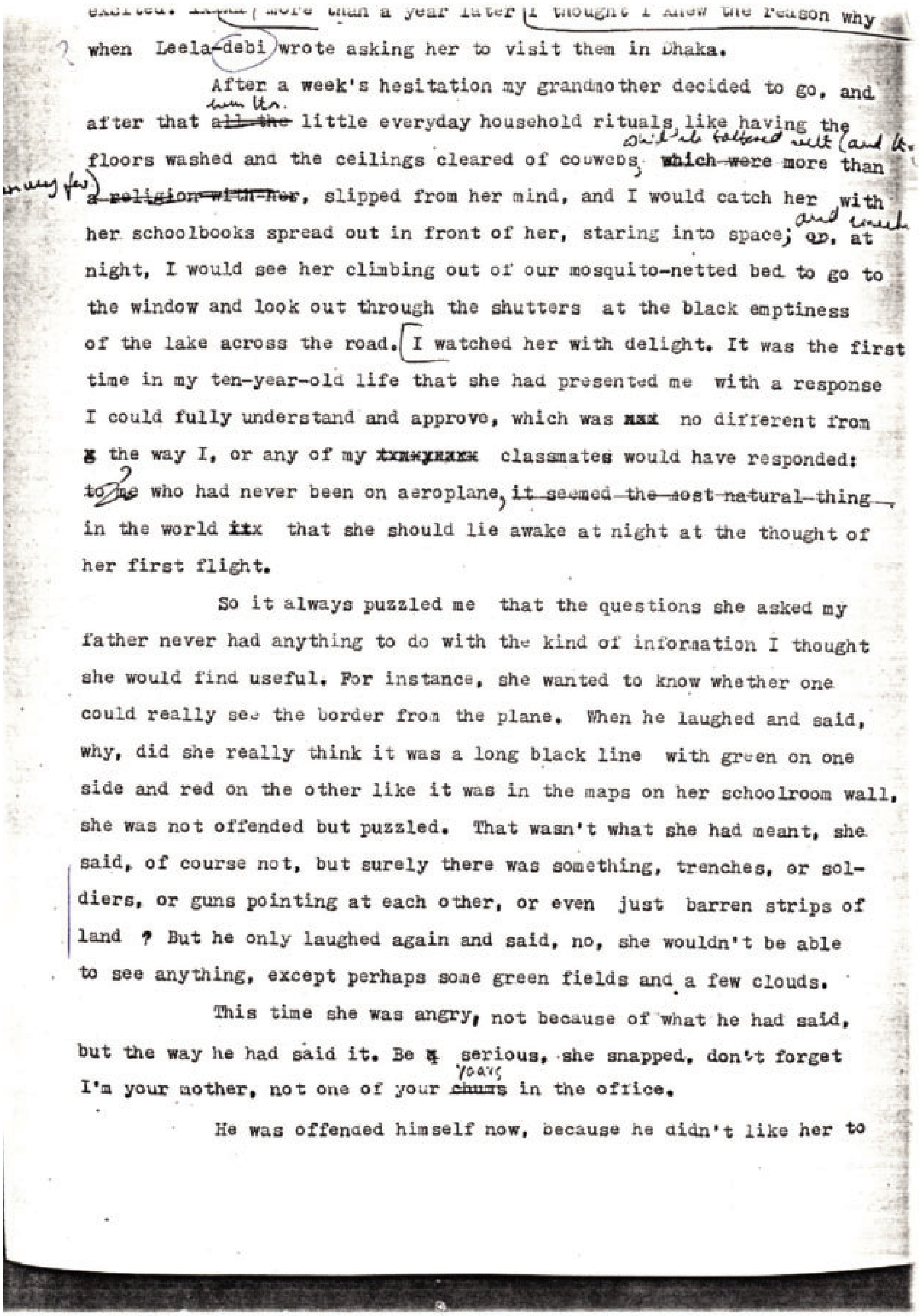
[10] On the margin in the same blue pen of C are the words: "def. cut".

[11] This paragraph is marked on the margin as above with the words: "†aw†kward †s†yntax & †t†one". The left part of these words has not been scanned.

That afternoon a taxi was called for us. When we went down, the driver, a short tubby man with large, curling moustaches ran around to hold the <back A> door open for us. I jumped in and slid <bouncing B> along the seat<~~, bouncing~~ B>. Then I turned around, waiting for May to follow. She was standing outside, hesitating, chewing a fingernail with <~~a look of~~ B> intense concentration <~~on her face~~ B>. Then she opened the front door and got in, next to the driver's seat.

The taxi-driver started forward as though to stop her, and then stood quite still, staring at her. At the same moment I cried out to my mother in utter astonishment: What's she doing ?

My mother shook her <head B> sharply at me and said: It's [space added in B] all right, it doesn't matter; she's different, she's a foreigner. Then, switching [end of the 9th sheet]



excited. ~~[illegible]~~ more than a year later I thought I knew the reason why ? when Leela-debi wrote asking her to visit them in Dhaka.

After a week's hesitation my grandmother decided to go, and after that ~~all the~~ them the little everyday household rituals, like having the floors washed and the ceilings cleared of cobwebs, ~~which were~~ which she followed with (and the more than in very few) ~~a religion with her~~, slipped from her mind, and I would catch her with her schoolbooks spread out in front of her, staring into space; ~~or~~ and watch, at night, I would see her climbing out of our mosquito-netted bed to go to the window and look out through the shutters at the black emptiness of the lake across the road. I watched her with delight. It was the first time in my ten-year-old life that she had presented me with a response I could fully understand and approve, which was ~~xxx~~ no different from ~~x~~ the way I, or any of my ~~xxxxxxxx~~ classmates would have responded: ~~to me~~ ? who had never been on aeroplane, ~~it seemed the most natural thing~~ in the world ~~itx~~ that she should lie awake at night at the thought of her first flight.

So it always puzzled me that the questions she asked my father never had anything to do with the kind of information I thought she would find useful. For instance, she wanted to know whether one could really see the border from the plane. When he laughed and said, why, did she really think it was a long black line with green on one side and red on the other like it was in the maps on her schoolroom wall, she was not offended but puzzled. That wasn't what she had meant, she said, of course not, but surely there was something, trenches, or soldiers, or guns pointing at each other, or even just barren strips of land ? But he only laughed again and said, no, she wouldn't be able to see anything, except perhaps some green fields and a few clouds.

This time she was angry, not because of what he had said, but the way he had said it. Be ~~q~~ serious, she snapped, don't forget I'm your mother, not one of your ~~chums~~ years in the office.

He was offended himself now, because he didn't like her to

Fig. 1. The fourth sheet of the typescript.

The Work in Progress: A Discussion

In the second part of this essay, we shall consider the differences between these earlier versions and the printed one, trying to ascertain if there is a discernible logic in the direction of the variations. While during the writing process the selection of certain words or structures may sometimes result from unconscious processes, every variant made at the time of typing and afterwards is the result of a process of conscious decision-making. Given the complexity of the narrative material and its arrangement in *The Shadow Lines*, we can consider the typescript as a clean slate where the mind of the author, unencumbered by the fatigue of the writing process, may concentrate on single items and make decisions according to certain poetic principles (Ferrer 2016). As Goodman (1988) maintains, variations interpret the themes. In fact the later variant interprets the former, but for the genetic critic the process may work the other way round as the older variant may sometimes be considered as an interpretation of the newer one. More precisely, both possibilities may be considered not as variants, but rather as variations that interpret the same theme (Ferrer 2016). Thus a knowledge of previous authorial solutions allows a deeper insight into the subject matter.

In order to discuss the principal differences between the typescript and the final version, we shall group the variants under three headings, that we shall consider separately: Naming, Plot, and Stylistic Patterns.

Naming

Reading about familiar characters with different names is probably one of the strangest of readers' experiences. It is particularly surprising that even major characters like Tridib were first conceived by their author under different names. In the pages transcribed above, only Ila, May, and the Shaheb already had their original names, while Tha'mma, Mayadebi, and Tridib were called respectively "didu" (usually non capitalised) in A and "Tha'ma" in B, Leela (with the variants Leela-mashi and Leela-debi), and Radhikaranjan. These changes invite a speculation on the criteria that Ghosh adopted in naming his characters and on the meaning that names may carry in the novel.

Generally speaking, names are related to the characters in at least three different ways: they may be semantically connected with some theme or motive through their etymology (e.g. Alu in *The Circle of Reason*); they may be connected with some historical, mythical character or to some beloved person (e.g. Arjun in *The Glass Palace*); or the author may choose them as they are indicative of a particular social milieu (e.g. Fokir Mondal in *The Hungry Tide*). In the Ibis trilogy, where most characters are socially mobile, many of them have several names according to the circumstances.

The change from "didu" to "Tha'ma" and "Tha'mma" is not a major one and does not much affect the connotative value of the name. "Tha'mma" (actually "Tha'ma" in B) is short for *thakuma*, which is grandmother on the father's side. "Didu" is short for *didima*, which is grandmother on the mother's side. The use of "didu" in the typescript is surprising because the character is clearly the mother of the protagonist's father. One can speculate that initially the whole architecture of the Datta-Chaudhuri family was different and that "didu" survived that genealogical changes until the B version. Certainly, the Price family had a different genealogy in the typescript version, since May is introduced as the niece of Miss Price and not as the daughter of Mrs Price.

Although both "didu" and "Tha'mma" are familiar, affectionate modes of address, the former is technically a diminutive and was spelt with a small "d", while "Tha'mma" with its six large letters and the capital "T" sounds and looks more solemn. Besides, "thaku-ma" is the feminine form of "thakur-dada" (grandfather), which is built on the Sanskrit word "thakur", which means master, elder, guru, which is consistent with the father's higher status (and of his elders with him) in Bengali traditional families (Das 1968, 25; Sarkar 2000). This connection with the word master resonates with the position of the character in her family and as headmistress in her school.

There is another reason, I believe, why Tha'mma had better be associated with father than with mother. While the narrator's father is, after all, a vague, absent parent, it is Tha'mma who embodies many of the values that are often associated with masculinity. She is a nationalist, she sympathises with freedom fighter terrorists, she upholds a cult for strong bodies and hard labour, and she is not particularly keen on religious practices. The narrator does not seem to appreciate these values, and his adolescent rebellion, or even Oedipus complex, seems directed more against his grandmother than his father.

Tha'mma's sister Mayadebi has undergone an interesting metamorphosis from her former name "Leela". In the novel she is called "Mayadebi" by the narrator and everyone else, while her sister calls her simply "Maya". In fact the narrator says that he never called her Mayadebi, but Maya-thakuma, being his grandmother's sister, but he remembers her as Mayadebi at the time of writing. This seems to imply that she has passed away at the time and has remained in his memory as a rather formal, lofty character. The suffix -debi (literally "goddess") adds formality to a woman's name and is usually reserved to the upper classes (Das 1968, 24; Sarkar 2000, 57).

In the typescript, Leela is called Leela-debi, with a hyphen which is not used in the case of Mayadebi. The names Leela and Maya are cognate. They are both of Sanskrit origin and point almost to the same cosmogonic concept. According to Maneka Gandhi Leela means "play"; in the Sanskrit tradition the term refers to the divine play through which God engenders the universe. According to this notion, God creates the universe like a child builds a sandcastle by the sea; without any real act of volition and without any human logic or purpose (Dimock 1989). Maya refers to the act of creating the universe too, and it may take on a positive or negative connotation depending on the viewpoint. From an *advaita* (non-dualistic) viewpoint, it carries the negative connotation of delusion, something that prevents us from seeing the real metaphysical Truth. From a *dvaita* (dualistic) viewpoint, Maya is the creation, the embodiment of the supreme creative energy (Shakti) and carries therefore a positive connotation (Bose 2018). Both Leela and Maya may undergo a similar semantic shift whereby the act of creating becomes the created universe itself. Why then would Ghosh choose Maya over Leela? I can only think of two reasons: either Leela resonated too strongly with Ila, which might create actual linguistic mismatches or an undesired connection, or Ghosh wanted the Sanskrit term to stand out either as a token of Brahmanical culture or as the very embodiment of Shakti. Mayadebi, like her sister in fact, is indeed very energetic, and much stronger than her husband, the

Shaheb, as one reads in these very pages. Apparently both Tha'mma and her son agree that it is Mayadebi who manoeuvres to advance her inept husband's career. The concept of "Leela" is famously employed by Tagore to describe the divinity of children (Dimock 1962), but is otherwise far less known than the concept of Maya; so maybe the shift was intended as a transparent way to underline the strength of the feminine world in which the narrator grew up.

While "Maya" and "Leela" belong to the same semantic field, social sphere, and Sanskrit descent, the difference between "Radhikaranjan" and "Tridib" is almost unbridgeable. The narrator, ever intrigued by names and words,[12] introduces the name in a way that is reminiscent of *Lolita*'s incipit: "a beautiful ringing name from another century, Radhikaranjan, which I would roll around my tongue like sugar syrup". It is difficult to speculate why Ghosh would think of this particular name. Possibly it is a kind of private reference. It is well known that the first germ of the novel lies in the anti-Sikh riot in Delhi following Indira Gandhi's assassination. In "The Ghost of Mrs. Gandhi", the author recounts how he was obliged to stay at his friend Hari Sen's because of the riot and how they concealed a couple of Sikh neighbours, saving their lives. *The Shadow Lines* is dedicated to "Radhika and Harisen" without any further explanation. In fact, Radhika (Chopra) is Hari Sen's wife. Hari Sen is a historian and Radhika Chopra an anthropologist who used to study with Amitav Ghosh when they attended their MA courses at Delhi University. "Radhika-Ranjan" means "he who makes Radhika happy", or "dotes on Radhika". The name is often referred to Krishna, who was Radha's lover according to the myth. Likewise, the name Hari refers to God and is normally used to designate Vishnu, and hence Krishna. Hence we may infer that initially Ghosh had named the protagonist's mentor, who is also a historian, after his friends. The name is obviously of Sanskrit origin and sounds very aristocratic, as the narrator underlines.

There is no sign of indecision about the name of Radhikaranjan in the typescript, while Leela and Tha'mma are both marked in either B or C. The decision to change it must have come rather late in the elaboration of the character, whose peripeteia undergoes a dramatic change from the typescript version to the final one. Ghosh may have decided to modify the name for the same private reasons that initially prompted him to use it (e.g. because he decided to use the dedication of the novel to acknowledge his friends rather than a character) or because the further development of this character was no longer consistent with either his friend's personality or the name itself. While a Sanskrit name would become a character like Mayadebi, it would hardly suit a non-conformist like Tridib. Incidentally, one must notice that, after *The Circle of Reason*, whose three parts were named after the three *gunas*, Ghosh rarely refers overtly to the Sanskrit tradition. The name of Arjun in *The Glass Palace* is an exception and so is Babu Nob Kissin in the Ibis Trilogy.

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[12] Similar in this to his counterpart in *Remembrance of Time Past*, see Eleonora Sparvoli's essay in this same volume.

The name “Tridib” is not immediately associated with any Sanskrit myth, although the word is of Sanskrit origin and means heaven or sky.[13] This may be a reference to Tridib’s own lack of concreteness, or to his detachment from the material preoccupations of his friends. The choice for this name may have been influenced by its contrary, Ila, which means earth in Sanskrit.[14] As Ila and Tridib are opposite forces that shape the personality of the protagonist (like Albertine and Swann in Proust’s *Remambrance*), so their action is opposite and complementary. Attributing spirituality to the masculine gender (Tridib) and energy to the feminine (Ila in primis, but also May and Tha’mma) is, a common assumption of Indian thought which attributes the energy of Shakti to Goddesses and asceticism to Gods such as Shiva (Zimmer and Campbell 1963; Bose 2018).

Ila has never fared well in Ghosh criticism; many scholars seem to agree with Tha’mma about her appraisal (see for instance Mongia 1992). And yet, when we think of Ghosh’s own biography, his life was more similar to Ila’s than to the protagonist’s, let alone Tridib. Like Jatin (Ila’s father), Ghosh’s father was a diplomat who worked in Dhaka and in Colombo before moving on to Iran. Amitav himself did not spend his teens in Calcutta, as he attended the Doon school from the age of thirteen and then moved to St. Stephen College in Delhi, before doing his PhD in Oxford. And even then, he did not stay in the UK all the time but went to Egypt for a year instead. On the way back from Egypt, young Amitav hitch-hiked all the way through Libya, in a bohemian mood that Ila would certainly approve of. Like Ila, Ghosh felt constrained in Calcutta, he married a Western partner and settled in a Western country. Ila is everywhere as displaced or dislocated (Spyra 2006; Roy 2014; Mannan 2017) as Tridib seems to be at home. Consistently she looks for tiny practical certainties, while Tridib seeks evasion.

Despite the narrator’s protestations to the contrary, Tridib is not always reliable, and so is the protagonist as he appears unable to take Tridibs words critically. We have two proofs of this when Tridib makes up a story about going to London for his *adda* friends, and later, when the protagonist, Ila and Robi visit the Prices. The narrator shows off his knowledge of the place where he had never been, saying that Solent road had been hit by a high-calibre bomb. Robi objects that it could not be the case as the Germans only started to use such bombs later, and dismisses the question: “He was just a kid, nine years old. Every little bomb probably seemed like an earthquake to him…” (SL: 55). The protagonist does not falter. More subtly, in another episode, it is Ila who takes the protagonist to know one of the most interesting places in London, Brick Lane, whose existence Tridib had never mentioned and the protagonist ignored.

The novel is built on specular binaries like “coming” and “going”, England and India, Calcutta and Dhaka, past and present, tradition and modernity, if only to deconstruct them.

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[13] A similar name has been given to Nirmal, which means “pure”, and is a kind of older avatar of Tridib.

[14] The name Ilā is very ancient and goes back to the Vedic period, however I see no reason to press the search beyond the literal meaning of the name as the myth of Ilā does not seem to have any connection with the novel.

The binary "Ila" and "Tridib", earth and heaven, may well be another instance of this same oppositional technique. It would be wrong to argue that either is better or worse. The logic of perfect binaries belongs to characters like Tha'mma, and as he grows up, the protagonist comes to comprehend their beguiling nature. If we think of the novel as a *Bildungsroman* (Almond 2004; Gahatraj 2017; Kaul 1994), the narrator comes of age as he learns to overcome these binaries by shedding light on the shadow lines that divide their continuum.

Plot

According to Seymour Chatman's seminal intuition, plots are made by kernels and satellites (Chatman 1978). The former allow the narrative to progress, creating a development, the latter are a kind of pause which hosts emotions, descriptions, dialogues, insights. Building upon this distinction, Franco Moretti has written an interesting essay included in his five volumes collection entitled *The Novel* (Moretti 2001). The chapter inspired by Chatman is devoted to what Moretti calls "serious fiction". The Italian scholar renames the concepts of kernels and satellites, calling them "scaffold" and "fillers". According to Moretti, the realistic novel of the nineteenth century is felt by readers to be "serious" as long as it does not only tell a story with peripeteias and events, but lingers on fillers, namely emotions, descriptions, dialogues, bon ton, etc. According to this theory, *Pride and Prejudice* is not interesting because Jane Austen tells about Lydia's elopement or Collins' quest for a wife, but because it portrays the manners, values, and problems of her society. In the eighth chapter of *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh discusses Moretti's essay in relation to the difficulty of imagining climate change. A novel that deals with climate change, Ghosh argues, falls outside the category of serious fiction, risking

> banishment to the humbler dwellings that surround the manor house – those generic outhouses that were once known by names such as 'the Gothic', 'the romance', or 'the melodrama', and have now come to be called 'fantasy', 'horror', and 'science fiction'. (GD: 24)

In the chapter just mentioned, Ghosh welcomes Moretti's insight and seems to agree, or to have hitherto agreed, that fillers somehow have a certain kind of priority in realistic fiction. The issues of indecision shown by the typescript seem to confirm this notion. Surprisingly at the stage of the typescript, some major parts of the plot were rather different from what they would become in the final version: the narrator did not know Tridib personally, as he did not live in Calcutta but in the US; May was not a musician, she was not Mrs Price's daughter, and was probably unknown to Tridib/Radhikaranjan; the famous visit to the Victoria Memorial took place in a taxi and without Tridib/Radhikaranjan. While in the final version May is clumsy and afraid of India, in the typescript she appeared rather confident as she insisted on taking a taxi and sitting beside the driver. One sentence deleted in C is also revealing of a different turn of events: talking of May the narrator says "Long afterwards, <~~when she had already become Ila's aunt~~↑? B>" the sentence is crossed-out in B, and a question mark is penned just above the sentence, while C responds to the question mark, confirming the deletion. Actually, the only way for anyone to "become" Ila's aunt was to marry either of her uncles, Robi or Tridib/Radhikaranjan. This suggests that the love story between Tridib and May was far more advanced and overt than it is in the final version, where May becomes Ila's sister in law instead. Here Moretti's image of scaffold and fillers is misleading; one is brought to think that the scaffold is built before it is "filled" with anything. In fact, in the fragment that we are examining, the opposite seems to be the case. Some "fillers" – like the long dialogue between Tha'mma and the family on her perspective trip to Dhaka, or even the short (and justly much-quoted) discussion on coming and going – were already there long before the plot was finalized. Ila was introduced longer before Tridib/Radhikaranjan entered the stage, which probably gave her more space in proportion. If Tridib was not living in Calcutta, the distinctive pages on *adda* were probably missing, but we can only make conjectures on this point. However, the important impression is that some "fillers" were in the novel right from the start and the plot has been arranged to accommodate them, which actually gives them pride of place.

It is interesting to see that the figure of Tridib has emerged slowly as the novel was being written, while Ila was there right from the start. As I said earlier commenting on their complementary names, theirs are two different world-pictures and two different kinds of cosmopolitanism that the narrator strives to overcome in a sort of Hegelian *Aufhebung*. Tridib may well have given to the narrator eyes to see other worlds, but he lacks the energy that Ila does have to actually travel, mix with people and look for adventures, and try to leave a mark in the world, as she does, albeit naively, with her Marxist friends.

Stylistic Patterns

So far we have dwelt on the reasons that may stand behind some of the variants considering the possible reasons for the different choices and their articulation with the general poetics of the novel at a macrolevel. We should now focus on the level of the sentence and try to trace a pattern in the changes made on the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes.

Consider for instance the following passages, the first from the typescript and the second from the printed version:

> It was not that she disliked the Shaheb: she merely distrusted and despised him in a mildly amused sort of way, and she would have done neither <~~had he~~ A> if, as she often <~~sq~~ A> said, he were doing something else, though what that something was I was never sure, for she certainly would not have tolerated him as a school-teacher or revenue inspector: perhaps she would have liked him best had he been a hotelier or <maybe B> an artist, for <~~it was~~ B> professions such as those <~~which~~ B> were to her synonymous with <~~eclecticism~~ B> <↑cosmopolitanism A> which she <~~detected in her own sister~~ A> so much distrusted in her own sister.

> It was not that she disliked the Shaheb: she merely distrusted and despised him in a mildly amused sort of way, and she would have done neither, **as she often said, if** he were **only** doing something else, **something less important**, though what that something was I was never sure, for she certainly would not **have been any more tolerant of him had he been a schoolteacher** or **even a** revenue inspector: perhaps she would have liked him best **if he**

> **had been** a hotelier, or maybe an artist, for professions such as those were synonymous **in her mind with the most detestable kind of** cosmopolitanism.

In the final passage the words that do not appear in the revised typescript have been emphasised. The changes that take place here are observable also in several other parts of the typescript, especially where Tha'mma and her son discuss the possibility of her visiting Dhaka. Most changes occur on the syntagmatic axis and concern the free indirect speech. The latter is made less formal and more similar to the natural direct speech until it becomes a sort of transcript without the customary punctuation. Non-content words have been added such as "only" or "even", as well as non-defining subordinate clauses ("as she often said", "something less important").

On the paradigmatic axis one change is worth commenting. In A, the author after writing "eclecticism" typed "cosmopolitanism" just above it, and at a later time deleted the former with a strike of pen (and not as he was wont to do by overtyping the word with xs). The fact that "eclecticism" was deleted at a later time (in the B revision) is proof that this was a moment of indecision. It probably arose from the conflict between Tha'mma's views (as she would probably use the derogatory word "eclecticism") and the author's urge to discuss cosmopolitanism, which is one of the main themes of the novel, as many scholars have noticed. In Bakhtinian terms, one would say that eclecticism is a hybridized word – belonging to the habitual lexis of the character – while cosmopolitanism belongs to the lexis of the narrator. This adjustment requires the next one, which is not in the typescript; the reference to Mayadebi is excised in favour of a more general reference to cosmopolitanism. The phrase "most detestable kind" also suggests that there may be several kinds of cosmopolitanism; and Tha'mma appears to loath most of them (if not all) for they are the opposite of nationalism. This is yet another point where Tha'mma's mindset appears colonial – and hence paradoxically close to Ila's – as nationalism is a typical European concept, while cosmopolitanism has a long tradition in Bengal from Ram Mohan Roy to Swami Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore.

Summing up these changes, one is reminded of Italo Calvino's *Memos for the New Millennium* (1985), especially of "Lightness" and "Exactitude". The former is displayed in freeing the text from grammar and typographical constraints as Ghosh creates a free indirect speech that could actually be written in inverted commas – thus thinning the boundary between direct and indirect speech. Like the decision of adding Tridib to the trip to the Victoria Memorial instead of letting May and the protagonist on their own, this stylistic choice reduces the space occupied by the narrator in favour of the other characters without actually silencing him like a direct speech would do.

Calvino's "Exactitude" is a quality that Tridib would sum up in the precept "use imagination with precision" (SL: 24). Here it is apparent in the selection of the term "cosmopolitanism" rather than "eclecticism" and in providing a fit context for it, passing from "which she detected in her own sister" in A, to "which she so much distrusted in her own sister" in B, to the final "synonymous in her mind with the most detestable kind of cosmopolitanism". The narrator, on the other hand, is alert to exactitude, as he immediately points out his grandmother's mismatch in choosing the verb that denotes her homecoming. The famous passage is worth a closer comparison with the earlier version:

> I laughed, delighted at having caught my schoolmistress grandmother out. <~~Didu, didu~~ Tha'ma, Tha'ma [sic] B>, I cried, pounding on the arms of the sofa; <~~didu~~ Tha'ma B>, you don't know the difference between coming and going. How can you 'come' to Dhaka ? You don't know whether you are coming or going. For me that phrase was to become as intimate and inseparable a part of my grandmother as the jingling of the keys which hung knotted to her sari on her shoulder. I teased her with it for years: [7th sheet] <~~for example,~~> if she happened to tell me that she was going to take a lesson in Bengali grammar, <for example, B> I'd burst out laughing and say: But <~~Didu~~ Tha'ma B>,[15] how can you teach grammar – you don't know the difference between coming and going<~~.~~ ? B> Eventually the phrase passed on to the whole family and became a part of its secret lore; a barb in that fence we used, like every real family, to demonstrate our uniqueness to others.

> **I jumped to my feet**, delighted at having caught **her** out – she, who'd been a schoolmistress **for twenty-seven years**. Tha'mma, Tha'mma! I cried. **How could you have 'come' home to Dhaka?** You don't know **the difference between** coming and going!
> I teased her with **that phrase** for years **afterwards**. If she happened to say she was going **to teach me Bengali** grammar, for example, I **would laugh** and say: But Tha'mma, how can you teach me grammar**?** You don't know the difference between coming and going**.** Eventually the phrase passed on to the whole family and became a part of its secret lore; a barb in that fence we **built to shut ourselves off from others**.

As we have noted before, this part, which foreshadows and interprets the two sections into which the novel is divided, is thematically pivotal and the author has bestowed special care on it. Most changes are on the paradigmatic axis, although the lexis remains within the same semantic field. The same principle of Lightness seen above seems to preside over some of the choices, such as "I jumped to my feet" instead of "pounding on the arms of the sofa", while "I'd burst out laughing" becomes simply "I would laugh", likewise the lengthy sentence about Bengali grammar is shortened with the extra advantage of pointing to the relationship between Tha'mma and the protagonist. Similarly the reference to the bunch of keys has been excised. As before, the verbal space occupied by the protagonist is reduced in favour of the other characters.

Exactitude is achieved through specific lexical choices: the verb "to tease" which was there right from the start is confirmed, while "that phrase" replaces a generical "it". "The difference between coming and going", i.e. the "phrase" appears twice in order to give it due prominence and suggest the idea of a playful repetition.

As it often happens also in Proust's *Remembrance*, eventually the whole episode is turned into a kind of insight ensuing in a general speculation. The reflection is similar in the two passages and is carried by the same metaphor of the barbed wire, but the idea seems sharper in the printed version, where the first-person plural no longer points to the protagonist's family, but to the majority of families, making the specification ("like every real family") unnecessary – another instance of weight loss.

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[15] Here "Didu" is capitalized, while it was not in the previous occurrences.

The foregoing notes point to some possible paths of investigation for the typescript. Unfortunately, there is no Ghoshian archive available for scholars to study drafts extensively, but other scholars better equipped than myself in linguistics may find in the pages reproduced above some useful material to guide us all through the complexities of this almost classic novel.

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AN ALTERNATIVE MODERNISM

Proust's Lesson in *The Shadow Lines*[*]

Eleonora SPARVOLI

ABSTRACT • Amitav Ghosh has often acknowledged Proust as a source of inspiration for *The Shadow Lines*. To him Proust's work represented a French alternative to English and American Modernism, where you can still trace a narrative or representational impulse. Building on this statement, the essay investigates the role of narrative in Proust's "antinovelistic" text, tracking its subtle link to yet another Proustian theme, namely a sense of distrust in the possibility of ever knowing reality, which can be attained only through someone else's narration. This mediation may open new worlds, like those where the genius of Proust and Ghosh linger for pages. And yet these narratives may become the screen against which every attempt at unveiling the mystery of life and death inexorably crashes, remaining untold.

KEYWORDS • Marcel Proust; Recherche du temp perdu; Amitav Ghosh; Shadow Lines; Modernism.

In an interview with John Hawley, Amitav Ghosh reveals that right about the time when he was beginning his work on *The Shadow Lines*, he had started reading the *Recherche* (1913-1927), which had a substantial influence on his work. Unsurprisingly in fact. We know how Proustian writing – ever suasive, pervading, enchanting – may take possession of a reader's soul and never let go, even for a lifetime. Rather surprising are instead the reasons that Ghosh offers for being attracted to the great novel and the lesson he claims to have gleaned from it. They do not only cast a light on Ghosh's own poetics, but retrospectively also illuminate Marcel Proust's enterprise – according to the fascinating notion of "comparatisme à rebours" (backward comparatism) that was theorised by the author of the *Recherche* (Proust 1971 : 311). According to this notion, a writer sometimes may find in an author from the past some "anticipated reminiscences" (such is Proust's paradoxical phrase) of some insights of his. These insights are the actual perfected realization of a potential that was foreshadowed in the earlier work and becomes clear only in the later one. I am referring to this statement of the Indian novelist:

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[*] Translated by Alessandro Vescovi.

> One of the reasons why Proust made such an impression was that his work seemed to me to represent an alternative modernism. Until then I had been exposed mainly to the Anglo-Irish-American variant of modernism, which is, of course, deeply hostile to the narrative or representational impulse. Proust's work on the other hand, offered many very interesting possibilities so far as narrative is concerned. And from the start of my writing life my fundamental engagement has been with narrative. (Hawley 2005: 8)

The word "narrative" strikes the Proustian scholar – or even the devote reader – who knows how Proust's work has generated a break from the novelistic tradition of the nineteenth century.[1] The French novelist was proud that his work showed none of those elements that had characterised the glory of the nineteenth-century novel: none of his characters would ever do anything (standing up, opening a window, putting on an overcoat) except to give these acts some interior meaning,[2] to disclose some repressed issue that would be exposed as if by a Freudian slip (J.Y. Tadié 2012). Proust is not interested in the action itself, the peripeteia, the advancement of the plot, unless they can reveal the symptoms of a deeper, unconfessed, conflict. Still Ghosh is right when he says that narration lies at the heart of the *Recherche*. In a book that locates in art the only reason for existing, the narrative mediation, the fact that something is recounted by someone else, seems the only possible key to accessing reality, the only way to confer value upon it.

In an often-quoted statement, Proust once spoke of the artist's power to multiply the universe:

> Le seul véritable voyage, le seul bain de Jouvence, ce ne serait pas d'aller vers de nouveaux paysages, mais d'avoir d'autres yeux, de voir l'univers avec les yeux d'un autre, de cent autres, de voir les cent univers que chacun d'eux voit, que chacun d'eux est.[3]

In front of Ila's surprise at his "remembering" an event that he never witnessed, but has heard from Tridib, the narrator of *The Shadow Lines* makes a very similar remark:

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[1] On Proust's modernism see Sparvoli (2019).

[2] «Mon livre est dépouillé de ce qui occupe la majeure partie des romans: à moins que ce ne soit pour faire signifier à ces actes quelque chose d'intérieur, jamais un de mes personnages ne se lève, ne ferme une fenêtre, ne passe un pardessus, etc.» (*Correspondance de Marcel Proust*, texte établi, présenté et annoté par Ph. Kolb, Paris, Plon, t. XIII, 1985, p. 25, Proust's letter to Henri Ghéon, January 1914). "My book has shed everything that occupies the best part of many a novel: unless it points to some interior issue, never does one of my *characters* close a *window*, wash his hands, *puts on an overcoat* or introduce people to one another" (Our translation).

[3] The only true voyage of discovery, the only fountain of Eternal Youth, would be not to visit strange lands but to possess *other eyes*, to behold the universe through the *eyes* of *another*, of a hundred *others*, to behold the hundred universes that each of them beholds. All translations of Proust's work, unless otherwise indicated, are by C.K. Monkrief.

"Neither then nor later […] did I ever succeed in explaining to her that I could not forget because Tridib had given me worlds to travel in and he had given me eyes to see them with" (SL:23). Furthermore, talking about some placenames that appear trivially familiar to his cousin (the Plaza Mayor in Madrid, Cuzco in Mexico), the narrator adds that he considers them "a set of magical talismans because Tridib had pointed them out to [him] on his tattered old Bartholomew's Atlas" (SL: 23).

Every reader of the *Recherche* is alert to the importance of names. Proust initially had planned to entitle the first volume *L'age des nomes* (the age of names).[4] That is the volume that tells the worshipping passion ("croyance") through which childhood envisages and desires a world that is still unknown and therefore inhabited by gods. There is more. One man contributes to this kind of animism that fills the child's world with divinities, Swann – a character very close to that of Tridib. He is a kind of alter ego of the narrator, one generation older – endowed with authority and prestige – who seems to anticipate the aesthetic and sentimental experiences that the narrator will later encounter. It is Swann who tells his young protégé how in Balbec – a small imaginary town on the coast of Normandy known to the protagonist for its storms and shipwrecks – there stands a most singular cathedral: "L'église de Balbec, du XIIe et XIIIe siècle, encore à moitié romane, est peut-être le plus curieux échantillon du gothique normand, et si singulière, on dirait de l'art persan".[5]

Thus the narrator, fascinated by the idea that a Gothic profile (with an oriental resemblance) may have bloomed at the foot of the deadly cliffs, starts fantasising on the place-names that appear on the rail timetable all the way to Balbec – Bayeux, Coutances, Vitré, Questambert. Later the narrator will actually undertake the journey, thus discovering the impossibility of overlapping dream and reality, and making some crucial experiences, both for himself and his narrative. So much so that towards the end of the *Recherche* he will write:

> Si j'y réfléchissais, la matière de mon expérience, laquelle serait la matière de mon livre, me venait de Swann. […] C'était lui qui m'avait dès Combray donné le désir d'aller à Balbec, où sans cela mes parents n'eussent jamais l'idée de m'envoyer, et sans quoi je n'aurais pas connu Albertine, […] les Guermantes, […] Saint-Loup et […] M. de Charlus.[6]

M. Proust, *La Prisonnière* in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, édition publiée sous la direction de J.-Y. Tadié, Paris, Gallimard ("Bibliothèque de la Pléiade"), t. III, 1988, p. 762. The only true voyage of discovery, the only fountain of Eternal Youth, would be not to visit strange lands but to possess *other eyes*, to behold the universe through the *eyes* of *another*, of a hundred *others*, to behold the hundred universes that each of them beholds.

[4] Initially the work was conceived as a trilogy: *L'Age des noms, L'Age des mots, l'Age des choses.*

[5] M. Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann*, in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, cit., t. I, 1987, p. 378. "The church at Balbec, built in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and still half romanesque, is perhaps the most curious example to be found of our Norman gothic, and so exceptional that one is tempted to describe it as Persian in its inspiration".

[6] M. Proust, *Le Temps retrouvé* in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, cit., t. IV, 1989, pp. 493-494.

Without Swann he would have never experienced the unrequited love for Albertine – which takes so much of the narrative – he would not have taken part in that *matinée* at the Guermantes where he first conceived the idea of becoming a writer and a subject to write about: "ce qui faisait que je devais à Swann non seulement la matière mais la décision".[7]

Arguably the protagonist of *The Shadow Lines* owes most of his experiences and his inspiration to Tridib.

The necessity for a third party's mediation in order to apprehend reality is connected to René Girard's famous theory of the *désir triangulaire* – a desire which, in order to move a subject towards an object, needs a third element who, by desiring someone or something, shows to the subject what to aim at. This phenomenon, that is quite pervasive in Proust's novel (and even in the history of its genesis), was not unknown to Proust himself, who had discovered the French cathedrals and Venice through Ruskin's books, and Vermeer's *View of Delft* thanks to an article by a renown scholar, Jean-Louis Vaudoyer. French cathedrals, Venetian architecture, and Vermeer live on in the subject matter as well as in the structure of the *Recherche*.

This experience is hardly uncommon – we all have met and loved something through someone else's stories. But it becomes more meaningful when we consider it together with a notion – central in Proust's and Ghosh's novels – that confers to another's narrative a more disquieting and pessimistic hue. I am referring to a sort of scepticism about objective knowledge – a concept that, to Proust, is devoid of any meaning. All forms of knowledge are not only subjective, but also based on convictions, prejudices, projections, heard or read tales much more than on sensorial data. The imagined reality in the *Recherche* is more real that the experienced one. Writing about the names and cities mused upon by the protagonist, Proust comments: "Même à un simple point de vue réaliste, les pays que nous désirons tiennent à chaque moment beaucoup plus de place dans notre vie véritable, que le pays où nous nous trouvons effectivement".[8]

It is immaterial that those places, when visited later, are not up to our expectations. The rectification made *a posteriori* by our minds has little existential value and does not really affect one's knowledge. What really counts instead is the long and painful desire that we have long tended in ourselves. The mind immediately goes to one of the most extraordinary passages in Ghosh's novel, where the protagonist reports Tridib's idea of the means to real knowledge:

«In short, when I thought about him the raw material of my experience, which was to be the raw material of my book, came to me from Swann […]. It *was* also he *who, ever* since the *Combray* days, *had* given me the wish to go to *Balbec*, where *without* that my parents *would never have* thought of sending me, and *without* which I *would never have known Albertine*, or even the *Guermantes*, […] Saint – Loup […] and *M* . de *Charlus*."

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 494. "I owed Swann *not just* the material *but* the *decision*, too".

[8] M. Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann*, in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, cit., t. I, p. 383. "Even from the simplest, the most realistic point of view, the countries which we long for occupy, at any given moment, a far larger place in our actual life than the country in which we happen to be."

> He said to me once that one could never know anything except through desire, real desire, which was not the same thing as greed or lust; a pure, painful and primitive desire, a longing for everything that was not in oneself, a torment of the flesh, that carried one beyond the limits of one's mind to other times and other places, and even, if one was lucky, to a place where there was no border between oneself and one's image in the mirror. (SL: 31)

A very Proustian page indeed, I believe, which may be juxtaposed to another passage from the *Recherche* when the young hero indulges in fantasies about the places he would like to visit. Playing with synaesthesia, he attributes to such places characteristics that are attached to the sound of their names, or to the colours connected to their pictured representations or to actual pictures hanging in those palaces, which he has seen on illustrated books. The following quote describes the project to visit Venice the coming spring, which excites the protagonist to the point of breaking down:

> J'entendis mon père me dire: «Il doit faire encor froid sur le Grand Canal, tu ferais bien de mettre à tout hasard dans ta malle ton pardessus d'hiver et ton gros veston.» À ces mots je m'élevai à une sorte d'extase; ce que j'avais cru jusque-là impossible, je me sentis vraiment pénétrer entre ces «rochers d'améthyste pareils à un récif de la mer des Indes»; par une gymnastique suprême et au-dessus de mes forces, me dévêtant comme d'une carapace sans objet de l'air de ma chambre, qui m'entourait, je le remplaçai par des parties égales d'air vénitien, cette atmosphère marine, indicible et particulière comme celle des rêves que mon imagination avait enfermée dans le nom de Venise, je sentis s'opérer en moi une miraculeuse désincarnation; elle se doubla aussitôt de la vague envie de vomir qu'on éprouve quand on vient de prendre un gros mal de gorge, et on dut me mettre au lit avec une fièvre si tenace, que le docteur déclara qu'il fallait renoncer non seulement à me laisser partir maintenant à Florence et à Venise mais, même quand je serais entièrement rétabli, m'éviter, d'ici au moins un an, tout projet de voyage et toute cause d'agitation[9].

The desire to visit a place that, like Venice, is such stuff as dreams are made on (dreams ailed by Ruskin's *Stones of Venice*, paraphrased in the quotation[10]) pushes the narrator to an ecstatic – almost hysterical considering the ensuing crisis ! – dematerialization. His desire is such as Tridib describes: one that creates pain and wears off one's flesh so as to blur the boundaries between inside and outside, between imagination and reality.

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[9] M. Proust, *Du côté de chez Swann*, in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, cit., t. I, p. 386. «I heard my father say: 'It must be pretty cold, still, on the Grand Canal; whatever you do, don't forget to pack your winter greatcoat and your thick suit.' At these words I was raised to a sort of ecstasy; a thing that I had until then deemed impossible, I felt myself to be penetrating indeed between those "rocks of amethyst, like a reef in the Indian Ocean"; by a supreme muscular effort, a long way in excess of my real strength, stripping myself, as of a shell that served no purpose, of the air in my own room which surrounded me, I replaced it by an equal quantity of Venetian air, that marine atmosphere, indescribable and peculiar as the atmosphere of the dreams which my imagination had secreted in the name of Venice; I could feel at work within me a miraculous disincarnation; it was at once accompanied by that vague desire to vomit which one feels when one has a very sore throat; and they had to put me to bed with a fever so persistent that the doctor not only assured my parents that a visit, that spring, to Florence and Venice was absolutely out of the question, but warned them that, even when I should have completely recovered, I must, for at least a year, give up all idea of travelling, and be kept from anything that was liable to excite me".

[10] "And at last, when its walls were reached, and the outmost of its untrodden streets was entered,

However, the primacy of imagination – which aims at filling the lacunae of one's direct knowledge through someone else's narrative – does not only depict enchanted worlds. When the hidden truth we seek regards the betrayal of someone we love, or someone's tragic demise, then the narrative mediation takes on a hellish tone: far from bridging the gap between ourselves and reality, it widens it, multiplying the veils that hide the unknowable secret.

When the narrator of the *Recherche* investigates Albertine's past – the woman he loved, who left him and later perished falling off a horse – he questions a number of diverse witnesses looking for evidence of her infidelity or her innocence – less likely for a man devoured by jealousy. Frustrated by a fruitless investigation, he wishes he could meet at least one reliable witness, like certain novelists, he says – the image deserves all our attention – who proclaim in the introduction of their work that what they write is a true story, told by someone who has personally taken part in it: "Combien nous voudrons quand nous aimons, c'est-à-dire quand l'existence d'une autre personne nous semble mystérieuse, trouver un tel narrateur informé! Et certes il existe"[11]. Undoubtedly he exists, and yet the truths he could tell us – the tale of the beloved one's life – will not unveil her mystery.

> On voudrait que la vérité nous fût révélée par des signes nouveaux, non par une phrase, une phrase pareille à celles qu'on s'était dites tant de fois. L'habitude de penser empêche parfois d'éprouver le réel, immunise contre lui, le fait paraître de la pensée encore. Il n'y a pas une idée qui ne porte en elle sa réfutation possible, un mot le mot contraire.[12]

Thus, even when Albertine's best friend admits that she had indeed had a lesbian intercourse with her on the very day the narrator suspected it, her confession sounds to the narrator a mere verbal construction, just like those he had fabricated through his endless musings – a flimsy truth that could easily be reversed, just another lie. The narrative mediation – necessary given the absence of irrefutable evidences – sanctions, in this case,

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not through towered gate or guarded rampart, but as a deep inlet between two rocks of coral in the Indian sea […]" (J. Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, volume II, *The Sea-stories*, Boston, Estes and Lauriat, 1853, pp 8-9.

[11] M. Proust, *Albertine disparue* in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, cit., t. IV, 1989, p. 131. «How gladly would we, when we are in love, that is to say when another person's existence seems to us mysterious, find some such well-informed narrator! And undoubtedly he exists».

[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 181-182. We would like the truth to be revealed to us by novel signs, not by a sentence, a sentence similar to those which we have constantly repeated to ourselves. The habit of thinking prevents us at times from experiencing reality, immunises us against it, makes it seem no more than another thought. There is no idea that does not carry in itself its possible refutation, no word that does not imply its opposite.

the impossibility of ever knowing the life of someone we love and eternally eludes us. But, even if those testimonies, the evidence so much sought after would emerge, would he be able to read them? When Albertine was still alive, next to him, he would question her repeatedly asking how she spent her time and what people she met during those walks that he, unfortunate gaoler, allowed her to take. Her tales rang true, and yet he lamented the absence of any tangible proof. The only irrefutable one?

> Pour invoquer ce témoignage des sens il eût fallu que j'eusse été précisément dehors, ce qui n'avait pas eu lieu. On peut imaginer pourtant qu'une telle hypothèse n'est pas invraisemblable. […] Et j'aurais su alors qu'Albertine avait menti. Est-ce bien sûr encore? […] Le temoignage des sens est lui aussi une opération de l'esprit où la conviction crée l'évidence.[13]

No data are true or false to our sense: their alleged truth depends on the meaning we attach to them. For the narrator of *The Shadow Lines*, describing Tridib's death would mean to give meaning to an event which looms like an open chasm, an abyss of absurdity. Ghosh is probably hinting at this void as he decides to have the event narrated through the four tales that the narrator reports; here truth appears feeble and ineffectual, like the ghosts of the mind of those who imagine without knowing.

The first tale, though it is reported as second, is the white lie told by his father, claiming that Tridib died in a car accident caused by the driver who swerved to avoid some "ordinary ruffians" (SL: 208) on the road. This story, verisimilar and deprived of its violence, eventually makes the gist rather unreal to the protagonist who comments "[…] for me 'dead' was just a word, associated vaguely with films and comic books. That was all; I had no means of attaching that word to a real presence, like Tridib's" (SL: 208).

The second account is a fragment of truth uttered by the mother, who immediately denies it, just a few seconds before the tranquillizer works its effect on the narrator:

> Why did you say "killed"? I said. What did you mean?
> But the soporific glow of the tranquilliser had already begun to warm my body, and in a moment I shut my eyes and forgot. (SL: 207)

Even the third story seems subject to the same subtraction of reality. It is the recurrent nightmare that Robi, Tridib's brother, often dreams since the day of the tragedy. Here unreal silences are broken by mysterious cries, sometimes soundless like May's, which Robi cannot hear, but whose desperate gist he well knows. Hasty movements turn into sudden immobility, faces and objects are warped by distress (Jethamoshai's rickshaw "becomes huge […] it grows till it's bigger than the shops and the houses") until Robi wakes up an instant before Tridib leaves the car.

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[13] M. Proust, *La Prisonnière*, cit., t. III, p. 694. «To invoke this evidence of the senses I should have had to be in the street at that particular moment, and I had not been. We may imagine, however, that such an hypothesis is not improbable: I might have gone out and have been passing along the street at a time at which Albertine was to tell me in the evening (not having seen me there) that she had gone a little way with the lady. And I should have known then that Albertine was lying. […] The evidence of the sense is also an operation of the mind in which conviction creates the evidence".

The last tale, apparently the most reliable, is May's, and it comes at the end of the novel. And yet, even this tale, though enriched with raw and real details, blurs into mystery, as the woman, though she remembers the fatal sequences by heart, has never been able to find any sense or reason for it: "He gave himself up; it was a sacrifice. I know I can't understand it, I know I mustn't try, for any real sacrifice is a mystery" (SL: 218).

In classical theatre gruesome or outrageous event would happen off stage, according to the rules of aesthetics and moral. They were recounted, but no one ever doubted their truthfulness. In the alternative modernism that Ghosh attributes to Proust, and that he brings to bear on *The Shadow Lines,* the narrative, though not refuted, appears devoid of its power, as it must be taken as a substitute for an elusive, meaningless reality, a reality that has no sound existence outside the verbal web in which it is caught.

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POLEMICS OF NATIONHOOD

A Study of Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines* and V. S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*

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ABSTRACT • This essay compares V. S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (1967) and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988). The two novels offer contrary perspectives on the imagined nation and man's inherent aptitude or inaptitude of inhabiting diverse cultures with unconditional tolerance, defined as they are by the contextual positioning of the two writers. In Naipaul's fiction, the imaginative project of 'thinking the nation' is shown repeatedly to be deeply flawed or even unworkable, but it cannot be replaced by any supportive faith in universal human values. Ghosh, on his part, focuses on the illusory borderline that in effect separates one from one's mirror-image – in the name of nation and imagined differences. While both dwell on the flawed notion of nationhood and on the dynamics of personal identity and national identity, Ghosh unlike Naipaul, expresses faith in universal human values. This dichotomy lends credence to what Homi K. Bhabha asserts, "Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye…"

KEYWORDS • V. S. Naipaul; The Mimic Men; Nationhood; Shadow Lines.

Similarities and Differences

Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* defines the nation as an "imagined community" born with the demise of feudalism and the rise of capitalism. Identifying the mythopoetic imagination at work behind modern nation-building, Anderson sees it as a kind of narrative project. Authors like the late Nobel Laureate V.S. Naipaul and Jnanpith award winner Amitav Ghosh wouldn't perhaps disagree with this. But while Naipaul sought to promulgate a vision that makes little room for divergent cultural and religious experiences in the construct of nation, Ghosh on his part seeks to replace the myth of the nation with a universalist faith in humanity.

Ghosh has often admitted to being influenced by Naipaul especially in his formative years. In fact, he says, it was Naipaul who first made it possible for him to think of himself as a writer, working in English.

> I was in my teens when I read Naipaul's essay on how, in the Trinidad of his youth, the flowers of the Caribbean were rendered invisible by the unseen daffodils of text-book English

> poets. That essay sparked so powerful a jolt of recognition that the moment has stayed with me ever since. As a child, while reading *The Mutiny on the Bounty* I'd been fascinated by the word "frangipani" which seemed to me to be redolent of all that was mysterious, desirable and secret. Then one day I discovered that the gnarled old branches by my window belonged to none other than a "frangipani" tree: I'd been staring at them for years. My response was neither shock nor disappointment: it was rather a sudden awareness of the anomalousness of my own place in the world. This was not an awareness I had ever seen reflected in anything I'd read – until I came across Naipaul's essay.
>
> This was the magic of reading Naipaul in those years… Naipaul's works were a whetstone against which to sharpen my own awareness of the world. (Ghosh 2001)

This influence surfaces in subtle ways in Ghosh's works, including *The Shadow Lines*. Just as Tridib in *The Shadow Lines* gifted the narrator worlds to travel in and eyes to see them with, Naipaul sharpened Ghosh's awareness of the world while inculcating in him a sense of detachment typical of a sharp and perceptive commentator, rather than a proactive participant.

In my essay, I would like to take up for study Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* published in 1967, that won the 1968 WH Smith Literary Award and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* written in 1988, for which the author won the Sahitya Akademi Award. I would like to show how these novels – shaped by the contextual positioning of the two writers – offer contrary perspectives on the imagined nation and underline man's inherent aptitude or inaptitude of inhabiting diverse cultures with unconditional tolerance.

A study of *The Mimic Men* highlights how formerly colonized people can often be reduced to a bunch of "mimic" men post-independence, losing the ability to cultivate a sense of belongingness. In Naipaul's fiction, the imaginative project of "thinking the nation" is shown repeatedly to be deeply flawed or even unworkable, but it cannot be replaced by any supportive faith in universal human values. *The Shadow Lines,* on the contrary, focuses on the illusory borderline that in effect separates one from one's mirror-image in the name of the nation and of imagined differences. It shows that a person who does not merely understand the contours of her country from a prefabricated textbook, but rather carries her country in her heart as she crisscrosses the world, has actually mastered the secret art of belonging. While both authors dwell on the flawed notion of nationhood and on the dynamics of personal and national identity, Ghosh, unlike Naipaul, expresses faith in universal human values and perceives identity underpinned by syncretism. That is perhaps "because of India," as Ghosh underlines in an interview in *Guernica.* He explains:

> One of the reasons why is because anybody who's lived in India knows that India is incredibly, incredibly diverse… That's one of the wonderfully liberating things about India; it lets you be exactly who you want to be. Zanganeh (2020).

Unlike Ghosh, Naipaul's works mostly revolve around his individual role in history and in that sense, his writings are no more than an extended autobiography concealed within the folds of different narrative structures. *The Mimic Men* is a case in point where the protagonist, Ralph Singh, ashamed of his roots, would rather remake "home" through a mythology of Englishness. He soon realizes that too doesn't provide for an authentic experience, leading therefore to an endless struggle.

For both Naipaul and Ghosh, the nation is a construct to be shaped by individual experiences. Both texts reflect structural similarities with the skillful intertwining of the personal lives of the characters with political events unfolding on the larger national and international canvas. But there is a fundamental difference when it comes to defining the idea of nationality and nationhood that spurs an introspective, transformational journey. Unlike Naipaul's, whose characters are invariably on a quest to belong, Ghosh's characters are often able to overcome every sense of dislocation and identity crisis that they may experience. Ghosh explains the difference very aptly when he says:

> Unlike Naipaul I was from a large country – a large, increasingly self-confident country. Often I think the weaknesses of Naipaul's work come from the fact of his having grown up in a circumstance where there were very intense small conflicts. Where he, I think, could never really claim Trinidad for himself, and never felt enabled to claim it for himself. But I felt very much that I was looking at the world as an Indian. So I think that was certainly one of the huge differences. (Zanganeh 2011)

This then explains why authorial intervention led to the difference in the thought process of the protagonists in the two novels.

Belonging and Rejection

The Mimic Men is set in an anonymous newly independent nation-state, Isabella, a fictitious but representative Caribbean island. The novel goes beyond politics and nationalism to consider the relationship between the socio-political and the psychological consequences of imperialism and its impact on the islanders. Post-independence, the formerly colonized people are reduced to a bunch of "mimic" men. For them independence is a mere word, not a real experience; nationalism, an impossibility. As the protagonist of *The Mimic Men*, Ralph Singh, points out: "To be born on an island like Isabella, an obscure New World transplantation, second-hand and barbarous, was to be born to disorder." (MM: 118)

Cultivating a sense of belongingness, then, is out of the question. Rather, what comes to the fore are feelings of dislocation, fragmentation, placelessness and loss of identity. Lost in the labyrinths of a postcolonial society, independence fails to offer a sense of national unity or identity, leading to a struggle for the protagonist, one that is reflective of the author's inherent struggle to come to terms with his own exilic identity and nationality. Ghosh avers, "He was struggling with something that he was trying to do truthfully, pushing himself. He was never doing what's comfortable, or what's easy. He was always pushing himself."[1] Therein lies Naipaul's strength as an author.

The *Shadow Lines* is sliced into two sections – *Going Away* and *Coming Home* – although in some ways the terms may be used interchangeably. The narrator has no name. He idolizes his uncle Tridib whose views on the nation and the world influence him strongly in his growing years. The narrative is non-linear and the characters in the novel inhabit three different countries – India, Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) and England. The author moves back and forth in time, space and history fusing, on the one hand, spatial, temporal and geographical borders, and on the other, the real and the imaginary. Personal memories often conflict with political histories, exposing the long shadow that falls between the notion of the nation and nationality per se. The narrator rediscovers the significance of national spaces carved out of imagined differences as he observes:

> … there had never been a moment in the four-thousand-year-old history of that map, where the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines – so closely that I, in Calcutta, had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka; a moment when each city was the invented image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free – our looking glass border. (SL: 233)

Spending hours at a stretch listening to his uncle Tridib's stories about London and other faraway lands, the narrator uses his imagination to define the world – which as Tridib explains – could be just as real as the world outside. Central to the novel then is the idea that the nation is a construct whose boundaries are continuously being reimagined and redrawn.

The Mimic Men, too, like *The Shadow Lines* goes back and forth in time as Ralph Singh the narrator tries to impose order in his life and reconstruct his identity by writing his memoirs. Rather than follow a chronological order in his writing, he zigzags through the themes of his childhood, education and adulthood, his life in Isabella and in England, his political career and marriage. Colonization as a theme runs through both novels, although in a more pronounced manner in *The Mimic Men*, and raises questions on identity, culture, history and sense of place. But people in Isabella are caught in between. Far away from their original homeland India and its traditions, they are unable to identify with those traditions or cultural ethos. On the flip side, they differ from the colonizers in all respects and are unable to associate themselves with them. The novel thus looks inward to focus more on the psychological problems of those formerly colonized.

The Shadow Lines is characterized by its universalism, and the idea that people could occasionally be endowed with the gift of "cosmopolitanism" that is, the ability for creative metamorphosis and a capacity to inhabit diverse cultures should they have the will to do so. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* set against a post-independent Caribbean backdrop subverts that very concept, underlining how the notions of colonization, decolonization, history, culture, race and politics leave scars on the colonized peoples. This eventually lead some people like the narrator Ranjit Kripalsingh or rather the mimic man Ralph Singh to write his own story to give meaning to his existence. The constant shifts between the past, the present, and the future reflect Singh's internal chaos; a technique suitable for presenting "social and psychological disturbances" and eventually seeking refuge in the kingdom of words.

Identity versus Mimicry

In *The Shadow Lines* Ghosh professes globalism and humanism rather than nationalism. In Naipaul's *The Mimic Men*, the truth is of a different order that triggers a sense of detachment and alienation creating small isles of men. The narrator's grandmother Tha'mma in *The Shadow Lines* is seen to have a nationalist dream. Her faith relates public service to personal activity. As she tells her grandson, "You can't build a strong country without building a strong body" (SL: 35). She recounts to her grandson how she dreamt of being of help to her shy, reserved classmate who turned out to be a national terrorist, and even kill if the need arose. This fervent patriotic zeal points to an abstract construction of nationhood and the Indian nation-state. The novel also shows how nationalism creates binaries, projects a false history that buttresses its own interest. It celebrates cultural pluralism on the one hand and also shows the sense of sameness that characterizes those on either side of a border.

Naipaul's novel, on the other hand, brings to light the differences and hierarchical framework despite people being on the same side of the border. So, while Ralph Singh is well aware of the ephemeral and relative nature of things that have no room for permanence, he is equally conscious of the supremacy of one race over another. Referring to *The Mimic Men* in his Nobel lecture, Naipaul remarked:

> This new fiction was about colonial shame and fantasy, a book, in fact, about how the powerless lie about themselves, and lie to themselves, since it is their only resource. And it was not about mimics. It was about colonial men mimicking the condition of manhood, men who had grown to distrust everything about themselves. Some pages of this book were read to me the other day — I hadn't looked at it for more than thirty years – and it occurred to me that I had been writing about colonial schizophrenia. But I hadn't thought of it like that (Naipaul 2001).

The schizophrenia stems from the fact that although the former colony of Isabella has become independent, the colonial experience has caused the colonized people to perceive themselves as inferior to the colonizer. Colonization is depicted as a process that erodes their identity, culture, history and sense of place for good. Ralph Singh is therefore sandwiched in between, distanced from India and unable to relate to Isabella and its native colonized lot. These colonial people thus become mimic men aspiring to be part of the superior "English" culture, with independence being akin to a surreal experience, and nationalism holding no water.

Through the Mind's Eye

At one level, both *The Mimic Men* and *The Shadow Lines* endorse Homi K. Bhabha's contention: "Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye…" (Bhabha 1990: 1). For Naipaul – as a way out of this transient nature of things – the only nation in his "mind's eye" is that which is mapped in words. These words instill in him a power of expression that, by default, initiate a process of decolonization and instill a sense of belonging nowhere except to a nation of words.

Tridib, Tha'mma, or the narrator in *The Shadow Lines* carry their nation in their heart. Tha'mma in fact is unable to comprehend "how her place of birth had come to be so messily at odds with her nationality" (SL: 152). Caught between memory and her "other" new identity as an Indian national, between belonging to homeland Dhaka and her Indian citizenship, the certainties of the language of differentiation and distanciation slip away. Rather than say she would go home to Dhaka, she says she would "come home to Dhaka". In her mind, it seemed she sought a fixed and settled point to go away from and come back to through verbs of movement, rather than the point itself being in a state of flux.

The novel highlights nationals are ultimately compelled to shed borders and barriers because abstract concepts of nationalism can never replace human bonding, just as a separatist political logic of the nation-state can never enforce culture difference. Some things will always connect Dhaka to Calcutta, Bengali Hindus to Bengali Muslims and Indians to Pakistanis as images and their reflections in a vast mirror. The grandmother's orthodox Hindu uncle Jethamoshai, for example, has never let the shadow of any Muslim ever pass him all his life, but after the Partition when he has almost lost his senses, he is happily looked after by a Muslim family. Jethamoshai claims that his fate is tied to his land irrespective of who rules over it:

> Once you start moving you never stop. That's what I told my sons when they took the trains. I said: I don't believe in this India-Shindia. It's very well, you're going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here, and I'll die here. (SL: 215)

Naipaul's concept of nationalism as a cultural construct differs. It enables the colonized to posit their difference and autonomy. Ralph Singh feels ashamed of his roots, to which he wouldn't want to go back. As Singh points out, "To be descended from generations of idlers and failures, an unbroken line of the unimaginative, unenterprising and oppressed, had always seemed to me to be a cause for deep silent shame" (MM: 101).

The narrator, once a powerful leader of Isabella but now in his early forties, a has-been who leads a twilight exilic existence in London, is preoccupied with his own "placelessness". In the solitude of his hotel room, he has all the time to reflect on questions concerning politics, the meaning of history, and value of writing, authenticity and identity. His question-mark identity as a mimic man – an imitation Englishman – makes for some thought-provoking observations about identity. Obsessed with his own sense of dislocation, he says

> I no longer dream of ideal landscapes or seek to attach myself to them. All landscapes eventually turn to land, the gold of the imagination to the lead of the reality. […] I could not pretend even to myself to be part of a community or to be putting down roots. […] I prefer the absence of responsibility. (MM: 13-14)

Moreover, once he realizes that idealizing his Hindu past will lead him nowhere; he resorts to Lacanian mimicry – of being mottled against a mottled background in London. However, his covert positioning as a colonized subject subverts imperial power. Bearing out Bhabha's notion of mimicry, his image as the colonized refracts and interrupts, rather than makes room for easily identifiable positions of colonizer/colonized.

According to Bhabha, "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. This is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference" (Bhabha 1994: 86). Living up to that definition, Singh and his English wife Sandra belong to a group in Isabella that comprises Indian men and their expatriate wives, a colonial outcrop. They mimic lives and landscapes that are not their own. Their alienation from their own cultures, selves and island landscape is a product of colonialism and results in a certain kind of vulnerability and fragmentation. Singh's generation re-imagines the Caribbean and remakes "home" through a mythology of Englishness. But when Singh himself tries to reimagine, he recognizes the inauthenticity of the experience. So, instead of a faithful reconstruction, an unfamiliar image is thrown back into the colonial mirror.

Singh's dream of "Central Asian horsemen, among whom I am one, riding below a sky threatening snow, to the very end of an empty world" also provides a link to the past. He looks beyond the villages of the Gangetic plains to a time when his ancestors had not yet become a settled people, when nomadic wandering seemed natural. It is as if India itself were a "temporary accommodation," so its loss was not to be lamented. It follows then that Singh represents displaced and disillusioned colonial individuals for whom nationalistic feelings are non-existent, who exist only for themselves, irrespective of their stature – in Singh's case as that of a powerful politician. It is by writing his memoirs that he tries to impose order on his life, reconstruct his identity and get rid of the crippling sense of dislocation and displacement.

Polemics of Nationhood

In *The Mimic Men*, although he is unable to understand Hinduism, Singh idealizes his Hindu past and culture. So he is shocked when his father sacrifices Tamango, the race horse, even though he is aware of the symbolic significance of such an act in Hindu tradition. The aim of this *Ashvamedha yajna* is to secure prosperity and fertility. When the horse is killed, the ideal past collapses for Singh as a child. Ironically, however, Singh's purpose behind idealizing the past was to snap all ties with plantation and slavery, and reconstruct history to establish his identity. But with time, he realizes that such a task is impossible and, he is disillusioned with this Indian world that is in stark contrast with the noble and ideal realm of imagination. His identity by virtue of his birth becomes as non-existent as that which he was forced to appropriate as an exile.

Thus, as Singh moves among the unanchored individuals in London, he understands alienation and exile are to be found everywhere. The cause of man's isolation, restlessness and alienation is not physical or geographical but spiritual; it is within him. His situation is thus symptomatic of Edward Said's comment, "The exile knows that in a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional" (2001: 185). Nationhood therefore is rendered meaningless as it fails to foster an identity that Singh can hold on to. For him, as much as for his creator Naipaul, home and the security and permanence it symbolizes then are ultimately to be found in the books they write or, rather in the action of writing them, the nation of words.

In *The Shadow Lines,* on the other hand, the narrator realizes that the uniqueness of Indian culture lies not so much in unifying ideology or philosophy as in society's traditional ability to preserve cultural diversities and use them to build psychological and even metaphysical defenses against cultural erosion. A paramount characteristic of the ideology of nationalism is that it defines itself in opposition to other countries across the border. Ghosh undermines this "myth of nationalism" on the Indian subcontinent, which has erected walls among heterogeneous ethnicities under the pretext of freedom, but has not been able to erase similarities to tailor them to a political-nationalist ideology. More than the nation-state, it is nation-people which is of supreme importance to Ghosh. When Robi recollects his brother Tridib's death in Dhaka fifteen years earlier, he expresses Ghosh's disillusion towards the nation states in the Indian subcontinent:

> And then I think to myself, why don't they draw thousands of little lines through the whole subcontinent and give every little place a new name? What would it change? It's a mirage; the whole thing is a mirage. (SL: 247)

The culture itself demands that a certain permeability of boundaries be maintained. On moral, intellectual and ideological grounds, Ghosh was opposed to the narrow myths of the modern nation-state, and preached, by contrast, the ideals of universal brotherhood and cosmopolitanism. His endorsement of the syncretism and humanism that downplay cultural differences explains his antipathy towards nationalism and its divisive epistemology. *The Shadow Lines* is thus split between the binaries of belonging and not-belonging, home and homelessness, filiality and orphanhood. It presents a far more liberal, open and modern "polemics of nationhood" than *The Mimic Men*, which fails to tackle the binaries or perceive inherent contraction from a broader, global perspective. This lack of an intellectual and aesthetic stance of openness toward divergent cultural and religious experiences also goes to explain why Ghosh emphasized:

> [Naipaul's] views and opinions I almost always disagreed with: some because they were founded in truths that were too painful to acknowledge; some because they were misanthropic or objectionable; and some because they came uncomfortably close to being racist or just plain ignorant (the last, particularly, in his writings on the Islamic world). Yet he was writing of matters that no one else thought worth noticing; he had found words to excavate new dimensions of experience. (Ghosh 2001)

The nation then in both novels is "imagined into being" – and in each, it is real in its own way. Naipaul looks inward – moving from global to local to show how its imagining is flawed. What is feasible for him is a nation created out of words without any supportive faith in universal values. Ghosh on the contrary professes a far more global, universalist, cosmopolitan faith in humanity, which goes beyond the nation and its making of physical and mental borders.

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THE LANGUAGE OF VIOLENCE AND FEAR IN *THE SHADOW LINES*

A Stylistic Analysis

Federica ZULLO

ABSTRACT • Since his first novels and essays written in the early 1980s Amitav Ghosh has shown an interest not in war itself, but in its more varied and contemporary versions, that is social and political turmoil, small conflicts, communal violence, "incendiary circumstances" (Alexander 2003). He has witnessed and narrated many of the conflictual moments taking place in India after Independence and Partition, giving voice to people's insecurity and fear. In *The Shadow Lines* he tells of private, personal stories deeply enmeshed in history and politics, being able to show the characters' emotions, anxieties and sense of humanity. In my paper I explore the language of a novel that reflects Ghosh's "mind style", in which "the author causes the reader to rearrange standard linguistic categories through metaphorical interpretation" (Leech and Short, 2007). I elaborate on the way fear enters the narrative and affects the characters, analysing the linguistic and stylistic strategies the writer uses to convey, in some crucial passages, a state of generalized terror. It is a discourse of fear that is developed in different ways throughout the novel, and it can be expressed, for example, through the focus on alternative objects, sounds and peculiar visions, according to the technique of foregrounding (Douthwaite 2000). Ghosh highlights the fear of the mob, together with the fear of the Other, of the terrorists, of the poisoning, or no fear at all: the narrative of these issues impresses the reader thanks to the use of effective stylistic features such as parallelisms, alliteration, repetitions and similes, and the over-lexicalization of certain words (Machin and Mair 2012). My analysis intends to show Ghosh's aim in writing *The Shadow Lines*: to find a suitable literary form and, at the same time, a suitable literary and linguistic style to present social and political dramatic situations, with the intent of taking the reader towards alternative trajectories, across the possibilities of language.

KEYWORDS • Shadow Lines; Fear; Violence; Style; Language; Memory.

Since his first novels and essays published in the late 1980's, Amitav Ghosh has manifested his interest in war not through the writing of canonical narratives, but rather concentrating on various, smaller conflicts, showing a different scenery than the military action.

The author has always paid attention to some “incendiary circumstances” that have marked the contemporary history of the Indian subcontinent, from British colonialism in the nineteenth century to the present times, choosing to mesh private, personal stories with greater conflicts, and highlighting the characters’ emotions, desires and reflections in those extraordinary situations. In his essay “The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi”, published in 1995, he recalls the turmoil that followed Indira Gandhi’s assassination in 1984, and expresses the will to narrate the world starting from situations a writer has to give an account of:

> The riots were generated by a cycle of **violence**[1], involving the **terrorists** in Punjab, on the one hand, and the Indian government, on the other. To write carelessly, in such a way as to appear to endorse **terrorism or repression**, can add easily to the problem, and in **such incendiary circumstances**, **words** can cost lives, and **it is only appropriate** that those who deal in **words** should pay **scrupulous** attention to what they say. **It is only appropriate** that they should find themselves **inhibited**”. (Ghosh, 2005:201)

In this passage we can observe a peculiar style, which seems to be typical of the author, both of his non-fictional and fictional writing. The way he sustains crucial ideas about colonial and postcolonial issues, and the way the characters of his novels do so, is often constructed through the use of parallel structures, of simple or rather complex sentences made up of coordination and subordination in which some keywords are repeated. As an example, in the passage above **words** and **appropriate** are repeated in a parallel structure (**It is only appropriate**) with a coordinate clause followed by a declarative sentence.

In “The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi” we are able to observe a frequent over-lexicalization of words, which means, according to Machin and Mayr, “an overemphasis on certain terms, the repetition of quasi-synonymous terms to give rise to a sense of over-completeness” Machin, Mayr 2012: 37). As for the previous passage, this regards the same semantic area of conflict **(violence, terrorism, repression, incendiary circumstances, terrorists)** and it is certainly effective that in just four lines we find such a concentration of “quasi-synonymous terms”, with the addition of some adjectives that express the fear generating from those words (**scrupulous, inhibited**). This is because the writer wants to make the point as clear as possible, since he needs to support his thoughts and feelings about those circumstances throughout the whole essay.

We will find the same stylistic features in The Shadow Lines, a novel mainly characterized by a straightforward language, which doesn’t mean simple structures and easy language, but rather a language that needs to communicate a world-view, and wants to convey what the narrator and the characters think and perceive about the world. We can associate Ghosh’s style to what Leech and Short call “mind style”, in which “the author causes the reader to rearrange standard linguistic categories through metaphorical interpretation. Any conceptualization of a world presupposes both a world to refer to, and a mind through which that world is reflected" (Leech and Short, 2007:151). It is commonplace that a writer's style reveals that particular writer's habitual way of experiencing and interpreting things, but the term "mind style" can be a realization of a narrative point of view. "The strangeness is in the way the author causes the action to be perceived, for example in the uses of senses, touch, vision and sound" (Leech and Short, 2007: 151).

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[1] Bold is mine in all quotations of this paper, in order to emphasize the stylistic features of Ghosh’s works.

I will consider these elements (especially vision and sound) in my analysis of both the essay on Mrs. Gandhi and the novel. First of all, I concentrate on the modality used by the author to talk about violence and conflicts, in fictional and non-fictional writing, looking at the lexical and grammatical categories, as well as the figures of speech, the use of irony and humor, the variations in tone and deviations. Secondly, I will examine such stylistic features in the expression and representation of fear that emerges from The Shadow Lines, in crucial passages where hidden secrets from the family and national past are traumatically revealed.

Words of Conflicts, Lines of Memory

Amitav Ghosh explores the Indian colonial and postcolonial history to catch nightmares and hidden secrets to be revealed, to critically discuss themes about nationalism, national construction, and migration. The Shadow Lines is a novel about a series of conflicts spanned across space and time, where the characters face violence and fear, and struggle to understand the meanings of events. The faded and fragmented memory of a riot in Calcutta in 1964, which constitutes the core event around which the whole novel develops, reflects the notorious phenomenon of communalism, that is a sudden explosion of violence caused by different religious and political groups. The unnamed narrator tells us that in India this can happen with such an intensity as to devastate in a few minute entire families and communities, generating irreversible changes. Since childhood, he has been a witness of these moments of terror and has lived across the shadow lines of spectral contact zones hiding horror and death. This can be perceived throughout the novel and in the essay "The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi" Ghosh reflects on the best way possible to write about these issues: which words can the writer use? How can a writer who has been personally involved in traumatic events write in the most appropriate way to give an account of them? In the essay he presents a sequence of terrible things that in the same year had taken place in various regions of the Subcontinent:

> Nowhere else in the world did the year 1984 fulfil its apocalyptic portents as it did in India. Separatist violence in the Punjab; the military attack on the great Sikh temple of Amritsar; the assassination of the prime minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi: riots in several cities; the gas disaster in Bhopal – the events that followed relentlessly on each other. There were days in 1984 when it took courage to open the New Delhi papers in the morning. (Ghosh, 2005:201)

The turbulent atmosphere of 1984 is described in the style of a news report: the chronicle of several events that have interconnections and provoke violent chain reactions in the whole country is a list in which the semi-colon separates elements that are part of the same discourse and scenery. This emphasizes the gravity of those facts happening in the same year. After the official report, the author goes on to write about his direct experience of a riot in Delhi in that period, an event that will constitute a point of no return in his narrative, both in the political and historical perspective he will privilege in the future novels and essays, and in the language he will use to represent reality. He continues:

> Of the year's many catastrophes, the sectarian violence following Gandhi's death had the greatest effect on my life. Looking back, I see that the experiences of that period were profoundly important to my development as a writer, so much so that I have never attempted to write about them until now. (Ghosh, 2005: 201)

Ghosh decided to protest against the violence on the Sikh community in Delhi which followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi. The author's reflections that originated from that dramatic moment revolve around two main questions: the first one is about the relationship between the writer as a member of civil society and the problem of intervention, of joining the crowd "when the constitutional authority fails to act" (2005: 202). On this issue Ghosh interrogates himself as never before, just as the incendiary circumstances involve him directly and a sentiment of fear and rage for political inefficiency leads him to intervene, to make a choice of responsibility. The second question is about how to talk about violence and fear, "without creating them as a panorama of violence – "an aesthetic phenomenon" (2005: 201), and without reporting dramatic facts as ordinary press commentary.

Ghosh concludes by saying that the writer should go beyond, having the opportunity to investigate the meaning of a historical moment on different levels, especially in the involvement of those who experience it. In the years that followed that "Orwellian 1984" he keeps working at a new novel, *The Shadow Lines* (1988), defining it later "a book not about any one event, but about the meaning of such events and their effects on the individuals who live through them" (2005: 201). In "The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi", recalling the riots of 1984, he tells about the way his friend Hari and his family had been able to save a Sikh family from Hindu fanatics and how a group of women had marched against the police in a non-violent, silent way.

> It is all **too easy to present violence** as an apocalyptic spectacle, while the resistance to it can **easily figure** as mere sentimentality or, worse, as pathetic and absurd. When I now read descriptions of troubled parts of the world, in which violence appears primordial and inevitable, a fate to which masses of people are largely resigned, I find myself asking, **Is that all there was to it? Or is it possible that the authors of these descriptions failed to find a form – or a style or a voice or a plot – that could accommodate both violence *and* the civilized willed response to it?** (2005: 202)

This is Ghosh's aim while writing his novel: to find a suitable literary form and, at the same time, a suitable literary and linguistic style to present violent situations. In the passage above we find repetitions and anaphora (**or a style or a voice or a plot**), and interrogative sentences that constitute another typical feature in Ghosh's fictional and non-fictional production. The writer continues to address questions not only to himself but to a whole community of readers, and the answer to the following question can be found in *The Shadow Lines*: “is it possible to write about situations of violence without allowing your work to become complicit with the subject?” (2005: 203) This is Ghosh’s challenge and has continued to be so throughout all his work. “It is when we think of the world the aesthetic of indifference might bring into being that we recognize the urgency of remembering the stories we have not written” (2005: 203). There is nothing pathetic and absurd in the way he treats the issues of violence and fear in his book.

The troubled search for the truth that we read and anxiously follow until the end is related to the Partition of India and the consequences of it in Indian politics and society. The unnamed narrator’s familiar story highlights what J. Alexander writes about trauma, which is “not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity’s sense of its own identity” (Alexander, 2003: 93). The Partition of India can be considered as a social and cultural trauma, following Alexander’s definition, that is “when the members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks on their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander, 2003: 93). Cultural trauma penetrates people’s daily lives, it is constantly re-lived through the memory of dramatic moments: in *The Shadow Lines* the way in which imagination characterizes trauma is within the same process of representation. “This is because real or imagined traumatic events are believed to have had damaging effects on collective identity. The status of trauma is assigned to an event only if the pre-established meanings of a collectivity are suddenly destabilized. It is the meaning that causes shock and fear, not the event itself” (Alexander, 2003: 93).

The Shadow Lines has been defined “a memory novel”, and as such, according to Arvin Chowdhary, “the narrative is wrought in non-linear mode. It moves back and forth, in utter disregard of our conventional notions of time and space. This technique enables Ghosh to make the narrator subsume and appropriate the memories of other characters and make them a part of his own memory and consciousness. Some incidents, belonging to different times and different places, even coalesce to give the narrator an insight into some vital aspects of reality – which is rather innovative” (Chowdary, 2002: 6).

In doing so, there emerges a consideration of history, as Brinda Bose suggests, “that sees it as a trajectory of events that causes dislocations, disjunctions, movements and migrations, eventually replacing solid markers with shadow lines, destabilizing our notions of the past in the reverberations of the present” (Bose, 2003:15). Such a new way of looking at the national past has been assumed by the so-called post-Partition generation of Indian writers, Ghosh included, who have conceived alternative versions of history, interpreting that “variety of unpleasant meanings” that have characterized Indian life, fathoming the Partition in every possible aspect, both public and private, in order to grant history, as well as politics, a more human signification.

In the novel, this is reflected in various moments: one is for example when Tha’mma’s uncle insists in his ultimate choice of staying in Dhaka in 1947, despite the exile of his whole family to India. When, in 1964, he receives a visit from his relatives for the first time after Independence, Tha’mma’s sister, Mayadebi, and his son Tridib try in every way to convince him to go to India with them, since his precarious health conditions. Yet, the uncle affirms:

> I know **everything**. I understand **everything**. Once you start moving you never stop. That's what I told my sons when they took the trains. I said: I don't believe in this **India-Shindia**. It's all very well, **you**'re going away now, but suppose when **you** get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will **you** do then? Where will **you** move to? No one will **you** have you anywhere. As for me, **I was born here**, and **I'll die here**. (Ghosh, 1988:211)

The uncle's response is structured mainly with brief, declarative sentences and questions that contain irony, assonance and hyperbole. What we can immediately notice from this passage is the use of the so-called "free direct speech", which is, in Leech and Short's definition, "where the characters apparently speak to us more immediately without the narrator as intermediary" (2007: 258), without quotation marks and reporting clauses. It is striking that Ghosh never uses quotation marks in the moments of dialogue, only leaving sometimes speech reporting clauses. This creates the effect of having a more homogeneous narrative that is not interrupted by punctuation, and it is seems that characters are directly speaking to us. This is the case of the uncle, who also gives an answer to his own questions and it is a definite one. Using the verbs **born here** and **die here** in the parallel structure, he conveys the sense of belonging, from birth to death, to a national entity that has been irremediably dismembered, but which has meant "a nation" for the people of his generation. It was difficult for them to accept such a change, something that was not knowable and was provoking death and terror. The repeated use of the second person singular **you** reinforces the effect of creating a more direct and close relationship with the reader, as if the man was trying to convince everyone, not only his relatives, of the rightness of his choice. The uncle's generation was not afraid of conflict, but was rather attached to a concept, to an idea and did not fear the consequences of such idealism.

Ghosh is also a humorous writer. According to A. Guha, "It is serious humour. Single words hide a wealth of meaning" (Guha, 1999). For example, the way Tridib's father is always referred to as Shaheb, Ila's mother as Queen Victoria, or the way the grandmother's sister always remains Mayadebi without any suffix denoting the relationship. Yet, serious humor is present where he describes, for example, what Tha'mma thinks about her flight to Dhaka in 1964. She starts to ask questions to the narrator's father about the borders she will be able to see from the plane, maybe the border between India and East Pakistan (the future Bangladesh).

> For instance, one evening when we were sitting out in the garden she wanted to know whether she would be able to see the **border** between India and East Pakistan from the plane. When my father laughed and said, why, did she really think the **border** was long black **line** with green on one side and scarlet on the other, like it was in a school atlas, she was not much offended as puzzled (…) No, that wasn't what I meant, she said. Of course not. But surely there is something – **trenches** perhaps, or soldiers, or guns pointing at each other, or even just barren **strips of land**. Don't they call it no-man's land? (…) No, you won't be able to see anything except clouds and perhaps, if you're lucky, some green fields.

> But if there aren't any **trenches** or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then? And if there's no difference, both sides will be the same; it'll be just like it used to be before. What was it all for then – Partition and all the killing and everything – if there isn't something in between? (Ghosh 1988: 149)

Through this mixture of free direct speech and narrative report of speech acts (which is more indirect than indirect speech) Ghosh presents us the futility and senselessness of war, of violence, in short, of Partition. Synonyms of the word **border** constitute an over-lexicalization: border is the keyword of the whole novel and forms the subject of discourse. It is all about lines and borders, but what Tha'mma, and maybe the reader too, would like to know is whether these nouns can be considered as concrete or abstract. Ghosh communicates, through the woman's questions, which are not meaningless at all, all the ambiguity and ambivalence of those nouns, something that has a political and cultural meaning. On this point, John Thieme maintains that the shadow lines are more than the borders established by politicians: "they are the lines of demarcation that separate colonized and colonizer, present and past, self and image. Ultimately they are the signifying acts that construct notions of discrete identity and it is one of the triumphs of Ghosh's brilliant novel that it is able to locate the experience of partition as a very specific Bengali problem, as a more general South Asian phenomenon and as an aspect of human linguistic and psychological experience more generally" (Thieme, 1994: 65-66).

As for the narrative and stylistic mode, Ghosh displaces the questions of nationalism and Partition focusing on the category of borders as a way to critically discuss those issues. This mode can be associated with foregrounding, or artistically motivated deviation, when "the aesthetic exploitation of language takes the form of surprising a reader into a fresh awareness of, and sensitivity to, the linguistic medium which is normally taken for granted as an automatized background of communication" (Leech and Short, 2007: 23). This foregrounding is not limited to metaphor and alliteration, since it may take the form of denying the normally expected clues of context and coherence. In Ghosh's case we may notice how foregrounding leads us to see the opaque qualities of prose style as more than vague metaphors. "Prose is opaque in the sense that the medium attracts attention in its own right; and indeed the interpretation of sense may be frustrated and obstructed by abnormalities in the use of the lexical and grammatical features of the medium" (Leech and Short, 2007: 24). Instead of narrating explicitly in a linear form facts about the protagonist's family, about Partition and the riots of the following decades, Ghosh chooses to deviate from the norm, to focus on some objects of discourse like the "lines" and the movements across them (going away and coming home) as signifiers of a certain discourse on the nation and on the world at large.

Sounds and Visions of Fear: Narrating a Communal Mob

In dealing with the concept of foregrounding, Douthwaite firstly refers to the terms of defamiliarization and enstrangement as they are elaborated by Shklovsky, regarding the way the perceiver is diverted from the familiar and forced into detecting the unfamiliar, since "the function of art is to make people look at the world from a new perspective, to restore the freshness that ordinariness perforce removes from daily experience, to make them regain the world they risk losing" (Douthwaite 2000, 104). In *The Shadow Lines*, along with the linguistic focus on borders and lines, we find another significant prominent feature that takes the reader to detect the unfamiliar and regards the way fear is described and narrated. It is rather a discourse of fear that we find in the novel, developed in different ways and, according to the technique of foregrounding, through the focus on alternative objects, like for example sounds and peculiar visions. Fear of the mob, fear of the Other, fear of the terrorists, fear of the poisoning or no fear at all: these issues are treated in the novel in effective ways.

Firstly, the discourse of fear emerges through the questions that the unnamed narrator asks to her "ultra-nationalist" grandmother when he comes to know about her "terrorist secret activity":

> Weren't you frightened? I asked. A little, she said, fingering the thin gold chain she always wore around her neck. But not very much; we were quite used to police raids in those days. There were raids all the time in the colleges and the university. We'd grown up with it[2].
> She was fascinated, long before that incident, by the stories she had heard about the terrorists. (…) Ever since she heard those stories she had wanted to do something for the terrorists, work for them in a small way, steal a little bit of their glory for herself. (Ghosh, 1988:36-37)

The woman expresses the will to participate in the nationalist movement, since Partition had meant a huge sacrifice for her family and for many other divided families all over the Subcontinent. In her speech she mentions the idea of growing up with turmoil and being used to it. It is through the dialogue between grandma and grandson that Ghosh presents the language of war, a binary discourse made by the good and the evil, us and them, through which one can judge people and politics. This is made clear when Tha'mma talks about the niece Ila, who has moved to London and has decided to live like "them", the people of the West, forgetting about her country of origin:

> Ila **has no right** to live there, she said hoarsely. She doesn't belong there. It took those people a long time to build that country; **hundreds of years, years and years** of **war** and **bloodshed.** Everyone who lives there has earned **his right** to be there with **blood:** with their **brother's blood and their father's blood and their son's blood**. They know they're a nation because they've drawn their borders with **blood.** Hasn't Maya told you how regimental flags hang in all their cathedrals and how all their churches are lined with memorials to men who died in wars, all around the world? **War** is their religion. That's what it takes to make a country. Once that happens people forget they were born this or that, Muslim or Hindu, Bengali or Punjabi: they become a family born of the **same pool of blood**. That is what you have achieved for India, don't you see? (Ghosh, 1988:76)

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[2] Ivi, p. 39.

Again, free direct speech seems to be addressed to a whole community, since it refers to political and historical questions and focuses on some words that go to the point, that are powerful for the way they are expressed. **War, blood, right**: the rhetoric of nationalism is made explicit through parallelism, irony and repetition, and Tha'mma's "brief history of the West". Colonialism and postcolonialism have led to a succession of conflicts that have created insecurity at large, and fear of what is different from you and so revolves against you. Ghosh represents the language of fear as it is built in these moments of instability and insecurity: it is an occult and invisible power which is part of a social imagery that in literature produces the effect of destabilizing the subject, taking the reader into a perturbing dimension and out of his/her reassuring space.

The counterpart of Tha'mma's anti-Western polemic is represented by May's account of her personal fear in the moment she is going to meet Tridib in India. The English girl is going to meet again the Indian boy whom she had known in England years before, the one who has kept writing bizarre letters to her for a long time. May is afraid both of India and of the Oriental man:

> **She had been frightened all day**, on the train. In fact, **she had been frightened** ever since she arrived in Delhi. She couldn't remember why; there wasn't any real reason. But **she remembered her fear**, how she had shut herself into her hotel room – it was like that time when she was a little girl, and she'd found herself alone at the deep end of a swimming pool**.** **She was frightened** because she was alone, because she didn't know what to do. A woman with a mangled hand had asked her for money one morning, and she'd stood there paralysed wondering what to do. All she could do was give her money, and that wasn't doing anything at all; it was an act of helplessness. She wasn't used to being helpless; she was used to doing things. She always had been. (Ghosh, 1988: 163)

She was frightened in/of India: fear of the unknown, that is an ancestral fear, fear of the Orient, a common European fear. India still represented that dark and strange imagery that had filled English imagination: she is a middle-class white English woman, and does not know how to behave there. Tridib too had sensed a kind of fear, in London, during the Second World War, but a different one, due to unexpected events during a war period. Thanks to Tridib's memory, the narrator tries to recreate in his mind the moments of panic before the bomb explosion in London that caused the death of the cousin's friends:

> The realities of the bombs and torpedoes and the dying was easy enough to imagine – mere events, after all, recorded in thousands of films and photographs and comic books. But not that other infinitely more important reality: **the fact that they knew**; that even walking down the street, that evening, **they knew what was coming** – not the details, nor the timing perhaps, but **they knew,** all four them, that their world, and in all probability they themselves, would not survive the war. **What is the colour** of that knowledge? **Nobody knows**, **nobody can ever know**, not even in memory, because there are moments in time **that are not knowable**: nobody can **ever know** what it was like to be young and intelligent in the summer of 1939 in London or Berlin. And in the meanwhile, there they are, in that gilded summer, laughing and singing on their way back to Brick Lane. (Ghosh, 1988: 66-7)

To know and **not to know** often implies to fear and not to fear: instead of May's fear of the unknown, here the young guys don't seem to be scared at all, despite the atmosphere of terror all around them. They just want to live intensely, since they know what is going on and what danger they are going to face. Fear is never mentioned but is hidden everywhere. Fear is described through sensations, thoughts, feelings and through the question about the color of all that.

Instead, in the following passage the object through which fear is expressed is certainly sound, manifested in all its forms and perceptions, since it is through the listening of sounds that a communal mob is gradually constructed, and it is what the narrator as child witnessed with his schoolfriends. It was 1964 and they were used to rallies and small riots, but they soon realized there was something different around, because extreme violence was about to explode:

> My desk was next to a window. Half-way through the lesson, I thought I heard a **noise**, somewhere in the distance: It was **faint** and **scattered**, like the **crackling** of a **short-wave radio station**, I wasn't quite sure I had **heard** anything at all, when I saw Tablu, who was sitting next to me, looking up too. I mouthed the words: What is it? But he didn't know either: he made a face and shrugged. Surreptitiously, keeping an eye on Mrs Anderson, I raised my head and looked out of the window. The **noise** was **louder** now. It **sounded** like **voices, many voices**, but it wasn't the orderly **roar** of demonstration. We were used to demonstrations going past our school; it happened every other day and we never gave them a thought. But this was different – a **shout** followed by another and another, in a **jaggedly random succession**, and then, suddenly, **silence**, and just when they seemed to have died away, there they were, **one voice**, followed by a dozen, and then again a moment of **silence.**
>
> There is a uniquely **frightening note in the sound of those voices** – not elemental, not powerful, like the **roar** of the angry crowd – rather, a torn, ragged quality; **a crescendo of discords** which you know, because of the **slippery formlessness of the fear** it creates within you, to be the **authentic sound of chaos the moment you hear it.** (Ghosh, 1988: 197)

What emerges here is the writing of a soundscape, that is not the presence of the usual phonological schemes, but it rather refers to what Michael Southworth (1969) and later Murray Shafer (1977) have first meant for the term: an acoustic environment that is the combination of all the acoustic resources, natural and artificial, within a given area as modified by the environment. The way Ghosh describes the progressive formation of the mob procedes along with the constant repetition of nouns, adjectives, verbs that belong to the same semantic area. The writer alternates noise, voices and silence, as if he was composing a syncopated piece of music, aimed at shocking and surprising the listener. Thus, we follow the crescendo of fear through the crescendo of sounds and the atmosphere created is a mixture of these two elements. We can observe the same stylistic technique as the narrator continues to describe that dramatic event:

> I still remember the tearful, **sing-song sound** of the boy's **voice** as he **told** us that his mother **heard** that they had poured poison into Tala tank, that the whole of Calcutta's water supply was poisoned. We did not need to ask any questions; we knew the answers the moment **he had said it**: it was a reality that existed **only in saying**, so when **you heard it said**, it did not matter you **believed** it or not – it only mattered that **it had been said** at all (Ghosh, 1988: 95-96).

Say, tell: neutral quoting verbs that are repeated in order to stress the fact that in alarming and frightening situations of the kind every word pronounced, every word that is said can count and even cost lives, and make the difference. These verbs are associated with **hear**, a mental process, according to the definition given by Halliday (1978), which reinforces the perception and construction of fear. What is said, what is heard can contribute to the creation of panic, to the widening of the mob. In the following lines we find the most exhaustive explanation of fear Ghosh has ever presented, always referring to the facts of 1964; now, he really seems to indicate what is the color of uncertainty and insecurity that fuel the tremendous fear surrounding us:

> It would not be enough to say **we were** afraid: **we were** stupefied with **fear**. That particular **fear** has a texture you can neither forget nor describe. It is like the **fear of** the victims of an earthquake, **of people** who have lost faith in the stillness of earth. And yet it is not the same. It is without analogy, for it is not comparable to the **fear** of nature, which is the most universal of human **fears**, not to the **fear** of the violence of the state, which is the commonest of modern **fears**. **It is a fear** that comes of the knowledge **that** normalcy is utterly contingent, **that** the spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits, can become, suddenly and without warning **as hostile as a desert in a flash flood.** It is this that sets apart the thousand millions of people who inhabit the subcontinent from the rest of the world – not language, not food, not music – it is the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one's image in the mirror. (Ghosh,1988: 202)

Parallelism, alliteration and similes, and the over-lexicalization of the word **fear**: these stylistic strategies are used to reach the climax of such a situation, in order to express that sense of impotence which, according to Bauman, constitutes the most perturbing effect of fear and "arouses not from real or alleged dangers as such, but from the wide space opening between dangers from which fears arrive and our possible reactions to them" (Bauman 2006, 160). The metaphor of the "looking-glass border" is evocative of transparent knowledge, of borders that dissolve in space and time, of the uncertainty of our own identity. But what really happens during a communal mob, when "the streets that one inhabits can become suddenly and without warning as hostile as a desert in a flash flood?" Ghosh succeeds in giving an answer to this, in May's revealing tale, when the truth about Tridib finally emerges. Here, we really find an internal deviation, compared to the general style of the novel. In the following passage we encounter a different stylistic mode, made of short, basic sentences, without any subordination, aimed at representing an escalation of panic and terror, and the realization of the senseless violence:

> **We** were on our way back from your grandmother's ancestral house, she went on. The car stopped. **By a mob.** I'm sure you know that. Some of **them** attacked **us**. They broke the windscreen and injured the driver. **We** had an armed security man with us. **He** fired a shot at them**. They** drew back. **They** might even have gone away. But your grandmother's uncle was following behind **us**. In a **rickshaw**. The man who had looked after him all those years was driving the **rickshaw**. **The mob** went after **them** instead. Your grandmother wanted the driver of our car to drive away. She **shouted** at him to get away, fast. I **shouted** back at her and got out of the car. Your grandmother **screamed** at me. She said I didn't know what I was doing, and I'd get everyone killed. I didn't listen, I was a heroine. I wasn't going to listen to

> a stupid cowardly old woman. But she knew what was going to happen. Everyone there did, except me. I began to run towards the **rickshaw**. I heard Tridib **shouting** my name. But I kept running. I heard him running after me. He caught up with me and pushed me, from behind. I stumbled and fell (…) It took less than a moment. Then **the men** began to scatter. I picked myself up and began to run towards **them. The men** had melted away, into the gullies. When I got there, I saw three bodies. **They** were all dead. **They**'d cut Khalil's stomach open. The old man's head had been hacked off. And **they**'d cut Tridib's throat, from ear to ear. That was that; that's all there is to tell. (Ghosh,1988: 245)

The assonance of the verbs **shout, scream,** connected with the noun **rickshaw,** a crucial object in the story, the insistence on the personal and object pronouns that mark the binary division **us/them,** the exclusive use of verbs of movements and the gerund that expresses actions in progress**:** these are some of the elements that contribute to the effective representation of a scene of communal violence, as if we were watching an action movie, with the ever-increasing pace of tension.

To conclude our partial exploration into Amitav Ghosh's linguistic and stylistic strategies in The Shadow Lines, with a specific focus on fear and violence, we can have a confirmation of the author's ability to imagine individuals and communities in social and political dramatic situations with the intent of taking the reader towards alternative trajectories, across the possibilities of language. It is from this novel, from its most violent and fearful moments, that we understand the author's will to contrast the evils of extremism and bigotry with the power of words, in order to propose a kind of human cosmopolitism built upon the lines of private and public memory.

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THE PARTITIONING “SHADOW LINES”

The Border, the “Other” and the Eco-Literary in *The Hungry Tide* and *The Great Derangement*

Asis De, *Nirmalendu* Maiti

ABSTRACT • Amitav Ghosh’s second novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988), published a little more than three decades ago, aims at a philosophical understanding of the significance of borderlines between nations and their people on politico-cultural levels. The political and ethno-religious contexts of the post-Partition Bengal in the eastern part of India serve as the canvas to bring home the cultural significance of the “Partition” between the Bengali-speaking people of two different religions across the border of two nations. In this proposed article we wish to establish the point that, as the notion of the “national” border (which Ghosh likes to find as “shadow” line) in post-Partition Bengal has its role in bifurcating the religio-cultural life of the Bengali people by creating a sense of the “Other’, a similar kind of “border” could be perceived in the human response to the non-human within the organic reality of existence. Taking Ghosh’s concept of the borderline from *The Shadow Lines*, this article explores the author’s employment of the notion of border between the human and the non-human, the human exploitation and the violence exerted on the non-human and the environmental anxiety which finds eco-literary expression in his fiction *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and the non-fiction *The Great Derangement* (2016). We shall explore how the “‘partitioning” or deepening the imaginary gulf between Nature and Culture” (*GD* 92) has contributed to the age-old indifference towards eco-literary expressions as simple nature writings and how climate literature is not just a literary “other” but an urgent demand of time with references to *The Great Derangement*.

KEYWORDS • Partition; Border; Other; Refugee; Violence; Ecology; Environmental Humanities.

> *Between the idea*
> *And the reality*
> *[…]*
> *Between the conception*
> *And the creation*
> *Between the emotion*
> *And the response*
> *Falls the Shadow*”
> T. S. Eliot, *The Hollow Men*

Whether the borderline between India and East Pakistan is visible from the aeroplane, is a puzzling question for Tha'mma in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988). Born in Dhaka and presently living the elderly phase of her life in Calcutta, Tha'mma is confused in defining "home" as she feels a strong sense of belongingness and ethno-cultural integrity with both Calcutta and Dhaka. The immediate effect of the political independence of the Indian subcontinent from the British Raj in 1947 was undoubtedly the Partition of British-occupied India into two nations – India and Pakistan, formed primarily on the condition of religious identity. Historically, the nation of Pakistan in 1947, was split into two landmasses – the West Pakistan (present Pakistan) and East Pakistan (present Bangladesh), both allotted to people of Islamic faith, which has been acknowledged constitutionally in Pakistan and after 1971, also in present Bangladesh. Though may appear quite simple on paper, this act of partitioning the subcontinent was not as easy as a mere cartographic exercise by only drawing borderlines between the nations. The Indian Partition, intended mainly "to regulate or resolve national, ethnic or communal conflicts" (O'Leary 2012: 31) as everyone knows, ultimately resulted in activities exemplary of the mutual distrust between communities – large scale violence, riots, deaths, cross-border migrations on both sides of the border. Brendan O'Leary's observation appears essentially historical when he categorizes the Indian Partition as a case of "external partition" involving "both the modification of prior homeland jurisdictions, and the transformation of the status of the existing sovereign border" (2012: 32). Amitav Ghosh's treatment of the Indian Partition, as represented in *The Shadow Lines*, is more inclusive with subtle nationalist and communal coverages in the eastern part of the post-colonial India compared to O'Leary's idea of "external partition".

Before the 1990s, border studies usually had their principal focus on geophysical landscapes and the territoriality of nation-states, with occasional interests in cultural anthropology, sociology and history. In the last three decades, more inclusive, intersecting and comprehensive discussions have found place in the intellectual discipline called border studies, which is essentially "about process and fluidity" while exclusively "rooted in space and time" (Wilson and Donnan 2012: 4). As Doris Wastl-Walter observes in the introduction of *The Ashgate Research Companion to Border Studies*, borders "can be material or non-material and may appear in the form of a barbed-wire fence, a brick wall, a door, a heavily-armed border guard or as symbolic boundaries, that is, conceptual distinctions created by actors to categorize components of belonging and exclusion" (Wastl-Walter 2011: 2). A concrete or symbolically perceptive boundary-line cutting its way through a binary of realities on both sides, the idea of the border has found a visible evolution from a categorically conceived politico-territorial or socio-cultural interpretation to multiple and trans-disciplinary approaches. The notion of the border has found a politico-territorially and ethno-nationally conceived expression in Amitav Ghosh's earlier narrative *The Shadow Lines*, though it has undergone a sea-change in his fiction like *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and the rather recent non-fiction entitled *The Great Derangement* (2016) where his focus on the idea of border shows a close leaning even towards an eco-literary dimension. In this article, we attempt to trace the shift in Ghosh's treatment of the border from a "national" phenomenon to a "natural" one.

Amid the wealth of Indian Anglophone partition literature, it is "only Amitav Ghosh who in *The Shadow Lines* focuses exclusively on the aftermath of the 1947 Partition on the Bengal border" (Roy 2010: 24). We propose that though Ghosh has used post-Partition Bengal as the spatio-temporal context of *The Shadow Lines*, the idea of the border lies at the core of the narrative and is also well reflected in the title. It is a historical truth that the partitioning border is only a political line, to set aside the issue of the religious difference between the Hindus and the Muslims. It is a problematic of cultural identity to many Bengalis who have experienced a post-Partition cross-border migration, or even separation from the ancestral "home" – the place of ethnic origin, in either side of the border. Through the fictional presentation of the character of Tha'mma in *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh addresses this very problematic of identity, partitioned between the "home" of memory and the "home" of present "national" reality. Tha'mma had not experienced any cross-border migration like the post-Partition "refugees" but settled in Calcutta before 1947 as a teacher in a school. She had hardly faced any difficulty in cultural assimilation for Calcutta shared the almost similar Bengali cultural space with Dhaka at that time. However, the post-Partition reality of the border and the consequent loss of an erstwhile homeland, mass-migration of the refugees, the mutual communal distrust and the resultant identification of the "other", ethno-religious violence and the desperate urge to survive in a somewhat unfamiliar environment lacking in resource, had altered the century-old history of togetherness and fractured the mostly homogenous Bengali cultural space into two nations across a line of control.

In *The Shadow Lines*, Tha'mma wonders whether the border would be visible from the aerial height of an aeroplane like in a "school atlas" where the demarcating line of control is mapped with "a long black line with green on one side and scarlet on the other", or whether military borderlines like the "trenches […] or soldiers, or guns pointing at each other" (SL: 167) separate the two nations geopolitically. At the centre of all her confusion, lie her ideas of ethno-national identity in relation to the spatiality of the border, as she explains it to the child-narrator referring to the Euro-American concept of ethno-nationalism: "Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood […]. They know they're a nation because *they've drawn their borders with blood*. […] That's what it takes to make a country. Once that happens people forget they were born this or that, Muslim or Hindu, Bengali or Punjabi: they become *a family born of the same pool of blood*" (SL: 85-86; emphases added). Tha'mma's idea of ethno-nationalism entertains a community-feeling as central to the perception of bordering, beyond any religious divide. Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Community: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, considers nation as "*imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 2006: 6; original emphasis). Tha'mma in *The Shadow Lines* considers nation not as an abstract construction, but as a spatial reality with border ensuring the existence of the "communion" and considers everything outside the edge as the "other". However, is it so easy to think that a bordered space accommodates only the homogenous and excludes only the "other"? What happens as "a family born of the same pool of blood" (SL: 86) decides over the erection of a partition separating a single household? The physicality of the "wooden partition wall" dividing the Datta-Chaudhuri household at Jindabahar Lane of Dhaka in Tha'mma's childhood, as she remembers later, only provided with "a strange, eerie silence [had] descended on the house" instead of the peace the family members on both sides "had so much looked forward to" (SL: 136). In the time following the Partition of India, perhaps for the first time, Tha'mma becomes conscious of the fact that her "home" straddles two places – Calcutta and Dhaka, one in reality and the other in memory. It is possibly for this reason that Tha'mma faces difficulty in describing her journey to Dhaka – whether it would be a "going away" from Calcutta, or a "coming home" to her birthplace.

A philosophical understanding of the significance of borderlines has continued to inform Ghosh's literary oeuvre throughout his career – whether it is between nations, between the natural environment and cultures, between people and ideologies, between the human and the non-human and even between literary genres, as borders are manifested in diverse ways, sometimes through material observations and often through the cultural and symbolic perception of partitioning shadowy lines. The presence of the "shadow lines" may be explored from an eco-literary dimension in Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* which is set in the Gangetic archipelago of the Sundarbans – "a terrain where the boundaries between land and water are always mutating, always unpredictable", where "there are no borders [here] to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea" (HT: 7). This geophysical borderlessness featuring the topography of the mangrove-clad tide country of the Sundarbans is a creation of nature, but simultaneously it is the human creation of a cultural border between the human and the wild, that the local population of the tide country honour and maintain. It becomes evident quite early in the third chapter subtitled "Canning" where Kanai and Nilima, waiting on the embankment of Matla river for the boat to Lusibari, meet Horen Naskor and in reply to Nilima's question about his business in Canning, Naskor replies: "'*Jongol korte geslam*, I went to 'do jungle' yesterday, Mashima… and Bon Bibi granted me enough honey to fill two bottles. I came here to sell them'" (HT: 27-28; emphasis original). Naskor's exploration of the "jungle" implies his journey to the wild space, certainly along with fellow villagers, to collect honey from the mangrove forest beyond the border of human habitation. Moreover, the mention of Bon Bibi, incidentally the very first reference to the tiger-goddess in the narrative, is the most prominent religio-cultural reference about the borderline partitioning the human area from the wild space of the Sundarbans infested with poisonous snakes, crocodiles and the deadly Royal Bengal tigers. To enter the jungle for fishing, harvesting honey or collecting firewood means to cross the border between the human and the wild, between the familiar safety and the unpredictable danger. In *The Hungry Tide*, though Nirmal considers the tale of Bon Bibi a "false consciousness" (HT: 101), to the belief of the local people in the tide country, irrespective of their religious identities, it is never possible to explore the jungle of the Sundarbans successfully without the blessing of Bon Bibi. The environmental anthropologist Annu Jalais, in her book *Forest of Tigers: People, Politics and Environment in the Sundarbans* (2010) observes that the villagers of the Sundarbans "act and sing the story of this 'interstitial' being – mediator between Allah and humans, between village and forest, and between the world of humans and that of tigers" (2010: 69). Jalais's use of the word "interstitial" reasonably emphasizes the existence of bordered religio-cultural and ecological domains in the Gangetic delta of the Sundarbans.

A cultural anthropologist by academic training, Ghosh takes a subtle interest in the eco-literary dimension of the mytho-cultural presence of Bon Bibi in the tide. A whole chapter subtitled "The Glory of Bon Bibi" (17th chapter of Part I) has been devoted to the origin, story and the impact of the myth on the people of the tide country. Though the tiger-goddess is worshipped as the protector deity of the people of the Sundarbans widely, this legend does "not begin either in the heavens or on the banks of the Ganges" (HT: 102) like familiar Indian mythological stories, but "set in a city in Arabia" (HT: 103), precisely the holy city of Medina. As per Ghosh's representation of the story, the blessed twins – Bon Bibi and her brother Shah Jongoli, after being chosen by the archangel Gabriel for a divine mission, "travel from Arabia to "the country of eighteen tides" – *athhero bhatir desh* – in order to make it fit for human habitation" (HT: 103; original emphasis). Therefore, the trans-historical myth of Bon Bibi is not a local one, but a trans-spatial legend, the produce of geo-cultural border-crossing. Moreover, despite the Islamic origin of the myth which is visible in the names of Bon Bibi [literally, the lady ("Bibi") residing in the forest ("Bon")] and Shah Jongoli [literally, the lord ("Shah") of the forest ("Jongol")], the tiger-goddess is, strangely enough, "worshipped" (in Islam, there is no provision of any ritual worshipping of a clay statue) by the Hindus and the Muslims of the Sundarbans alike: another border-crossing, and a compelling case of cultural hybridity! Due to the trans-religious nature of the cult of Bon Bibi in the Sundarbans, faith in the tiger-goddess is universal, and there is no religious "othering" despite the several border-crossings. The worshippers of Bon Bibi, as Annu Jalais notes in *Forest of Tigers* "do not think of her in terms of "Muslim" or "Hindu" but as a "forest super-power" who extends her protection over individuals of all communities equally" (2010: 69). The readers of *The Hungry Tide*, in no way, experience the unease and anxiety of the communal distrust and the air of mutual racial "othering" as found in the representation of the post-Partition riots and violence in *The Shadow Lines*. Though Robi, the narrator's uncle in *The Shadow Lines*, finds the business of spatial bordering for freedom "a mirage", he is compelled, pitifully enough, to believe in the existence of border as a permanent mark of fracture despite sufficient spatio-temporal distancing from the event of Tridib's death: "my hand shaking like a leaf, fifteen years later, thousands of miles away, at the other end of another continent" (SL: 272). *The Hungry Tide*, on the contrary, shows that the villagers in the Sundarbans are quite free from such irrecoverable angst of communitarian violence in the realm of Bon Bibi, where the ethno-religious border between them is nothing but "a mirage" in practice. The Bon Bibi's gospel insists on the border between the greedy, rich people and the righteous, poor villagers, as Ghosh points out: "Thus did Bon Bibi show the world the law of the forest, which was that the rich and the greedy would be punished while the poor and the righteous were rewarded" (HT: 105).

However, the perception of an ecological border partitioning the two realms, islands with human habitat and the wild forested islands, is primarily point associated with the legend of the tiger goddess. Before crossing this borderline and exploring the forested islands in search of fish, crabs, honey and firewood, the poor villagers usually worship

Bon Bibi seeking protection from tigers and crocodiles, though many end up as easy hunts of these predators. The death of Kusum's father and the reference to the widows – "a startlingly large proportion of the island's women" in "borderless white saris" (HT: 80) exhibit the reality of the impoverished island people in the Sundarbans. The relationship between the forest and the villagers dependent on the forest for survival is conditioned by the anxiety of death and "the relative invisibility of slow violence" which is "neither spectacular nor instantaneous" (Nixon 2011: 2). The poor villagers' habit of living with anxiety, insecurity and death often erupts into visible combative violence when an animal like a tiger enters the village and gets trapped. In chapter 22 of Part Two in *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh describes the blinding and subsequent killing of a tiger trapped inside a livestock pen, by the peasants of an island who were maddened in bloodlust and behaving like "an angry mob", in the words of Kanai. The word "mob" immediately connects *The Hungry Tide* with *The Shadow Lines*, where this word appears thirteen times. The appalling violence of Tridib's murder, as recounted by May Price in *The Shadow Lines*, is comparable to the horrific killing of the tiger:

> The *mob* had surrounded the rickshaw. They had pulled the old man off it. I could hear him screaming. Tridib ran into the *mob*, and fell upon their backs. He was trying to push his way through to the old man, I think. Then the *mob* dragged him in. (*SL*: 276; emphases added)

The "mob" that killed Tridib, Jethamoshai and Khalid in *The Shadow Lines*, assembled just when "outsiders" like Tha'mma try to bring Jethamoshai to Calcutta from Dhaka, crossing the line between India and East Pakistan. Similarly, while preventing Piya from intervening in the killing of the tiger, Kanai warns her: "You're dealing with a *mob* here. They could turn on us, too, you know. We're *outsiders*" (HT: 294; emphases added). Despite the spatio-temporal differences between these two incidents in two different narratives, the common issue of violence is enacted out by a "mob" that does not, in any way, allow "outsiders".

Amitav Ghosh's latest non-fiction *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016), the title of which recalls a popular American non-fiction entitled *The Great Derangement: A Terrifying True Story of War, Politics and Religion at the Twilight of the American Empire*[1] (2008) by the columnist-writer Matt Taibbi, is primarily a cultural commentary on the ecological relationship of humanity with the "Nature" by exploring the literary, historical and political treatments of climate change. *The Great Derangement* could also be read as Ghosh's aesthetic of the eco-literary representations. Ghosh's ruminations on "Fiction, History, and Politics in the Age of Global Warming" for the Randy L. and Melvin R. Berlin Family Lectures at the University of Chicago in 2015 result in this remarkable non-fiction – a set of three essays subtitled "Stories", "History" and "Politics". All three essays question the conceptual partitioning of the human from the non-human, or as Alessandro Vescovi points out in his essay "The Uncanny and the Secular", "the distinction between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, which goes back to Descartes" (2017: 214) and the ethical validity of such deceptive divide. The notion of the borderline, as manifested on the geopolitical level underpinning the idea of the nation in *The Shadow Lines*, has been articulated on several spatio-temporal levels in almost all of Ghosh's fictions and it takes a subtle eco-literary turn in *The Hungry Tide*. Though it may appear quite astonishing to many readers of this article that why and how does the analysis of a non-fiction become relevant in a discussion where the major case studies are novels! This is again, a deceptive psychological bordering between genres, whereas in this non-fiction Ghosh carries forward his eco-literary interest alloyed with the idea of bordering which he started in *The Hungry Tide* twelve years ago! Ghosh considers the interplay of boundaries in time and space as a conditioning feature of the genre of novel in the first section of *The Great Derangement*: "It is through the imposition of [these] boundaries, in time and space, that the world of a novel is created: like the margins of a page, these borders render places into texts, so that they can be read" (GD: 79-80). Citing the reference to a popular Bengali novel entitled *A River Called Titash* (1956) by Adwaita Mallabarman, Ghosh shows how "through a *series of successive exclusions*, Mallabarman creates a space that will submit to the techniques of a modern novel" (GD: 81; emphasis added). As the foregrounding of the setting requires a simultaneously exclusionist literary practice in modernist novels, the relevance of the spatio-temporal borderlines as narratological vectors should be acknowledged. Without these borders, Ghosh opines, "telescoping the changes into the duration of a limited-time horizon" (GD: 81) within a narrative is not possible.

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[1] American columnist-writer Matt Taibbi's non-fiction *The Great Derangement: A Terrifying True Story of War, Politics and Religion at the Twilight of the American Empire* (2008) is a sardonic commentary mainly on the American political system and also on some US religious institutions that became a *New York Times* bestseller after its publication. Taibbi regrets how the actions of a few people can affect the lives of the majority and derange the American society with contradictions. The "Epilogue" of Taibbi's book ends with an alarming note: "Maybe that simple observation is our path back to reality, *if it's not too late*" (247; emphasis added). The conditional ending of Matt Taibbi's non-fiction appears amazingly identical with Ghosh's alarm at the end of *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*: "The struggle for action will

It is not just the spatial boundary perceived between a metropolis like Kolkata or Delhi and the rurality of the Sundarbans which is essential in rendering the sense of the difference between places, but also the temporal border fairly visible in the narrative ordering of *The Hungry Tide*: the bipartite division subtitled "The Ebb: Bhata" (Part I) and "The Flood: Jowar" (Part II) after the twin processes of the movement of riverine water of the Sundarbans are partitioned by a temporal order as well. Moreover, apart from this crucial interplay of the spatio-temporal boundaries in fictional representation, some specific trait in characterization often links the narratives as a common trope. For example,

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no doubt be difficult and hard-fought, and no matter what it achieves, *it is already too late* to avoid some serious disruptions of the global climate" (GD: 216; emphasis added).

as Anshuman Mondal observes in his penetrating study entitled *Amitav Ghosh*, "the figure of the "refugee" is one that has continued to inform his fiction throughout his career" (2007: 2). The figure of the "refugee", being the embodiment of the border politics of Indian Partition, is the resultant "other", an unwelcome population to India. Ghosh, in both *The Shadow Lines* and *The Hungry Tide*, embarks upon the historicity of the Indian Partition concerning border politics of the two nations and the refugees. In Part Two of *The Shadow Lines*, Tha'mma snaps at the narrator's father while clarifying her understanding of the term "refugee" in relation to the temporality of Partition: "We're not refugees, […]. We came long before Partition" (SL: 145). Even while referring to the Khulna riots of 1964 which simultaneously alludes to the violent murder of Tridib in Dhaka, the narrator observes that with the outbreak of the riots, "*Hindu refugees* began to *pour over the border into India*, in trains and on foot" (SL: 252; emphasis added). With the rush of millions of "Hindu refugees", their pouring "over the border into India" had transformed the landscape and environment of Kolkata, as Tha'mma exclaims while travelling by car in the southern part of the city: "When I last came here ten years ago, there were rice fields running alongside the road… where rich Calcutta people built garden houses. And look at it now – as filthy as a *babui's* nest. *It's all because of the refugees*, flooding in like that" (SL: 145; emphasis added). Refugee influx and the resultant transformation of the environmental landscape – the gearing issues in Ghosh's future narrative *The Hungry Tide* are embedded in Tha'mma's remarks, which could be seen as "evidence of how refugees were deeply unwelcome in capital cities in the immediate aftermath of partition" (Sen 2018: 162). The border between India and East Pakistan does not remain a political boundary only, but a line separating people apart, fuelling mutual distrust, communitarian hatred and sometimes, violence.

Though *The Hungry Tide* "emphasizes the ephemerality of the physical environment of the Sundarbans and its hostility to human settlement" (Kumar 2015: 20), Ghosh's treatment of the refugee influx from East Pakistan/Bangladesh and the Morichjhãpi genocide of 1979 deserves critical attention while exploring the idea of the border. Apart from the very few descendants of "the first settlers, who had arrived in the 1920s" at the island of Lusibari, most of the island population is constituted of the post-Partition poor refugees coming across the border: "Others had come in successive waves, some after the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 and some after the Bangladesh war of 1971" (HT: 59). In the "Introduction" to *The Bengal Diaspora: Rethinking Muslim Migration*, the editors Claire Alexander, Joya Chatterji and Annu Jalais hold the ill-regulated refugee-management of the new nation-states of India and East Pakistan responsible for the messy situation: "Forged on the anvils of nation-making… states had little or no role in helping to settle the new arrivals, and their efforts to control movement across borders had little effect" (2016: 1-2). To both India and East Pakistan, the refugees had become a major political issue and challenge to the political order of the states across the border. Even one of the reasons behind the interference of the Indian Army in the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971, as Jeff Hay points out in *The Partition of British India*, was the Indian leaders' fear "of a massive wave of refugees crossing the border into Calcutta and the rest of Indian West Bengal" (2006: 113). The anxiety of the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was so intense that she even had a discussion with the US President Nixon over the "financial burden" of the refugees, as found in a diplomatic letter "written to Indira Gandhi two days after the fall of Dhaka" (Rahman 2019: 170): "When we met in Washington you were assured of our intention to continue to carry the main financial burden for care of the refugees" (qtd. in Rahman 2019: 171). This diplomatic reference to the "financial burden for care of the refugees" shows how significant was the interdependence of transcontinental foreign aid and refugee-management system of India almost fifty years back. By implication, one may find an oblique politico-economic relationship of the historical incident of refugee eviction from the island of Morichjhãpi and "Project Tiger", the ecological conservation of Royal Bengal tigers in the Indian part of the Sundarbans in 1973, which has been indirectly represented by Ghosh in *The Hungry Tide*.

In the post-Partition years, the impoverished refugees from East Pakistan, dependent instantly on the charity of the Indian state, were initially shifted "to a place called Dandakaranya, deep in the forests of Madhya Pradesh, hundreds of miles from Bengal" (HT: 118). After the birth of Bangladesh in 1971, it was expected that compared to their Pakistani predecessors, the new government would be more tolerant of their poor Hindu peasant citizens, and the situation would improve. One may remember Rehman-shaheb, the man in the small Bangladeshi restaurant "called the Maharaja, in Clapham" (SL: 264) in *The Shadow Lines*, who, enthusiastically asks Robi whether he had been to Dhaka "after Bangladesh became independent" and then tells him: "It's *completely changed now* – so *modern*" (SL: 266-267; emphasis added). The idea of a "completely changed", "modern" Bangladesh is a product of temporal bordering, which should stand for a less violent nation that protects the rights of its citizens. However, in *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh tells his readers that the communitarian "shadow lines" still exist within the new nation of Bangladesh, and the refugees are victims of violence alike: "In Bangladesh they had been among the poorest of rural people, oppressed and exploited both by Muslim communalists and by Hindus of the upper castes" (HT: 118). The ethno-religious and socio-economic borders within the society violently ostracize and exclude the "other". The cross-border movement continues and these poor peasants, after their arrival in India notice a change of identity: from citizens to refugees. From the mid-1970s, terms like "infiltration", "illegal entrant" became common in media pointing out the failure of Indian law to prevent cross-border migration, and the situation of this second wave of refugees was very much that of demographic waste – outsiders with barely any political rights and citizenship. However difficult the situation is, this destitute population decided to stay in India, and quite interestingly, got support from people with individual interests, as Willem van Schendel observes quite rightly in his book *The Bengal Borderland*: "earlier immigrants offered newcomers shelter and support, Indian employers were keen to exploit cheap labour, and Indian politicians were interested in expanding their electorate" (2004: 220). These simple interest-oriented equations, when get in conflict with the issue of foreign aid for the environmentalist conservation scheme of "Project Tiger" in the islands of the Sundarbans, result in betrayal with the refugees finally epitomizing in the state-organized Morichjhãpi massacre. The eviction of the refugees from Morichjhãpi, as described in Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, balances the ideas of the border and the "other" with the ecological and the literary.

Nirmal’s diary, usually seen as a “testimony” of the Morichjhãpi incident by many of Ghosh’s readers and critics, could also be seen as a primary eco-literary narrative within the narrative frame of *The Hungry Tide*, despite its overtones of political betrayal of the refugees mentioned as “bastuhara”. Crisscrossing the epistemological borders of mythology, history, anthropology, local knowledge of the environment, geological sciences and even referring to Rilke’s poetry in *The Duino Elegies*, Nirmal’s diary is charged with, what Ghosh finds in *The Great Derangement* as “the dynamics of landscape” (GD: 81). In Nirmal’s diary, the reader of *The Hungry Tide* would notice that, as Nirmal tells Horen Noskar about the expedition of François Bernier and his two Portuguese pilots to the Sundarbans in 1665, and describes their “uncanny” experience of a tempest when they “took hold of a tree and… [t]heir arms became living roots like those of the tree that had given them shelter”, it is Horen who points out: “They must have crossed the line” (HT 147). To Nirmal, Bernier’s description is the unnatural and mere imaginative expression of the Sundarban landscape, as it dissolves the line between the human and the botanical. But to Horen, their “mistake” (HT: 147) of crossing the border and entering the island of the mythical, mischievous demon Dokkhin Rai is the root of all trouble. However, Nirmal’s diary could also be seen as an “apology” of a leftist who laments the “anti-human” stand of the Left Front government of West Bengal and its political preference for the western idea of wildlife conservation at the cost of a refugee settlement. Nirmal identifies his concern for the refugees as similar to Kusum’s anxiety as his diary chronicles her words on the face of eviction – “Who are these people, I wondered, who love animals so much that they are willing to kill us for them?” (HT: 261-262). Kusum’s question challenges Nirmal’s long-nourished leftist ideology of privileging the rights of the dispossessed, and he finds himself a shareholder in the refugees’ resistance against the state and its policy of setting a conservation site under “Project Tiger”.

The Hungry Tide, as Shameem Black has convincingly demonstrated in a recent article, “uncovers a past in which refugees compete for legitimacy on tideland islands with endangered tigers” (2016: 302). The legitimacy of rights over the islands of the Sundarbans, we argue, is not a mere political issue sparked off by post-Partition refugee influx in the second half of the previous century, but a trans-historical and cultural one, as one may find the idea of the border in the myth of Bon Bibi and Dokkhin Rai. The divide between the human and the wild spaces is an environmental reality of the Sundarbans, which has been honoured through ages and is mutually beneficial for existence and ecological balance. The mangrove biosphere of the Sundarbans with its less fierce “keystone species” like the crabs and the dolphins, acts as a protector of the tidal region from storms and cyclones. The fear of the extremely fierce Royal Bengal tigers and the crocodiles, again, has been proved effective in protecting the forest from the unbridled anthropocentric aggression regardless of the environmental balance. The logic of ecological balance that permeates Piya’s vision insists on the culturally conceived “imaginary line” which is “intended” by nature to resist human aggression:

> “what was *intended* – not by you or me, but *by nature*, by the earth, by the planet that keeps us all alive. Just suppose we crossed *that imaginary line that prevents us* from deciding that no other species matters except ourselves. What’ll be left then? Aren’t we alone enough in the universe?” (HT: 301; emphasis added)

Piya's questions are as existentially fundamental as the question of Kusum in particular relation to the eviction of refugees from Morichjhãpi. However, the difference between the two coercive approaches probably lies in the issue of "legitimacy". Both Kusum and Nirmal are Indian citizens, and therefore, embodiments of legitimate rights inside the geopolitical territory of India. But their sympathetic identification and voluntary dissolution of the border between themselves and the refugees compels them to face tragic ends. An outsider herself, Piya's suggestion to honour the "imaginary line" between the human and the wild spaces, makes her perspective spatio-temporally universal. The "imaginary line" in the myth of Bon Bibi is not a mere fantasy, but a trans-historical cultural "knowledge that accrues over generations through dwelling in a landscape" (GD: 74) like the tidal country.

In Ghosh's *The Great Derangement*, the reference to the term "ecological refugees" in relation to the mobility of his ancestors from a village "on the shore of the Padma River" to another place on the banks of "the Ganges, in Bihar" (GD: 4-5) in the mid-nineteenth century is not a casual one, but has broader implications and could even be related to those, who had come to Lusibari, as Nilima observes in *The Hungry Tide*, "even more recently, when other nearby islands were *forcibly depopulated* in order to make room for wildlife conservation projects" (HT: 59; emphasis added). The only difference between these two types of human mobility with a temporal gap of more than a century between them is that the latter kind of mobility was "forcibly" handled by the state, determined to resist ecological imbalance. The obvious concern of *The Great Derangement* is climate change as the subtitle shows, though Ghosh steers his focus mainly towards the "partitioning" of nature from culture. To Ghosh, the global politics of putting ecological fiction outside the "horizon" of literary mainstream and branding those eco-literary productions categorically as "science fiction" is "an aspect of the broader imaginative and cultural failure" (GD: 10): "it could even be said that fiction that deals with climate change is almost by definition not of the kind that is taken seriously by serious literary journals" (GD: 9). This marginality of ecological fiction, to Ghosh, is due to its supposed dissociation from the rationalistic discourse of non-fiction. Drawing on Bruno Latour's notion of modernity, Ghosh recognizes "the project of 'partitioning', or deepening the imaginary gulf between Nature and Culture" (GD: 92) as responsible in contributing to the age-old indifference towards ecological fiction as simple nature writings. The modernist enterprise of drawing a border for "purification", of keeping Nature separate from Culture has made science fiction the "other" and "a genre *separate* from the literary mainstream": "The line that has been drawn between them exists only for the sake of neatness; because the zeitgeist of late modernity could not tolerate Nature-Culture hybrids" (GD: 95-96; original emphasis).

The latest categorization of "a new genre of science fiction called "climate fiction" or "cli-fi", to Ghosh, is another enterprise of bordering ecological fiction in a narrower space with more limited scope, as these are mostly "disaster stories set in the future" (GD: 97). But apart from the time future, Ghosh opines, "the age of human-induced global warming…also includes the recent past, and most significantly, the present" (GD: 97). From this point of temporality, the scope of science fiction or climate fiction is restricted: "it is precisely not an imagined 'other' world apart from ours; nor is it located in another 'time' or another 'dimension'" (*GD* 97). While talking on *The Great Derangement*, Ghosh tells the interviewer James Daniel Elam that "the temporal order of modernity has changed" and this change has affected the spatialities of the centre and the margin: "People who were at the so-called margins of the world are now actually experiencing the changes in many ways before the people at the centre" (2018: 246). Ghosh's eco-literary vision dismantles the notion of the ignorant, subaltern "other" across the border, and centres round an inclusive collectivity, as "climate crisis cannot […] be thought of as a problem created by an utterly distant 'Other'" (GD: 154). On a final note, we emphasize that the western paradigm of scientific rationalism and its tendency to claim an exclusively ordered world of knowledge with neat epistemological divisions may fall short of understanding Ghosh's idea of the cosmos. Ghosh's notion of time is different from the western view of the linear time, when he alludes to the "ever-shrinking time horizon of the climate crisis" (GD: 216) and the metaphoric "shadow lines" may become visible, as he talks of "an acceptance of limits and limitations" (GD: 215). As Ghosh points out in the conclusion of *The Great Derangement*, it is the ethical responsibility of the future "generation" to realize "their *kinship* with *other* beings" and "to transcend the isolation in which humanity *was entrapped in the time* of its derangement" (GD: 217; emphasis added). Ghosh's use of the word "other" – sharply connotative of a bordering divide, or the use of the past – "was entrapped in the time" to allude to a specific temporal order, may appear as insisting on the notion of the partitioning line, but the magic of his eco-literary vision lies in the word "kinship" which can renew the experience of collective survival on earth.

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RIOTS, CROWDS AND THE COLLECTIVE IN AMITAV GHOSH'S POLITICAL IMAGINATION

From *The Shadow Lines* to *Gun Island*

Lucio De Capitani

ABSTRACT • This article, using the riots in *The Shadow Lines* (1988) as a point of departure, maps a more general system of representations of multitudes within Amitav Ghosh's work. Its implications, in turn, can shed light on Ghosh's relationship with the idea of collectivity, which is more fraught with tensions and ambivalence than it may initially appear. More precisely, I argue that Ghosh's work is deeply concerned with the various ways in which collectivities, masses and gatherings of different kinds can affect, enhance, diminish or threaten individual existences, and tries to find a reconciliation between the collectivity and the individual. As a result of these anxieties, Ghosh tends to represent crowds and multitudes chiefly in two modes: as an anonymous, dehumanized and threatening mass; or as a community of individuals bound together by spontaneous human solidarity. In turn, this tends to exclude from his imaginative horizon certain kinds of collectivities that do not fit in either of the two modes, such as various kinds of explicitly politically engaged movements. Besides *The Shadow Lines* – the moment in which Ghosh lays the foundations of this system of representations –, the article considers other works of fiction and non-fiction – most notably "The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi" (1995), *In an Antique Land* (1992), *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *River of Smoke* (2011) – in order to show how the characteristics of this system have remained consistent throughout Ghosh's career. The point of arrival, finally, is Ghosh's recent work on climate change and migration – *The Great Derangement* (2016) and *Gun Island* (2019) – in which the shortcomings of this system of representations, as regards Ghosh's intervention in current public debates, come to light with particular clarity.

KEYWORDS • Amitav Ghosh; *The Shadow Lines;* Crowds; Riots; Political Imagination; Activism.

1. Introduction: Between the Individual and the Collective

Communal riots are unquestionably a central element of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988), which is, in its author's words, "a book […] about the meaning of such events and their effects on the individuals who live through them" (Ghosh 2005b: 201). The second half of the novel, in fact, largely revolves around the gradual revelation of the details of the death of Tridib – the narrator/protagonist's uncle and mentor – at the hands of a murdering mob in Dhaka, as well as around the protagonist's attempt to make sense of riots from an ethical, political, historical and psychological point of view. While the significance of riots in *The Shadow Lines*, especially in connection to communalism, nationalism and Partition, has been variously explored in the past (see Huttunen 2008; and Roy 2010: 111-129), in this article I would like to suggest that the riots in *The Shadow Lines* can be used as a starting point to map a more general system of representations of crowds and multitudes within Ghosh's work. The implications of this system of representations, in turn, can shed light on Ghosh's relationship with the idea of collectivity, which is more fraught with tensions and ambivalence than it may initially appear.

This ambivalence has recently become more prominent, as Ghosh has put an increased emphasis, at least from a theoretical point of view, on the concept of collectivity. In *The Great Derangement*, his 2016 essay on climate change, Ghosh picks up a quarrel with John Updike about the definition of the novel, taking, as terrain of contention, *Cities of Salt* (1987) by Rahman Munif, already reviewed by Ghosh in his influential 1992 essay "Petrofiction". Ghosh comments on Updike's own review of Munif's book, specifically on Updike's argument that *Cities of Salt* is not a novel. As Ghosh explains, for Updike "the reason why *Cities of Salt* does not feel 'much like a novel' […] is that it is concerned not with a sense of individual moral adventure but rather with 'men in the aggregate'. In other words, what is banished from the territory of the novel is precisely the collective" (Ghosh 2016: 78). Ghosh, on the other hand, rejects the idea that the novel *should* be concerned exclusively about individual moral adventures, and argues *for* the presence of the collective within the territory of the novel: in the context of the climate crisis, this is a crucial aspect of our imagination that we need to recover, because climate change is "in every sense a *collective predicament*" (Ghosh 2016: 80, emphasis mine).

Interestingly, the endorsement of the collective does not necessarily echo Ghosh's previous definitions of his own novelistic practice. Several earlier interviews, on the contrary, put considerable stress on *individual predicaments*. In an interview with Frederick Luis Aldama, he states that "in the end my real interest is the predicament of individuals" (Ghosh and Aldama 2002: 86-87) – as opposed to the tendency of anthropology towards "[making] people into abstractions" (Ghosh and Aldama 2002: 86). Ghosh further expanded the same point in another interview – this time specifying his own approach to historical narratives:

> My fundamental interest is in people – in individuals and their specific predicaments. If history is of interest to me it is because it provides instances of unusual and extraordinary predicaments. […] to me the historical (or non-fictional) aspect of the situation is interesting only insofar as it creates a unique predicament for a character. (Hawley 2005: 6)

It might be easy to frame Ghosh's newly declared interest for "men in the aggregate" and their *collective* predicament as a recent development connected to the climate crisis. However, I think it is more productive to argue that Ghosh's work has *always* presented – and still presents – a tension between the collective and the individual.

More precisely, throughout this essay, I argue that Ghosh's work is deeply concerned with the various ways in which collectivities, masses and gatherings of different kinds can affect, enhance, diminish or threaten individual existences, and tries to find a reconciliation between the collectivity and the individual. As a result of these anxieties, Ghosh tends to represent crowds and multitudes chiefly in two modes: as an anonymous, dehumanized and threatening mass; or as a community of individuals bound together by spontaneous human solidarity. In turn, this tends to exclude from his imaginative horizon certain kinds of collectivities that do not fit in either of the two modes, such as various kinds of explicitly politically engaged movements. As mentioned, my starting point is going to be *The Shadow Lines* and its riots – the moment in which Ghosh lays the foundations of this system of representations. I then move to other works of fiction and non-fiction – most notably, "The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi" (1995), *In an Antique Land* (1992), *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *River of Smoke* (2011) – in order to show how the characteristics of this system have remained consistent throughout Ghosh's career. My point of arrival, finally, are Ghosh's recent works on climate change and migration – *The Great Derangement* (2016) and *Gun Island* (2019), in which the shortcomings of this system of representations, as regards Ghosh's intervention in current political and public debates, come to light with particular clarity.

2. *The Shadow Lines*: Riots vs. the "Indivisible Sanity"

In *The Shadow Lines*, riots are described, first of all, as a loss of the self. In several instances, the participants in a riot are described as a homogeneous mass, acting as a collective entity which appears mechanical, inscrutable and relentless. A good example is the passage in which the narrator's bus is stopped by a rioting mob in Calcutta. That mob is connoted as a tentacled and snake-like monster that threateningly flails at the protagonist: "Looking ahead through the windscreen, I saw a scattered mob milling around the Circus. As I watched, one limb of the mob broke away from the main body and snaked out towards us. And then I was thrown off my feet as our bus, brakes screeching, came to an abrupt halt" (Ghosh 2005c: 249). It is impossible to distinguish specific individuals within this mob – each of their actions merges into a sinister, collective act.

This point is reiterated with clarity in the novel's final description of mob violence, when May tells the narrator her version of the events. May's account only allows the reader to see Tridib vanishing into the mob and emerging as a corpse, while the crowd scatters:

> the mob dragged him in. He vanished. I could only see their backs. It took less than a moment. Then the men began to scatter. I picked myself up and begun to run towards them. The men had melted away, into the gullies. When I got there, I saw three bodies. They were all dead. They'd cut Khalil's stomach open. The old man's head had been hacked off. And they'd cut Tridib's throat, from ear to ear. (Ghosh 2005c: 307)

While the final image of Tridib's corpse allows the reader to surmise how he was killed, the *sight* of the killing eludes the reader. As such, Tridib's death does not have clear, identifiable perpetrators that can be blamed. Therefore, the violence committed on him seems strikingly impersonal. To paraphrase Ghosh's own words from another description in "Petrofiction", the mobs in *The Shadow Lines* are "faceless crowds, a massed symbol of chaos" (Ghosh 2005a: 151).

There is another aspect that is peculiar to Ghosh's representation of riots: they are systematically described as a subversion of everyday life and relationships. Riots are uncanny in Freud's classical sense: they emerge from the familiar and they subvert it into a twisted version of itself. Consistently, the narrator, on the bus, describes how Calcutta, during the riot, turns into a dangerous, unfamiliar, disturbing environment: "We could not recognize the streets we were careering through. We did not know whether we were going home or not. The streets had turned themselves inside out: our city had turned against us" (Ghosh 2005c: 249). More importantly, the riot reveals how "normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits, can become, suddenly and without warning, as hostile as a desert in a flash flood" (Ghosh 2005c: 250). This subversion can be connected with the suppression of individuality, because the self, during a riot, is equally estranged from itself – it morphs into a different being, controlled by the multitude. The narrator, in framing the riots as uncanny and as a suppression of the self, seems to be espousing classical crowd psychology that sees rioting as a kind of frenzy – a surrendering of one's rational capacity to mindlessness – and the rioting crowd as an "amorphous, monolithic and pathological entity" (Scott and Drury: 2017, 11).[1]

If riots are an uncanny subversion of normalcy, it is something common, mundane and familiar that the narrator elects as their counterpoint. He defines "the madness of a riot [as] a pathological inversion, but also therefore a reminder of that *indivisible sanity* that binds people to each other independently of their governments" (Ghosh 2005b: 282-283, emphasis mine). He provides a concrete example of this "indivisible sanity" when he mentions how the various religious and ethnic groups of Kashmir managed to stand united in a "spontaneous show of collective grief" (Ghosh 2005b: 276) in the occasion of the theft of the sacred relic from the Hazratbal mosque – the event that had sparked riots all over the Subcontinent in 1964, including the one in which Tridib had been killed. Although "there were innumerable black-flag demonstrations, every shop and building flew a black flag, and every person on the streets wore a black armband", the narrator remarks how "in the whole of the valley there was not a single recorded incident of animosity between Kashmiri Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs (Ghosh 2005b: 276-277). What this passage illustrates, therefore, is a different mode in which people can gather as a collective entity, in a moment of solidarity, tolerance and religious syncretism.

While the marches in Kashmir are explicitly framed as the diametrical reversal of the communal riot, there are other examples in the novel of the "indivisible sanity" that binds people together. In the section about Tridib and his family's stay in London during World War II, both the narrator and other characters lay significant stress on the way the Londoners acted towards each other in wartime. It is Mayadebi, Tridib's mother, that first discusses this with Alan Tresawsen, the brother of her host Mrs. Price:

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[1] For an alternative, more recent psychological interpretation of crowd behaviour that rejects the idea of the mindless, irrational, pathological crowd, see Stott and Drury (2017) and Hopkins et al. (2016).

> Well, [Mayadebi] said, laughing, the couple of months she had spent in London had been so exciting – the atmosphere had changed so dramatically […]. Everyone was so much nicer now; often when she and Tridib were out walking people would pat him on the head and stop to have a little chat with her; the shopkeepers would ask her how her husband was, and when he was to have his operation. But it wasn't just her – everyone was being friendly with everyone else; why, just that morning his sister, Elisabeth [Mrs. Price], had said that old Mrs. Dunbar who lived down the road had actually been civil for the first time in living memory…
> Yes, [Alan] said, that's true – there's a kind of exhilaration in the air.
> Yes, that's the right word, said Mayadebi: exhilaration. I've been lucky, I've been able to watch England coming alive. (Ghosh 2005b: 81-82)

The protagonist shares this exhilaration: when he arrives in London, years later, he expresses his desire to experience England as it was during the war – he wants "to know England not as *I* saw her, but in her finest hour" (Ghosh 2005b: 71, emphasis in the original). What Mayadebi is describing – and the protagonist is fantasizing about – is the forging of a collective identity that, unlike the riot, is not a diversion from or a perversion of everyday relationships, but rather their enhancement. It is a process of community-building that is rooted in everyday life, energizing it with tolerance and solidarity. At the same time, within this process, the individual is not smothered or erased by the multitude. Before Mayadebi's description of the Londoners, the narrator introduces – and speaks at length of – a number of characters, juxtaposing them to the collective upheaval of solidarity, as if to strike a balance between collective and individual dimension: the reader is introduced not only to Alan Tresawsen, but also and his friends Dan, Mike and Francesca Halévy. This group of friends represents a small, politically active and joyful community, which the narrator sets as representatives of England "in her finest hour".

The Shadow Lines, therefore, presents the reader with two models: the mass as mindlessness, which erases individuality in a pathological and often violent distortion of everyday life and relationships; and as a hopeful sense of collectivity that spontaneously and organically *emerges* from everyday life and relationships, in which individuals are still visible. These are Ghosh's principal modes of representing crowds, and, albeit with variations and specificities, are ubiquitous in his work.

3. Crowds, Violence and (thick) Descriptions

Each of Ghosh's two main modes of depicting "men in the aggregate" has a specific relationship with violence. Ghosh's seminal essay on violence, "The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi", may help to clarify this point. *The essay* is tightly linked to *The Shadow Lines*, as it is focused on the event that prompted Ghosh to write the novel in the first place: the 1984 riots in Delhi targeting the Sikh community after the assassination of Indira Gandhi. In the conclusive part of the essay, Ghosh reflects on how a writer should talk about violence "without reducing it to mere spectacle" (Ghosh 2005b: 201). This involves avoiding a gory (and aestheticizing) representation of violence, as it happens when journalism, cinema or literature linger in "the bloody detail or the elegantly staged conflagration that closes a chapter or effects a climax" (Ghosh 2005b: 202). Ghosh's response is that writers, to provide an ethical narrative of violence, should focus (also) on the *resistance* to it.

More specifically, Ghosh argues that:

> My experience of violence was overwhelmingly and memorably of the *resistance* to it […]. What I saw at first hand […] was not the horror of violence but the *affirmation of humanity*: in each case, I witnessed the risks that perfectly *ordinary people* are willing to take for one another. […] The truth is that the *commonest response to violence* is one of repugnance and that a significant number of people try to oppose it in whatever way they can. That these efforts rarely appear in accounts of violence is not surprising: they are too *undramatic*. (Ghosh 2005b: 202, emphasis mine)

This passage is one of the building blocks of Ghosh's humanism and poetics. Ghosh argues that the resistance to violence is both natural and common, it is carried out by ordinary men and women and often takes "undramatic" rather than spectacular forms. Human beings, therefore, are instinctively oriented towards opposing violence and supporting each other, upholding everyday relationships of solidarity. The "indivisible sanity", in other words, ultimately binds them together, at least as long as they are not compelled by external forces like divisive or supremacist ideologies. These considerations, on the other hand, have consequences for literary representation: a writer, Ghosh argues, should try to "find a form – or a style or a voice or a plot – that could accommodate both violence *and* the civilized willed response to it" (Ghosh 2005b: 202). I would argue that this means finding a form that, on the one hand, prevents the spectacularization of violence by avoiding a graphic, detailed or obsessive representation of violent acts, and that, on the other hand, describes – this time, at length and with abundance of details – the widespread, spontaneous resistance that human beings put up against violence.

The two broad representational strategies that Ghosh recommend for "violence *and* the civilized willed response to it" can also be attached to the forms of representation that Ghosh employs for the two different forms of multitudes that I identified in the previous section. In *The Shadow Lines*, riots are described as fundamentally shapeless, chaotic, to be visualized only through several layers of mediation or through fragmented images. This is consistent with their nature as an amorphous mass where individuals disappear, but also in line with Ghosh's idea of de-spectacularizing violence while providing a testimony to it. Tridib's death needs to be recounted – in fact, it structures the entire novel – but, alongside the riot that causes it, it can only be "[described] at second hand" (Ghosh 2005c: 280) by other characters (the protagonist's father, his uncle Rob, May), not by the narrator, and through narrative techniques that reject a direct description of violence (such as Rob's account, which is actually the retelling of a recurring nightmare about the day of Tridib's death).

Events like the marches in Kashmir or the collective solidarity of the Londoners, instead, require realistic, detailed, imaginatively rich descriptions that do justice to the way communities and individuals help and support each other as part of their everyday life, or engage in active, spontaneous and natural resistance to violence. Creating this kind of description can be considered one of the primary tasks of Ghosh's art of fiction. Mark Frost argues that Ghosh's chief interest lies in the description of "a total picture of a place and its time, the landscape, the clothes, the languages" (Frost 2016: 1538), in what he calls, after Clifford Geertz, thick descriptions.[2] In a similar vein, Alessandro Vescovi, elaborating on a concept presented in *The Shadow Lines* – the idea of 'imagining with precision' that the narrator sees as Tridib's cardinal lesson[3] – states how Ghosh's fiction is animated by the idea that historical data must be located in an imaginatively vivid context to become knowledge (Vescovi 2011: 136). I would like to argue that such features of Ghosh's style and poetics are activated when he describes instances of collectivity in which individuals can express themselves and that enable the unfolding of everyday relationships and of bonds of solidarity, as opposed to descriptions of violent crowds (or crowds affected by violence) which are instead represented through various stylistic or narrative forms of mediation and fragmentation.

We shall now consider two examples of this recurring, dichotomic opposition between the two typologies of multitude, the two representational strategies attached to them, and their different relationships with violence. The first one is the very last passage of *In an Antique Land*, where Ghosh juxtaposes a moving reunion between himself and a group of Egyptian friends with images and tales of collective violence in Iraq. On the one hand, the reunion is the culmination of an entire volume of ethnographic portraits of the Egyptian *fellaheen* and their environment, and is populated with familiar faces to whom the reader has been gradually introduced throughout the narrative. Thick description and relationships of solidarity and friendship are, once again, matched. On the other hand, this reunion is haunted by the spectre of violence, which takes the form of images, of anonymous crowds, either of perpetrators or of victims of violence. Isma'il, one of Ghosh's friends, tells a gruesome tale of how, while he was working in Baghdad, a mob had descended upon a crowd of Egyptians who were celebrating a football victory, killing several of them. Later, Ghosh and his friends gather around a television screen to watch the dramatic exodus of the Egyptian migrants escaping from Iraq, due to the imminent outbreak of the First Gulf War. They attempt to locate Nabeel, another friend that had moved to Iraq and is now missing, but to no avail: “We were crowded around the TV set, watching carefully, minutely, looking at every face we could see. There was nothing to be seen except crowds: Nabeel had vanished into the anonymity of History” (Ghosh 1992: 353). Once again, there is a clear connection between an anonymous, faceless, dehumanized crowd – in which no individual, including Nabeel, can be identified – and the enacting of violence – committed in this case, *against* the crowd. Collective violence – inflicted or endured – defines the last pages of the book, but, once again, it appears through a second-hand description of a riot and through the fragmented images of a television news reportage.

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[2] The classical point of reference for the concept of thick description is Geertz's 1973 essay "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture" (Geertz 2000), although Geertz himself borrows it from philosopher Gilbert Ryle. With this term, Geertz means a description of an event within a given culture that, far from simply describing what it is happening from a factual point of view (as in a 'thin' description), includes all the possible interpretations of that event within that culture, including possible misreadings and parodies; and that in turns allows the anthropologist to sketch "a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures in terms of which [all the possible meanings of the event] are produced, perceived and interpreted, and without which they would not […] in fact exist" (Geertz 2000: 7). Similarly, Ghosh's descriptions of cultural realities generally make sure that readers not only visualize gestures and events, but are also able to decode their (various) meanings within that given cultural context (if not immediately, in the course of the narrative).

[3] "Among other things, Tridib was an archaeologist; he was not interested in fairylands: the one thing he wanted to teach me, he used to say, was to use my imagination with precision" (Ghosh 2005c: 29).

The second example of the dichotomy between the two types of crowd and styles are Robin Chinnery’s different descriptions of Fanqui-town, the busy foreign enclave of Canton, in *River of Smoke*. In his letters to Paulette Lambert, the painter offers a minutely precise description of the place, stressing the ethnic diversity and chaotic vitality of the place, providing vivid sketches of both individuals and groups. Smitten by Fanqui-town, Robin repeatedly expresses his desire to paint a monumental scroll that captures the layered, multicultural life of the enclave – an apt metaphor for Ghosh’s own enterprise. Ultimately, however, the letters become Robin’s *only* portrait of Fanqui-town in its multicultural splendour, as the scroll is never painted: Robin is forced, like the other Europeans, to leave Canton as the opium crisis intensifies. What he does produce after leaving, however, is a series of paintings of Fanqui-town being burnt down by the fire caused by a riot. The paintings are actually the rendering of a recurring nightmare that keeps coming back at him, which in turn accurately predicts the way Fanqui-town will be destroyed a few years later.

It could be argued that Ghosh’s art echoes Robin’s predicament: its mimetic, enthusiastic representation of everyday life in a variety of times and places – and, more importantly, of the people that inhabit those realities – is haunted by the potential for violence that can emerge from those very same collectivities and spaces. Ghosh celebrates the former, and does so in detailed, imaginatively vivid thick descriptions; but he is also ethically compelled to represent the latter when it manifests itself. He does so, however, in a mediated, fragmentary form – in this case interposing dreams (or rather, nightmares) between his readers and the violent crowd that burns Fanqui-town to the ground.

4. The Responsibilities of Joining and Humanism

“The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi” is crucial for another reason: it introduces the idea of ‘joining the crowd’ as an ethical dilemma. In the essay, Ghosh describes how, in the aftermath of the 1984 riots in Delhi, a march was being formed to protest against the outbreak of violence. Normally not keen on joining this kind of gatherings, Ghosh refers to a passage from V.S. Naipaul to explain his feelings towards such events up to that point:

> In his incomparable prose, Naipaul describes a demonstration. He is in a hotel room somewhere in Africa or South America; he looks down and sees people marching past. To his surprise, the sight fills him with an obscure longing, a kind of melancholy; he is aware

> of a wish to go out, to join, to merge his concerns with theirs. Yet he knows he never will; it is simply not in his nature to join crowds. (Ghosh 2005b: 197)

However, this time, Ghosh joins the protest march “without a second thought” (Ghosh 2005b: 198). Joining a crowd, Ghosh argues, is imperative in moments of civic and political crisis, even for writers: “Writers don’t join crowds – Naipaul and so many others teach us that. But what do you do when constitutional authority fails to act? You join and in joining bear all the responsibilities and obligations and guilt that joining represents” (Ghosh 2005b: 202).

These passages encapsulate many of Ghosh’s ambivalent attitude towards multitudes. Crowds are, indeed, attractive: they promise a sense of community that individuals, on their own, cannot achieve. They are also, at times, a political necessity. But, while affirming the ethical necessity to join crowds, Ghosh, intriguingly, cannot help conveying a sense of lingering uneasiness towards that act of joining – reminding his readers that there are “responsibilities and obligations and guilt” to be faced in this act. “Guilt” is the most intriguing term, because it implies that there is an inevitable element of regret in every form of joining. This could be reasonable for someone who joins a riot or any form of violent crowd, but it is curiously out of place and overly dramatic in a context that focuses on the importance of collective action.

The reason for Ghosh’s ambivalence, I would argue, is that the neat distinction between the two types of crowds that we have sketched so far can become, at times, dangerously blurred. A passage in *River of Smoke* may help clarifying this. The passage revolves around Neel, the Bengali *zamindar* who has taken shelter in Canton to elude the British authorities. Drunk and overexcited – hence already in a state of psychological alteration – Neel joins a riot that breaks out as a protest against the execution of an opium dealer. This passage allows us to experience Ghosh’s understanding of the psychology of riots from the perspective of a participant:

> Neel too was shouting obscenities now. His voice was no longer just his own; it was the instrument of a multitude, of all these men around him, these strangers who had become brothers – there was no difference between his voice and theirs, they had joined together and the chorus was speaking to him, telling him to pick up the stone that was lying at his feet, urging him to throw it, as the others were doing – and there it was, one among a hailstorm of stones and bottles, flying across the Maidan, hitting the soldiers on their helmeted heads, raining down on the mandarin in his tent. (Ghosh 2011: 378-379)

Adopting the perspective of someone who is allowing himself to be involved in collective violence, the passage shows that joining a riot, that “amorphous, monolithic and pathological entity” waiting to engulf and destroy the observer, might be described, with a shift of perspective, in terms of shared enthusiasm towards merging with a greater whole. The loss of the individual self, which characterizes the riot, is clearly present, as Neel surrenders himself to the multitude, but while *The Shadow Lines* always puts the reader in the position of observing this process in its clear, undisguised horror, here the reader gets to experience Neel’s perception of a genuinely exhilarating experience, a moment of shared fellow-feeling with newfound “brothers”, which prevents him to fully realize the violent nature of his actions.

This passage allows us to spell out one of the crucial relationships between the individual and the collective in Ghosh’s fiction, tightly connected to Ghosh’s anxiety towards the “responsibilities and obligations and guilt that joining represents”: individuals, in Ghosh’s fiction, are often confronted with multitudes of various kinds, and asked to respond to these multitudes, either by rejecting or joining them. Their personal predicament, in many cases, involves choosing which community, which form of “men in the aggregate”, they want to join, and why. This choice is never easy, as misjudging the nature of the community you are joining might mean becoming complicit in actions that you might not agree with (at least, at first) – most notably, but not exclusively, violence. This, however, is also Ghosh’s own predicament as a writer and public intellectual. Ghosh tries to exorcise the possibility by allowing his writing to actively celebrate multitudes only when they can be understood through the humanist ethos – the “affirmation of humanity” – that he introduced in “The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi”. Another way to put this is that Ghosh celebrates multitudes only when he perceives them as wholly unsullied by any form of divisive ideology – cultural, political or religious – and, on the other hand, tends to downplay any possibility for a political framing of multitudes if he can rather work within a humanist, universalist framework based on spontaneous solidarity.

An exemplary case of this operation is the narrative about the settlers on the island of Morichjhãpi in *The Hungry Tide.* These refugees, in the novel, clash with the Indian authorities to defend their right to occupy a piece of land in the Sundarbans – and are ultimately massacred by goons hired by the government. This is possibly the most extended description of a popular movement in Ghosh’s fiction. However, I would argue that he has allowed his fiction to engage at length with this historical episode because it can legitimately be framed as a struggle for fundamental human needs (food, land, a home) detached by any political ideology or programme – a pure humanist struggle for the “affirmation of humanity”, as it were. There are several moments in which this framing is established, and many come from Nirmal, the elderly teacher who describes the events unfolding in Morichjhãpi in his journal and quickly becomes passionate about the fate of its inhabitants. While watching the refugees in protest, he frames theirs “shouts of defiance” as an existential cry on behalf of humankind:

> the people in the boat [the refugees in Morichjhãpi] began to shout in unison, “*Amra kara? Bastuhara*. Who are we? We are the dispossessed.”
> How strange it was to hear this plaintive cry wafting across the water. It seemed at that moment, not to be a shout of defiance, but rather a question being addressed to the very heavens, not just for themselves, but on behalf of a bewildered humankind. Who, indeed, are we? Where do we belong? (Ghosh 2004: 254)

Another pivotal moment in this humanist framing is when Kusum, one of the refugees, laments the persecution of the authorities and voices out what she and the other inhabitants of the island stand for:

> it seemed to me that this whole world had become a place of animals, and our fault, our crime, was that we were just human beings, trying to live as human beings always have, from the water and the soil. No one could think this is a crime unless they have forgotten that this is how humans have always lived – by fishing, by clearing land and by planting the soil. (Ghosh 2004: 262)

Thus framed, this is a struggle that ignites Ghosh's literary imagination. This is a multitude that can be joined (as Nirmal does), and write about (as Ghosh does), without compromising one's own individual self: rooted in a shared experience of humanity, the multitude ultimately reveals itself to be not an other, which is to be joined by surrendering the self, but a mirror of the individual.

5. Conclusion: *The Great Derangement, Gun Island* and the Limits of Ghosh's Political Imagination

Guided by a humanist framework, Ghosh's work has systematically juxtaposed an image of "faceless" crowd embedded in violence with communities of ordinary individuals that resist that violence by upholding human solidarity. This dichotomy in the representation of crowds, however, leaves Ghosh's art of fiction unequipped to represent other multitudes. I want to focus here on political collectivities in protest, asking not for "the affirmation of humanity" in elegiac or joyful tones, but for systemic and radical change in righteous anger and political self-awareness. This lack of representation, I argue, is particularly relevant for the last phase of Ghosh's production – the essay *The Great Derangement* and the novel *Gun Island.* This phase, on the one hand, represents a moment of remarkable public engagement for Ghosh, who has tackled the global crisis of climate change and connected it (in *Gun Island*) to the predicament of contemporary migrants. Neel Mukherjee argues, in a review of *The Great Derangement*, that "at a time when the idea of the *engagé* intellectual is unfashionable and in full-blown retreat, here is a book that triumphantly announces its return" (Mukherjee 2016). As noted at the beginning of the essay, this is also a moment in which Ghosh has explicitly stressed the importance of recuperating a sense of the collective. Ghosh's political approach in this phase, however, appears more problematic if we look at it through the lenses of Ghosh's system of representations of crowds and multitudes that I have been sketching so far.

A noticeable aspect of both books is that, while discussing the politics of climate change and the migrant crisis, they offer a rather limited representation and a narrow understanding of popular and political movements. *The Great Derangement* ends with the recommendation that secular, activist movements should join forces with people of faith to create enough political momentum on climate change. Apart from this aspect, however, the discussion of popular movements that emerges from the book is limited to a specific form of criticism: Ghosh accuses modern activism to be focused on "an exercise in personal expressiveness" (Ghosh 2016: 131); and, in particular, he quotes a passage by Roy Scranton's *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene* to voice the idea that, in a context of general disempowerment of the public sphere, a march or a demonstration is "little more than an orgy of democratic emotion, an activist-themed street fair, a real-world analogue to Twitter hashtag campaigns: something that gives you a nice feeling, says you belong to a certain group, and is completely divorced from actual legislation and governance" (Scranton 2015: 62). Activism, for Ghosh, lacks a genuine collective dimension – he considers it as trapped in an individualizing imagery and in an obsession with personal self-expression. The problem Ghosh had with John Updike's conception of the novel and the role of the collective in literature – the fact that it is framed as an "individual moral adventure" – reappears, for Ghosh, in the realm of (popular) politics.

In *The Great Derangement*, however, there is little attempt to imagine which form a new political collectivism should take to avoid the form of "the individual moral adventure" that contemporary activism allegedly embraces; and there seems to be little trust in the fact that such re-imagining may emerge from activism itself. Moreover, there is also much that Ghosh leaves out in his account that could have balanced the image of the "activist-themed street fair" as the symbol of contemporary grassroots politics. As sci-fi writer Vandana Singh argues, Ghosh should have "looked at the history of social movements in general and their potential for engendering systemic change, and then examined climate justice movements in that context" (Singh 2017). Singh, in particular, argues that the role of indigenous peoples over the world deserves a special mention because "not only has indigenous resistance stopped or stalled fossil fuel projects, but the experience of peoples from the Dongria Kondh in India to the Standing Rock Sioux in the US reveals the brutal face of industrial civilization" (Singh 2017). Indigenous activism, therefore, provides examples of "alternative ways of thinking and being" that could also be used as a starting point for the "wide, sweeping infrastructural changes" that we need to survive climate change (Singh 2017). My point is that Ghosh's lack of engagement with the history of popular movements, conjoined with a rather pessimistic dismissal of the possibility of grassroots politics, is indicative of some limits of Ghosh's political imagination as regards the representation of multitudes, especially when dealing with crowds and communities that actively engage in participatory politics and oppositional struggles.

Those limits, however, are consistent with the system of representations of crowds and collectives discussed in this article, and it can be explained through it. Ghosh has always been very cautious when it comes to representing crowds that actively and self-consciously participate in a political struggle: the spectre of the "amorphous, monolithic and pathological entity" of the riot, hiding within any exhilarated crowd, prevents Ghosh from lending his imagination to multitudes that cannot be articulated within the humanist framework that he is comfortable with. This, however, posits serious limits to his intervention in the political issues of the present, as well as to his desire to recover a collective aspect in novelistic practice. So far, his strategy to find a middle ground between the individual and the collective has been to conceive multitudes that are rooted in everyday relationships, in solidarity, and express their "undramatic", spontaneous resistance to violence by upholding their belonging to a common humanity and opposing divisive politics and ideologies. While this position is not incompatible with the effective literary representation of *some* struggles (as *The Hungry Tide* shows), it is not an effective framework to give voice to a whole range of contemporary (or past) protest movements, which may employ a rhetoric of forceful confrontation, lay emphasis on breaking the flow of everyday life, are often a far cry from being “undramatic” and spontaneous, and are involved in complex, historically stratified debates about politics, strategies, tactics, economics and ethics that cannot be reduced to “the affirmation of humanity”. It should be underlined that this lack of representation exists irrespective of Ghosh’s support for the political causes or positions espoused by activists or popular movements: it simply shows that these movements are outside his literary imaginative horizon.[4]

Such an imaginative gap is blatant in *Gun Island.* This ambitious novel, in which Ghosh variously intertwines the climate crisis, the life-stories of migrants coming to Europe, and a reflection on the limits of rationality and secularism, reaches its climax precisely in a stand-off between different types of crowds, on the Mediterranean Sea. As a migrant ship is approaching the Italian coast, two groups of activists rush to meet it: a mob of right-wing activists whose aim is to prevent the ship from landing, and a number of activists that want to welcome it and bring the migrants to safety. Neither group is particularly remarkable, but it is striking how the pro-migrants activists, in particular, mostly limit themselves to shout a few rather generic slogans and to have a short and inconsequential discussion about violent and non-violent tactics, before the actual resolving mechanism of the novel is activated. Following the apparition of a “storm of living beings” (Ghosh 2019: 307) – birds and cetaceans – that surrounds the migrant ship and swirls around it in a marvellous spectacle, the Italian admiral in charge of the situation decides to ignore his orders and let the migrants in. While the episode is meant to provide the novel with a hopeful conclusion, it is significant that such hope comes from the individual decision of an enlightened member of the military, and, on a symbolic level, from an arguably miraculous, non-human apparition. Notably, it does not come from a collective, popular effort to make the authorities accountable for either the migrant or the environmental crisis. *That* kind of narrative of a collective force, however, would step outside the poetics that Ghosh’s work is comfortable with as regards the representation of crowds, and that has been set rather stably since *The Shadow Lines.* Held back by a deeply-felt ambivalence towards collectivities that vocally push for political action – arguably emerging from the experience of riots at the heart of *The Shadow Lines* – Ghosh’s fiction prefers not to imagine that kind of crowds with adequate precision.

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[4] Recent examples of works, both in fiction and non-fiction, that do engage imaginatively with protest movements, specifically with environmental activism, are Richard Powers’ *The Overstory* (2018) and Naomi Klein’s essay *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (2014). Powers’ novel, which describes the lives of nine characters defined by their relationship with trees, also depicts a complex portrait of a group of environmental activists, which several of the protagonists end up joining. Powers manages to describe in detail their predicament, their idealism, their shortcomings and their difficult and sometimes questionable choices, while, at the same time, never letting the culprits of environmental devastation off the hook. Klein’s book, on the other hand, while providing a detailed analysis of the historical events and ideologies that engendered the current climate crisis, is noticeable for its extensive cavalcade through the history of a vast number of environmental movements around the world – both indigenous and otherwise, both Western and non-Western.

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II.

FoRESHADOWED CoNTEXTS

THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Sameness and Difference in *The Shadow Lines*

John THIEME

ABSTRACT • This article discusses Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* by looking at the complex and somehow problematic notions of sameness and difference as two cultural paradigms that also reflect some of the debates on critical theory, society and history stemming from the 1980s. In fact, the cultural context in which the novel was written somehow surfaces and affects the narrative development, in particular the attempt to read and make meaning of existence and memory. The very metaphor of the mirror, an almost obsessively recurring object in the novel's ramifications, is here taken up as a key to questioning and exploring relations of likeness and unlikeness, spanning the treatment of violence in Partition riots and the idea of imaginative geography, and its numerous analogies between places, and its lack of a fixed centre. However, going beyond the altering power and Lacanian echoes of mirrors, Ghosh seems less concerned with taking his readers into a postmodern funhouse of deforming mirrors than with highlighting the hermeneutic strategies that, consciously or unconsciously, come into play when we look at mirror images. Whereas obviously the personal and national dimensions of the shadow lines work in a parallel way to generate an intertext about a relationship that transcends borders, supposed symmetries and asymmetries too are revealed by discrepancies between imagined versions of people and their actual identities, physical and mental, and ultimately Tridib's worldview represents an idealistic attempt to collapse not just national borders, but also correlative psychic divisions within individuals.

KEYWORDS • Sameness; Difference; Mirror; Partition; Borders.

Since this volume commemorates the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of *The Shadow Lines*, I should like to begin by considering it as a novel of the 1980s, a decade when difference was a central concern of several of the theoretical discourses that were to the fore in academic circles then. After suggesting ways in which it engages with such discourses, I will move on to discussing its treatment of difference and sameness more generally.

I first taught the novel in London about a year after its publication and have a vivid memory of being asked by an earnest student to explain the meaning of the closing words, where the narrator expresses his gratitude to May "for the glimpse she had given [him] of a final redemptive mystery" (SL: 286). What the mystery was was a mystery to her. She was far from alone in her group; the ending seemed abstruse to several of her classmates. In a perceptive discussion of *The Shadow Lines*, Jon Mee *has* offered an explanation of the ending, while expressing unease about it. Mee says, "The sexual encounter between the Indian narrator and the Englishwoman May becomes a metonym for the possibility of making human connections across the cultural differences with which Ghosh so scrupulously structures the rest of his novel" (Mee 2003: 90). I agree with this, but despite Mee's discerning use of the word "metonym", would suggest that the ending offers a resolution of the differences embedded in the novel's various divisive shadow lines, which goes beyond simply erasing cultural differences. I will try to demonstrate this by contextualizing the ending in terms of the novel's recurrent stress on sameness in difference, difference in sameness, and I will discuss both the novel's ubiquitous concern with cross-cultural relations and its apparently ambivalent movement between a Western and a subcontinental poetics.

Like much of Ghosh's work, *The Shadow Lines* repeatedly suggests commonalities across cultures and such commonalities are particularly foregrounded in its recurrent use of the image of the mirror, which vies with the map as the central trope of *The Shadow Lines*.[1] The looking glass border between India and what was then East Pakistan and the narrator's memory of seeing Nick Price as "a spectral presence" (SL: 49) beside him in his looking glass are just two of the more obvious references to mirrors that encapsulate the novel's concern with difference in sameness, sameness in difference. Mirrors reflect a supposedly accurate likeness, but they also invert images by transposing left and right, right and left. Beyond this, certain kinds of mirrors can, of course, distort, but in *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh seems less concerned with taking his readers into a postmodern funhouse of deforming mirrors than with highlighting the hermeneutic strategies that, consciously or unconsciously, come into play when we look at mirror images.

The Shadow Lines reads as well today as when it first appeared and yet in some respects it is very much a novel of the 1980s, permeated by allusions to ideological cross-currents that were in vogue at the time of its publication.[2] Its pages are littered with references that suggest an engagement with aspects of postmodern, poststructuralist and cultural theory that absorbed much of the Western academy in the late 1970s and 1980s, having in many cases had an earlier provenance in France. This was the period when post-Saussurean linguistics impacted on the Anglophone world, and Ghosh could almost be quoting from a theory primer, explaining the gap between signifier and signified, when the narrator, talking about his love for Ila, writes, "between that state and its metaphors there is no more connection than there is between a word, such as mat, and the thing itself"

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[1] See particularly Mukherjee 1995, 255-67, and Mondal, 2007, 85-103.

[2] Several of the novel's characters are involved in academic life. At different moments in the action, Tridib is researching sites associated with the Sena dynasty of Bengal for a PhD in archaeology (SL: 7), the narrator has a grant to work on the nineteenth-century textile trade between India and England at the India Office in London (13-14), Robi has a six-month Harvard fellowship in administration and public affairs (23), Ila's father is a visiting professor in development studies at a university in the north of England (SL: 31-2), Snipe lectures in Middle English at a Hampstead college, suggestive of Westfield College (SL: 60), and even Ila is a student, doing a BA in History at University College, London (SL: 76).

(SL: 94). Terence Hawkes, *in Structuralism and Semiotics*, offers a similar account of "the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign" with reference to the relationship between "the signifier 'tree' […] and the actual physical tree growing in the earth" (Hawkes 1977, 25). In much the same way, the narrator's fascination with catoptrics,[3] the way mirrors form images, chimes with Lacan's account of the significance of the mirror phase in the development of subjectivity. As Terry Eagleton puts it in another of the theory primers that achieved wide circulation in the 'eighties: "the mirror situation […] is essentially narcissistic: we arrive at the sense of an 'I' by finding that 'I' reflected back to ourselves by some object or person in the world" (Eagleton 1983, 164). And, arguably, this has resonance with regard to the narrator's defining himself in contradistinction to the spectral presence of Nick Price. If one agrees with this, it becomes important to add that, again in Eagleton's words, "The image which the small child sees in the mirror is in this sense an 'alienated' one: the child 'misrecognizes' itself in it, finds in the image a pleasing unity which it does not actually experience in its own body" (Eagleton 1983, 165). And, again if one agrees with this, one wants to ask whether in the narrator's case such misrecognition relates to his cultural positioning, as a Bengali seeing himself in relation to an imagined personification of the former colonial power, or whether it has a more general significance, as in Lacan's account of mirror misrecognition. I will come back to this, after mentioning further ways in which *The Shadow Lines* shows itself to be conversant with ideological cross-currents that were prominent in Western academic discourse in the 1980s.

Towards the end of the novel, the narrator extends his thinking on the slippage between signifiers and signifieds in a passage in which, as he approaches the central traumatic event, Tridib's death, he sees himself engaged in a "struggle with silence". This silence, he says, "is simply a gap, a hole, an emptiness in which there are no words" (SL: 213). Again, this is very clearly post-Saussurean because the silence is said to lie "in the gap between words and the world" (214), but it also evokes the view that it is impossible to convey inhuman atrocities such as the Holocaust in language. In George Steiner's oft-quoted words, "The world of Auschwitz lies outside speech as it lies outside reason" (Steiner 1967, 123). And just a few lines further on, *The Shadow Lines* refers to the silence as "the silence of an absolute, impenetrable banality" (SL: 214), phrasing that recalls Hannah Arendt's argument, put forward at the time of Adolf Eichmann's trial, about the banality of evil (Arendt 1963). So the violence of the riot in which Tridib is killed is related to the debates about the problematics of articulating the Holocaust that continued to occupy an important role in academic discourse in the Eighties.

There are other manifestations of ideologies that were gaining in prominence in the 1980s. The cultural geography of the text, most vividly articulated in the narrator's Tridib-inspired comment that "a place does not merely exist, […] it has to be invented in one's imagination" (SL: 21), has much in common with revisionist notions of place and space that were gathering momentum in the Eighties, with the Anglophone academy again becoming aware of the thinking of French commentators, such as Gaston Bachelard and Michel Foucault,[4] on space. And, perhaps most tellingly of all, given the text's response to political cartography and nationalism, the 1980s was the decade when the influence of Edward Said's stress on imaginative geography in *Orientalism* (1978) was signalling a seismic shift in the study of postcolonial relations and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) was demonstrating that contemporary notions of nation were a post-Enlightenment social construction.

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[3] My use of catoptrics is indebted to Parashkevova 2012.

Some of *The Shadow Lines*' narrator's apparent allusions to the theoretical avant-garde of the 1980s could, of course, be unconscious on Ghosh's part, but collectively they suggest a knowing awareness of the anti-essentialist cultural politics that were becoming popular in the Western academy during the decade. So what are we to make of this ostensible indebtedness? Does it suggest a Western-oriented poetics is framing what is a predominantly subcontinental experience? The text of *The Shadow Lines* offers no sustained answer to this question, but it *seems* to suggest otherwise, not simply because of its engagement with the specificity of the political geography of parts of South Asia, but also because, as the action builds towards climax, the narrator says that the "fear that comes of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent […] sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the subcontinent from the rest of the world" (SL: 200). And in the words that follow this statement, his fixation with mirrors recurs, when he expands his view of South Asian distinctiveness by adding that the inhabitants of the subcontinent are differentiated by "the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one's image in the mirror" (SL: 200). So, what *could* be read as an expression of the Lacanian view of the mirror stage as a universal phase of children's early psychic development seems to have taken on a culturally specific significance as a marker of subcontinental difference.

The way the mirror image is introduced at this point in the novel echoes an earlier passage, which is central to its exploration of contrasting approaches to imaginative geography. In this passage, the narrator recalls Tridib telling him that knowledge can only be achieved through "a pure, painful and primitive desire […] that carried one beyond the limits of one's mind to other times and other places, and even, if one was lucky, to a place where there was no border between oneself and one's image in the mirror" (SL: 30). Such a vision transcends the "fear of the war between oneself and one's image in the mirror", which supposedly characterizes the subcontinental psyche and also, given the novel's sustained use of analogies between the personal and the political, it proposes an epistemology that dissolves politically drawn borders and undermines notions of nation. And it is a vision which contests conventionally received notions of difference, by asserting the individual imagination's power to invent places, to transcend difference.

This vision is, then, a challenge to the lived reality of Partition, both the political actuality of the dismemberment of the subcontinent and all the other divisive shadow lines that course through the novel's pages. The narrator is fascinated by Tridib, but one wants to ask whether we should see him as a dramatized point of view, a Conradian focalizer – there is, of course, the Conrad allusion in the title – whose account need not necessarily be taken at face value. This isn't to argue that he is unreliable, simply to say that he represents a particular mindset and that the novel has no fixed centre of gravity. The titles of its two catoptrically paired parts, "Coming Home" and "Going Away", might seem to express a neat reversal, but there is no clear identification of a point to which it returns or from which it departs. At one point the narrator tells his grandmother, "'You don't know the difference between coming and going!'" (SL: 150) and it is a remark that can be seen to have a metatextual relevance to the treatment of place throughout *The Shadow Lines*. The narrator writes, "Every language assumes a centrality, a fixed and settled point to go away from and come back to, and what my grandmother was looking for was a word for a journey which was not a coming or a going at all; a journey that was a search for precisely that fixed point which permits the proper use of verbs of movement" (SL: 150). This could also be seen as relevant to the issue of whether the novel's *poetics* are Western or subcontinental. Where is it coming to us from? Where is it taking us to?

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[4] See particularly Bachelard 1964 and Foucault 1986.

Where the narrator is concerned, coming and going seem to relate to his own dual socialization: he is both a product of India, and particularly the Calcutta locality in which he has grown up, and someone who misrecognizes himself as a colonial double of Nick Price. His imagination strives to find correspondences across politically drawn borders and other more personal shadow lines. This is evident from the opening page onwards. There he says that Mayadebi was twenty-nine when she travelled to England with her husband and Tridib, who was then eight. He follows this by adding that, although his memory is uncertain as to when Tridib first told him about this journey, he had come to believe that it happened when *he* was eight and as he does so he tries to imagine an eight-year-old Tridib looking like himself. At the time when Tridib has told him about the trip to England, he has seemed old to the narrator, though, he says, "he could not have been much older than twenty-nine" (3). In short, the narrator endeavours to project the younger Tridib onto himself and at the same time imagines the Tridib who is telling him about the journey to England as the same age, twenty-nine, as Mayadebi. The novel's engagement with the vagaries of memory can be Proustian, but in passages such as this there is a conscious admission that the narrator has imposed his own perspective, mainly it would seem in an endeavour to identify with Tridib and this is part of an epistemological struggle to find sameness in difference. Here, though, his desire is frustrated, when his grandmother tells him Tridib "looked *completely* different – not at all like you" (4; italics in original).

It is the first of numerous passages, in which his imaginings try to find similarities that are not apparent to others. For example, he remembers his grandmother and Mayadebi embracing, when the Shaheb and his family visited Calcutta, when he *was* eight, and feels they are lookalikes, as if there is "a mirror between them" (SL: 35). However, when he is recalling this, Robi disagrees, echoing the words his grandmother uses when she contradicts his belief that he looks like Tridib, by saying "they were completely different" (35) and adding, in another variation on the motif of family likenesses, that *he* (Robi) looks more like the grandmother than the narrator does. Beyond the personal, the novel suggests numerous analogies between places, and its lack of a fixed centre – not knowing "the difference between coming and going" – is vividly conveyed through its pairing of rooms and buildings. The underground room in the old family house in Calcutta is likened to the cellar in the Lymington Road house. The bombed cinema in the pornographic letter Tridib sends to May is paralleled by a supposedly similar "ruin" (SL: 141, 167), when Tridib and May visit the Victoria Memorial in Calcutta. In Ila's view, the Stockwell house that she shares with three others is like the Brick Lane house in which Alan Tresawsen lived with his three friends at the beginning of World War II. Ila's equation of these two houses again raises the issue of sameness and difference, as the narrator says he "began to marvel at the easy arrogance with which she believed […] that times and places are the same because they happen to look alike" (SL: 101). So here, where she sees sameness, he sees difference. Perhaps the most striking catoptric building of all is the house in Dhaka, which has been divided down the middle by a wooden partition.[5] This has been the inspiration for stories that the narrator's grandmother has told Mayadebi when they were young, a site for a child's imaginative fantasy, and it can be seen as a metonym for the catoptric poetics of the whole novel: on the other side of the house the inhabitants' meals "start with the sweets and end with the daal, their books go backwards and end at the beginning, they sleep under their beds and eat on the sheets […]" (SL: 123). This is imaginative geography on a micro-level, but, as the grandmother imagines this looking-glass world into existence, it is easy to map the comic absurdity of her stories onto the tragic absurdity of Partition. Again, sameness and difference are paired. The tension between these two conditions runs right through the novel, then, but it is expressed in different ways and the balance between them varies. Likenesses are inexact; a degree of misrecognition is invariably involved. And, amid the numerous passages in which the narrator attempts to impose sameness, there are others that point in an opposite direction. Difference is particularly prominent in competing accounts of the same circumstances. In the opening pages, there are two different accounts of how Tridib lives his life. Ila's stories of her popularity amid her schoolmates are contradicted by group photographs of them. Nevertheless there are enough similarities to suggest that cultural, personal and political relations are closer than culturally constructed notions of alterity and the ideology of the inviolate nation state generally suggest. As in Ghosh's next book, *In An Antique Land* (1992), where he demonstrates the seamlessness of the pre-Enlightenment trading networks that linked the eastern Mediterranean and the Arabian peninsula with India prior to the advent of Portuguese colonization, *The Shadow Lines* constantly finds affinities between peoples and cultures that have historically been seen as discrete – in the Western imagination.

The personal and national dimensions of shadow lines come together very obviously in an intertext about a relationship that transcends borders, which underpins much of the narrative: the Tristan and Iseult legend. This story is recycled from character to character:

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[5] Cf. R. K. Narayan's very similar earlier use of the trope of the divided house in *The Financial Expert* (Narayan 1952). I discuss this in Thieme 2007, 81-2 and 120-21.

Snipe has told it to Tridib, Tridib to Ila and the narrator and, when it is invoked most fully, albeit still sketchily, the narrator is telling it to May. Tridib says it is a story that “happened everywhere”, but immediately afterwards adds that it comes from a time “when Europe was a better place, a place without borders and countries” (SL: 183), so its putative universalism is in fact pan-European, not planetary. This, though, is very much in keeping with Benedict Anderson’s argument that the notion of nation, as we have it today, is a post-Enlightenment construct. So one could argue that, as in *In An Antique Land*, Ghosh is, perhaps sentimentally, seeing medieval European culture as supra-nationalist, immune from the politics of partition that subsequently played such an important part in the European colonial project. In any case, where *The Shadow Lines* is concerned, the story of “a man without a country, who fell in love with a woman-across-the seas” (SL: 183) counterpoints several of the novel’s relationships. It is most explicit in Tridib’s desire to meet May in an extra-national space, “as the completest of strangers […] in a place without a past, without history, free, really free, two people coming together with the utter freedom of strangers” (SL: 141). But at the same time, he blends this version of difference with sameness, by taking the view that they will be “all the more strangers, because they knew one another already” (141).

Supposed symmetries and asymmetries proliferate throughout the novel, particularly in discrepancies between imagined versions of people and their actual identities, physical and mental. The narrator imagines Nick Price Nick as “bigger and better, […] a head taller” (SL: 49) than himself, but when they actually meet Nick proves to be no taller than he is; he imagines Nick as a kindred spirit, who wants “to travel around the world like Lionel Tresawsen, to live in faraway places” (SL: 51-2), but again this is belied by the reality. When May first arrives in Calcutta, he is similarly surprised at how different she is from how he has imagined her (SL: 161). Inspired by the attractions of Tridib’s capacity to conjure places into existence and his flair for fictive inventiveness, the narrator is prone to inventing versions of people, places and experiences, which, however attractive they may be, are at odds with their actuality. This, of course, is in direct contrast to Ila, as is made explicit in the memorable passage early in the novel, when his longing to visit Cairo and see the mosque of Ibn Tulun and the Great Pyramid of Cheops is counterpointed by her memory of Cairo, which she *has* visited, as the place where the Ladies’ toilet is “on the other side of the departure lounge” (SL: 20). Yet, despite their seemingly diametrically opposed outlooks, they too share elements of sameness in difference. The narrator recalls that, as a child, he is said to have been so like Ila that he “could have been her twin”, but the sentence in which he says this ends with the words, “it was that very Ila who baffled me yet again with the mystery of difference” (SL: 31). This provides a partial context for the gnomic final sentence, where the word “mystery” recurs, when the narrator spends the night with May, in an embrace that delivers some kind of closure, as May comes to terms with the circumstances of Tridib’s death, seeing this as an unfathomable sacrifice, and concluding that she “mustn’t try” to understand it “for any real sacrifice is a mystery” (246). For the narrator, though, as they lie together in one another’s arms, this affords a glimpse of “a final redemptive mystery” (SL: 246) and arguably *for him* this offers some kind of resolution to his recurrent wrestling with the issue of sameness in difference. One wants to add that, *pace* Mee, the earlier use of the phrase "mystery of difference" in relation to Ila suggests that more than cultural difference is involved.

Tridib has dreamt of a Tristan and Iseult love-across-the-seas relationship with May; the narrator has been obsessed with Ila, with whom he has been twinned and who has chosen his imagined *alter ego*, Nick Price, over him. Now the narrator as it were steps into Tridib's shoes, coming together with a woman-across-the-seas. He and May are an unlikely version of the archetypes of the Celtic legend: she is of a different generation and is temperamentally unlike him, and she has been described in terms which, on one level, make her the antithesis of a romantic heroine: Tridib has said she is not "beautiful or even pretty in the usual sense" (SL: 11). This, though, as another form of difference, only helps to reinforce the appropriateness of her occupying the role of an Iseult. Ghosh's response to the traumas occasioned by partitions is a form of non-Western humanism that thrives on the erosion of cultural *and other* differences. Critics have equated this with the humanism of the Bengal Renaissance, particularly with Tagore's anti-nationalist ideology and Satyajit Ray's affirmation of humanity through his commitment to close observation of the minutiae of individual behaviour.[6] The influence of both these precursors on Ghosh is particularly prominent in *The Shadow Lines*, a novel built around Tagore's notions of *ghare* and *baire*, the home and the world, or, to put this another way, the personal and the public. According to Partha Chatterjee, *baire* carries with it the connotations of colonized space, the public world permeated by the social codes of the colonizer,[7] while *ghare* suggests a private sanctum, away from such interventions (Chatterjee 1989).[8] This may be slightly reductive, since, in Tagore's novel, *Ghare Baire*, the world of the home is not immune to outside forces, but it helps to pinpoint the relationship between the personal and the public in *The Shadow Lines*. Ray's thinking seems closely linked with Tagore's – he directed a film of *The Home and the World* (*Ghare Baire*)[9] – but superficially at least his art is less politically charged than Tagore's, and his humanism inheres in an approach which observes the world in miniature.

So, *The Shadow Lines* demonstrates an obvious indebtedness to Tagore's anti-nationalist ideology, and arguably Ghosh's emphasis on sameness in difference, difference in sameness, is a post-Partition expression of the commonalities shared by human beings in a global society. At the same time, he has said that *The Shadow Lines* is his novel that most shows the influence of Ray (Ghosh 2003: 1), and this particularly manifests itself in his attentiveness to detailing the nuances of human responses. The Tagorean anti-nationalism of *The Shadow Lines* has received ample attention,[10] but Ghosh's use of a literary technique analogous to Ray's understated observation of human beings in close-up is an equally, perhaps more, important aspect of its contribution to twentieth-century Bengali humanism.

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[6] See, e.g. Mondal 2007, 34-6, and Prasad 2008, 136.

[7] As Anjali Gera puts it, "For many Indians, like Thamma in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, *coming home* is to *go away* from the nation" (Gera 2003, 109; italics in original).

[8] I am indebted to Madhubanti Bhattacharyya for first drawing my attention to this.

[9] National Film Development Corporation of India, 1984. Ray first wrote a script for a film of *Ghare Baire* in the 1940s, but it was not made at this time: http://www.filmsufi.com/2014/10/the-home-and-world-satyajit-ray-1984.html. Accessed 21 October 2018. Along with numerous other adaptations of Tagore, he wrote and directed an English-language documentary on the life and works of Tagore: *Rabindranath Tagore* (Films Division of India, 1971).

The narrator of *The Shadow Lines* has seen the "loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one's image in the mirror" as a culturally specific marker of subcontinental difference, but the ending promises a recognition of sameness in difference that moves beyond solipsism without descending into a glib form of transcultural humanism. It seems close to endorsing Tridib's view that knowledge depends on having a "desire" that opens up the possibility of entry into "a place where there was no border between oneself and one's image in the mirror". These two passages – the one emphasizing the gap between self and mirror image and the other predicating the possibility of closing it down – may seem to be at odds with one another, but the notion of the loneliness that comes from being at war with one's mirror image can be seen as a split that arises as a consequence of double socialization: being brought up in terms of the inclusive values of *ghare* and the exclusive, and often, but not always, colonially driven, public imperatives of *baire*. In this reading, Tridib's worldview represents an idealistic attempt to collapse not just national borders, but also correlative psychic divisions within individuals. The narrator has been inspired by Tridib from an early age and now, in his union with May, he momentarily transcends difference by vicariously becoming a Tridib who plays Tristan to May's Iseult. This seems a fitting ending to a novel whose poetics have distanced it from the toxic shadow lines of European Enlightenment thinking and also, ultimately, the primarily European theoretical avant-garde thinking of the 1980s. This is particularly evident in its references to catoptrics and the instantiation of difference inherent in Lacanian mirror-stage theory. The "final redemptive mystery" would seem to come from finding sameness in difference through a non-Western, and more specifically a Bengali, poetics and politics that draw on Tagore's advocacy of a genuinely global humanism and, more important still, Ray's implementation of such a credo through his closely observed studies of individuals.

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[10] Again, see Mondal 2007, 34-6, and Prasad 2008, 136.

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MAPS, HOUSES AND SHADOW LINES

Amitav Ghosh's Masterpiece Thirty Years after

Silvia ALBERTAZZI

ABSTRACT • This contribution highlights how *The Shadow Lines* is based on post-colonial paradigmatic concerns, such as identity, colonial history, independence, but also novelties, particularly as far as the search for a new language and a new narrative form is concerned. While Salman Rushdie conjugates storytelling and border-crossing as natural inclinations, Ghosh echoes and complicates Conrad's idea of a shadow line, multiplying and mirroring maps, houses, and borders. Amitav Ghosh's narrative moves across such symbolic places thanks to postmemory, and narrates the stories of those affected by the artificiality of national borders and historic partitioning. They are the winding stories of the losers not the straight lines of the winners.

KEYWORDS • Post-Colonial Literature; Postmemory; Maps; Houses; Borders.

The Shadow Lines sums up and fictionalises all the major issues of post-colonial literature. This masterpiece examines the search for identity, the need for independence and the difficult relationship with colonial culture, the rewriting of the colonial past, the impulse to create a new language and a new narrative form, and the use of personal memory to understand a communal past.

Obviously, at a first level, the image of the shadow lines reminds us of frontiers, borders, limits. If we accept Salman Rushdie's idea that, "In our deepest nature, we are frontier-crossing beings" (2002: 350), our existence appears as a series of frontiers to be crossed, and journeys through borders that shape our characters. In *Step Across This Line*, Salman Rushdie writes: "The journey creates us. We become the frontiers we cross […]. To cross a frontier is to be transformed. […] At the frontier we can't avoid the truth; the comforting layers of the quotidian, which insulate us against the world's harsher realities, are stripped away and [we] see things as they are" (2002: 350).

Yet, in the same essay, Rushdie also stresses that besides – and even before – being frontier-crossing beings, we are story telling animals, and stories are the tracks we leave behind. It is the task of writers to disentangle our intricate tracks, and give them meaning, while turning them into stories. In this sense, each author is similar to the protagonist of Joseph Conrad's novella *The Shadow Line*, who "goes on recognising the landmarks of the predecessors, excited, amused, taking the hard luck and the good luck together" (1986: 43), until he (or she) perceives the shadow line that will be the starting point for his – or her – weaving of the tale. In Conrad, the shadow line is a cryptic image: it refers both to the moment of interior darkness and confusion which precedes maturity in human life and to the line which divides us from our family and literary ancestors. Difficult to perceive, "shadowy", Conrad's line is also a metaphor for human weakness. Not by chance, *The Shadow Line* was published during the first world war and is dedicated to Conrad's son "Borys and all others who like himself have crossed in early youth the shadow-line of their generation", that is to say, young men who joined the army during the Great War.

In the title of Amitav Ghosh's novel, the shadow lines are plural, thus increasing the polysemy of Conrad's image. Like Conrad's novella, Ghosh's is a story of young people who are caught at a moment of epiphany, when certain events suddenly acquire a deeper meaning, changing for good their perception and interpretation of the past. While in Conrad World War I acts as a temporal watershed, in Ghosh it is World War II that functions "as a European fracturing experience that parallels the South Asian experience of Partition", as John Thieme has noted (1994: 69). Yet, in *The Shadow Lines*, these experiences are confronted by a young man who had not yet been born when either of them happened, but whose family has been deeply influenced by both. Consequently, Ghosh's anonymous narrator filters his relatives' experiences through the lens of other people's memories. His post-memory is emphasised by the plural in the title of the novel, which marks the passage from the personal to the communal in the story, while stressing the coming of age of both a man and a nation.

Indeed, *The Shadow Lines* shows a connection between the personal and the public, setting the personal conflict against the backdrop of national turmoil. Moreover, dealing with other people's memories of times and places he has never experienced, the narrator on the one hand shows that the lines dividing peoples and countries have always existed and, on the other, that these invisible borders are – and have always been – "shadowy", "illusory", but can be potential and often disrupting sources of violence. In his essay "The Ghost of Mrs Gandhi", that was published in 1995, Ghosh states that *The Shadow Lines* is not a book about a particular violent event, "but about the meaning of such events and their effects on the individuals who live through them" (1995). The borders that divide peoples from others and from themselves are innumerable: borders separating the coloniser and colonised in the past and "us" from "them" in the present; borders changing continuously, as the perspective from which we look at them changes; invisible mental borders separating past and present, memory and reality, identity and mask, and, last but not least, critical and historiographic borders marking the territories of literature, genres, canons. It is again John Thieme who notes that Ghosh's novel can be considered a sort of "palimpsest offering shadow lines of earlier Western texts, of which the Conrad novella alluded to in its title is only one" (Thieme 1994: 69), as if the Indian author were literally "going on recognising the landmarks of the predecessors" until a shadow line ahead warns him that the season of learning and imitation is over and that it is high time he found his own distinctive voice.

It is worthwhile remembering what Salman Rushdie was writing in the very same year as the publication of *The Shadow Lines*, in *The Satanic Verses*, referring to the ex-colonisers: "They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct" (1992: 168). If it is true, as Promilla Garg observed, that since "[t]he anglicised gaze of the educated Indians […] points to the fact that independent India is culturally colonised still" (2002: 169), post-colonial writers must learn to invent their own stories, without imitating the descriptions of the British canon, it is no less true that *any* author must invent their own story, not succumb to the stories invented by a central power. Therefore, acquiring maturity is learning how to build the right story for oneself: "Everyone lives in a story", cousin Tridib says in *The Shadow Lines*, "my grandmother, my father, *his* father, Lenin, Einstein […] they all lived in stories, because stories are all there are to live in, it was just a question of which one you choose." (179). Not by chance, the Indian critic Jani George wrote that "*The Shadow Lines* operates in a third space that is most fully imagined by Tridib and communicated by him to the narrator" (2017: 28).

As we all know, the two sections of Ghosh's novel are called: "Going Away" and "Coming Home". In the first part, "going away" refers both to the narrator who, at the end of this section, goes to that England he has so much dreamed of during his childhood, and to other people who had already 'gone away' before him, setting in motion the chain of events which leads to his own trip overseas. In the second part, the person who 'comes home' is his grandmother, going to Dakha, where she was born when it was still an Indian town, and which, after Partition, belongs to East Pakistan. However, the concept of home is a shifting one in a world which seems to be permanently unsettled: "'home' is what we create only through a combination of memory and desire" (Alam 1993: 142).

What Ghosh means by "home" is emphasised in the narrator's childhood memories, when he remembers playing "houses", hidden under a table, with his cousin Ila. The two children draw on the dusty floor squares and rectangles that are meant to represent the rooms of their imaginary house. It is especially the girl who is keen on mapping her home: she draws a drawing room, a kitchen, a bedroom for each member of the family, and even a cellar, where, as she says, she will play "houses" with Nick.

> She added a couple of lines […] and said: That's the cellar, and that's the staircase. That's where Nick and I play "Houses" sometimes.
> Why do you play down there? I said. Why don't you play under a table, like this?
> It's the same thing, she said. This table is like a cellar anyway.
> […]
> Why don't you play in the drawing room, or there in the garden, or out there where they play cricket?
> You can't play "Houses" in the garden, she said. It has to be somewhere dark and secret (SL: 68).

Just as the space where you play "houses" has to be dark and secret, so the space of memory, dreams and fiction is mysterious. When you write fiction, as when you draw your imaginary house, you must overcome the limits of realistic mimesis. To see how, in *The Shadow Lines*, playing "houses" has a metafictional meaning, let me quote another passage from the narrator's childhood memories:

> She crawled around me again, through the hall and into the drawing room. Then she squatted and drew a thin rectangle next to the drawing room wall.
> That's the staircase, she said. You have to climb up it and then you come to the bedrooms.

> […]
> I shook my head violently; something about those lines had begun to disturb me.
> You're lying, I shouted at her. That can't be a staircase because it's flat, and staircases go up, they aren't flat. And that can't be upstairs because upstairs has to be above and that isn't above; that's right beside the drawing room.
> […]
> You're stupid, she said. Don't you understand? I've just rearranged things a little. If we pretend it's a house, it'll be a house. We can choose to build a house wherever we like. (SL: 68-69)

In fiction, as in children's play, you can build a house wherever you like. Storytelling, like playing, is building worlds, shaping topographies that are not necessarily meant to obey the laws of geometry and physics, not even the law of gravity. Let's see now how the episode ends:

> It can't be a real house, I said at last, because it doesn't have a veranda.
> Veranda? She said in amazement, rolling the word slowly around her mouth as though she had forgotten its taste. What shall we do with a veranda?
> She was uncertain now, biting her nails, unable to find a place for verandas in the world of her invention. And I, sensing her confusion, felt a sudden, predatory thrill of triumph.
> I fell on my knees and, leaning over her house, I rubbed away a line and drew another in its place.
> Look, I said. There's our veranda.
> She stared at me aghast, rubbing her knuckles against her teeth. I could tell from the brightness of her eyes that she was close to tears.
> You can't do that, she said. You can't put it there.
> I rocked back on my hunches, hugging my knees: Why not?
> Because, she said, that's going to be Magda's room.
> […] Magda was Ila's doll.
> […] I said warily to Ila, why should a doll need a room?
> Not Magda the doll, Ila cried. This is the real Magda – our baby. A house has to have a baby. (SL: 69-70)

It is not enough to substitute a line with another to find an agreement. You have to agree on the use of the house: Ila and the narrator cannot reach a compromise because they have different views of it. While the narrator thinks only of a house with all possible comforts, Ila wants to build a home, the nest of a family, with parents and children. For the boy, a line becomes a veranda, for the girl, a doll comes alive. Or better: it is not Madga the doll who inhabits the room that the narrator deleted to make space for a veranda, but it is Magda the baby, the child you cannot do without if you want to build a proper home. Yet, in the course of time, the narrator – and not Ila – will be the one to own the best tools to recreate reality. Without moving from Calcutta, he will build many homes in faraway places with his imagination: in Tridib's London; in his grandmother's Dakha and, of course, in his own hometown. On the contrary, Ila, who is always on the move, and remembers only the toilets of the airports of each new city, will cling to a conventional idea of home.

> I could not persuade her that a place does not merely exist, that it has to be invented in one's imagination; that her practical, bustling London was no less invented than mine, neither more nor less true, only very far apart. It was not her fault that she could not understand, for as Tridib often said of her, the inventions she lived in moved with her, so that although she had lived in many places, she had never travelled at all. (SL: 21)

To stress this point, in a much-quoted scene of his novel, Ghosh shows us his narrator walking through the streets of London for the first time, and yet finding his way better than even a native: the city he had created in his imagination was so real that he has no problem in recognising all its features in reality. On the contrary, when grandmother is going to leave India to go to Dakha, the problem which most haunts her is that she would have to fill in "Dakha", Pakistan, as her place of birth on all forms, and then state "Indian" as her nationality: she is not able "to understand how her place of birth had come to be so messily at odds with her nationality" (SL: 149). This situation leads her to a confusion in the use of the verbs of movement: she says she is "coming" to Dakha after so many years and her grandson cannot but tease her, a former headmistress, for making such a mistake.

> I teased her with that phrase for years afterwards. If she happened to say she was going to teach me Bengali grammar, for example, I would laugh and say: But Tha'mma, how can you teach me grammar? You don't know the difference between coming and going. […] But, of course, the fault wasn't hers at all: it lay in the language. Every language assumes a centrality, a fixed and settled point to go away and to come back to, and what my grandmother was looking for was a word for a journey which was not a coming or a going at all; a journey that was a search for precisely that fixed point which permits the proper use of the verbs of movement. (SL: 150)

As Ghosh implies in this passage, the language of the coloniser cannot express the shifting world of the colonised: it is a language based on concepts like "centrality", "certitude", "stability", which are lost on the ex-colonies. Yet, a wrong use of that very language can become a distinctive feature of a particular familiar lexicon, "a part of its secret lore; a barb in that fence we buil[d] to shut off ourselves from others" (150). Trespassing the linguistic "shadow lines", the colonial subject creates their own language, and uses it to keep non-native intruders out of their world. Language shifts exactly like man-made geographical borders; it can divide some people, while linking others; in a word, it is "shadowy", just like the lines separating countries on a map.

In the last section of the novel, the image of the shadow lines is brought back to the semantic field of the border. The narrator, reflecting on the continuous changing of the frontiers on geographical maps, comes to the conclusion that you cannot separate two countries so simply as by drawing a line:

> I was struck with wonder that there had really been a time, not so long ago, when people, sensible people, of good intention, had thought that all maps were the same, that there was a special enchantment in lines […]. They had drawn their borders, believing in that pattern, in the enchantment of lines, hoping perhaps that once they had etched their borders upon the map, the two bits of land would sail away from each other like the shifting tectonic plates of the prehistoric Gondwanaland. What had they felt, I wondered, when they discovered that

> they had created not a separation, but a yet-undiscovered irony […] a moment when each city was the inverted image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free – our looking-glass border. (SL: 128)

Trying to find a link between two cities touched haphazardly by the points of a compass on a map, the narrator realises that the borders drawn by cartographers do not underline the diversity of the countries they separate. It is apparent here that maps offer only the sense of imaginary communities, because, as Justin D. Edwards observed, "they only focus on borders and view the nation from above" (2008: 86). Facing the shadow lines of geographical maps, the experience of the colonial – and post-colonial – subject is lost, "and the territory becomes defined by an abstract set of boundaries that lie outside his experience" (2008: 87). If drawing a map is a way to control the territory, an act of power, the space occupied by the colonised, and by all those who are victims – and not agents – of history, is not shown by the borders drawn by the winners, but by the stories of the losers. To the falsity, or at least, the unreliability, of the maps, one must oppose the reliability and sincerity of imagination. It is only through the power of imagination that the narrator arrives not only at drawing his own maps, where borders are only shadow lines, but also at recognising "each of the characters […] as their mirror image, and image whose otherness defines their identity", as Jani George suggested (2017: 96).

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THE SHADOW LINES AND THE DIALOGISM OF *ADDA*

Binayak Roy

ABSTRACT • *Adda*, in the Indian and Bangladeshi cultural context, is like a hobby, a pastime pursued for its own sake. It is a kind of collective talk by a group of intimates. Ideally, each participant is at once a speaker and a listener. Its informing spirit is one of amusement rather than edification. It is more serious than small talk but less formal than a debate. In a way, it stands between the two and reflects the sceptical, argumentative, humorous Bengali temper. *Adda* acknowledges multiple accentuality, varying points-of-view, different "funds of knowledge," and functions within the ethics of answerability. *The Shadow Lines* is deeply rooted in the Bengali literary tradition in its exploration of the multifaceted nature of *adda*. The range of Tridib's intellectual interests is matched by the fluidity of his personality and performativity in his Gole Park *adda* sessions. *Adda* (as speech) helps in the consolidation of group identity/community. In that sense adda is a verbal performance involving self-enrichment. Malik's chance remark in 1979 at the Teen Murti House Library in New Delhi triggers the narrator's recollections of the Calcutta riots in 1964. Similarly, a chance remark in 1981 by Rehman-shaheb, a Bangladeshi restaurant owner in Clapham, transports Robi back to the events in Dhanmundi in Dhaka in 1964, where he witnessed Tridib's violent death. In a foreign *adda* setting, he reflects on the post-liberal political economy and disintegration of the Indian nation-state. The narrative acknowledges the place of *adda* in contemporary Bengali society and its centrality in the identity formation of diasporic Bengalis, but its effects point towards a process of hybridisation of modes of expression. Though *adda* is primarily a Bengali institution, the use of English codes and contexts make it transcend its Bengaliness and become transnational.

KEYWORDS • Adda; Dialogic; Community; Performativity; Speech Genre.

Never was adda so *theorised and romanticised as it was in Calcutta, as both a significant component and symptom of Bengali bourgeois culture in the first three-quarters of the twentieth century.*

Amit Chaudhuri, *Clearing a Space*

The cultural location of adda perhaps has more to do with a history in which the institution came to symbolise – in problematic and contested ways – a particular way of dwelling in modernity, almost a zone of comfort in capitalism.

Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.

One voice alone concludes nothing and decides nothing – two voices is the minimum for life; the minimum for existence

M. M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*

> *Adda* is the source of creativity and of different cultural movements. One good example is *Adda* at college street coffee house in Kolkata. Sunday *addas* are very productive at different places including leading leaders and writers. Literary and cultural *little* magazines are offsprings of *addas*. Bengali mind is identified with these *addas*.

Theory

Adda, in the Indian and Bangladeshi cultural context, is like a hobby, a pastime pursued for its own sake. It is a kind of collective talk by a group of intimates. Ideally, each participant is at once a speaker and a listener. Its informing spirit is one of amusement rather than edification. It is more serious than small talk but less formal than debate. In a way, it stands between the two and reflects the sceptical, argumentative, humorous Bengali temper. Dipesh Chakraborty defines adda as "the practice of friends getting together for long, informal, and unrigorous conversations" (2001: 181). Debarati Sen extols *adda* as a "distinct speech genre" practiced by the Bengalis for long, whose "content has always been tied to something intellectual, like local and global politics, art, literature, and music. Also salient is its urban setting" (2011: 522). *Adda* means both a form of talk and a place associated with it. The word *adda* exists in many Indian languages, but in the Indian public discourse it has become synonymous with Bengali identity and culture. The attraction of *adda*, according to several Bengali cultural commentators, is the sheer joy of talking – the pleasure of engaging in meaningful dialogues with others as a deeply satisfying social intercourse with peers on topics that matter to us all, even if only temporarily. As an intensely pleasurable leisure activity, *adda* is a meaningful product for immediate consumption by those who create it.

Structurally, *adda* shares much with any kind of group talk but what distinguishes it from other such activities is the lack of adult supervision policing its content. In *adda*, one's knowledge of something, be it the latest love-interest of some celebrity or whether a communist government is good for the country's economy, need not be backed by references to books or scholarly writings, although references to books and other texts are not uncommon. Bruner explains that "[o]ur practices often presuppose knowledge that is plainly not accessible to us by means other than praxis" (1996: 105); and the example he gives is that of the knowledge of grammar that is required for our daily conversations, but which many amongst us may not know that we actually "know." *Adda* is a tolerant, secular, democratic and dialogic space, where, Buddhadev Bose contends, "[e]verybody must have equal status and respect… While it is impossible to avoid differences [of power, status, social standing, etc.] between people in practical life, yet those who don't know how to strip themselves off such differences along with their work-dress will never get a taste of *adda*."(2010: 13). The hallmark of adda is compassion and a tone of hospitality towards the other:

> There's got to be diversity of thoughts and beliefs [in an ideal *adda*], but there should also be deep fellow-feeling and understanding [between participants in *adda*]. *Adda* is only for those who are drawn towards each other by strong emotions of compassion and fellow-feeling, and should only be restricted between them. (2010: 13)

Adda is essentially dialogic; it acknowledges multiple accentuality, varying viewpoints, different "funds of knowledge," and is framed within the ethics of answerability. Moje et al, basing their ideas on Moll et al's concept of "funds of knowledge," argue that every individual possesses multiple funds of knowledge from the multiple social worlds that he/she inhabits. In negotiating with day-to-day life-world, he/she selectively draws from these multiple funds of knowledge as per the demands of the situation, time and place. Bakhtin argues that in the absence of any shared meaning, interlocutors must dialogically negotiate meanings of acts as unique acting agents from particular subject positions within the context of the particular act itself. Bender expatiates that meaning is constructed "in the relationship of understanding [between the speaker and the addressee – real or imagined] from a particular perspective and the obligation of acting from that position" and as such the truth or the meaning of any utterance is essentially partial, ever un-finalised and subjective (1998: 189).

Any meaning making process, according to Bakhtin (1981), is essentially dialogic and must attempt to include both sides of the conversation. However, when Bakhtin speaks of dialogue, he means more than the actual act of conversation between interlocutors. Every utterance is dialogic in that it anticipates an addressee and can never be free from the influence of the anticipated response to the utterance. An utterance emerges from the desire to be answered; it is "not designated to dissipate in a vacuum" (Braxley, 2005: 13). Braxley explains that the response to an utterance, however, does not need to be immediate for the utterance to be dialogic; nor does the response (or, for that matter, the utterance itself) have to be oral or even verbal. The response could be "either in words or in action," spoken or written and directed to the speaker or not, but there's always a listener and "the listener will respond eventually" (2005: 13). Therefore, meaning is always negotiated and, as Volosinov/Bakhtin (1973) writes, "can only arise in inter-individual territory." (Volosinov/Bakhtin cited in Dyson, 1993: 4). Bakhtin argues that precisely because meaning cannot be shared with others, "the 'ethical act' is grounded in an awareness of difference" and is unique "within the act itself"; its truth cannot be accessible outside "the act itself," in which "the unique self plays a crucial part" (Bender, 1988: 188). Bakhtin's notion of participative thinking "emphasises that I can only understand theoretical ideas and other people within specific actions that exist in relation to myself" (Bender, 1988: 188).

History of *Adda* and *Adda* in Bengali Literature

The *adda* in Bengal is, in part, derived from the rural *chandimandap*, in part from the pre-British *majlish* and the *baithakkhana*, and in part aspiring to the club and the salon and through all this contributing to a distinctly Bengali identity. The *adda* with its non-fixity of topics and even of space (not all *addas* have a fixed space) may be seen as a critique of the more rational forms of "getting together," the *sabhas* and *samitis*, organisations that had a defined agenda for their meetings. The term *adda* only began to be used in this particular sense in the last decade of the nineteenth century. However, it is instructive to see, later on, the terms *adda*, *majlish*, and *baithaki adda* being used interchangeably. As someone adept in *adda*, the Bengali writer, Sayyad Mujtaba Ali described himself as the representative of all the *chandimandaps*, *zamindari-havelis*, and teashops in Bengal – heir to a long tradition of speechculture. The time and space given over to the pleasure of communal speech connects the *chandimandap* with the *havelis* and teashops. The nature of orality changed, however, once the *adda* was removed from the bounds of the *baithak-khana* to the cafés of the early twentieth-century city. What was retained, even enhanced, in the process was the intimacy *affect* of communal speech; speech as passionate, multi-sensory experience, an occasion for heated debate, its spontaneous and raucous nature far exceeding any yardstick of reasoned debate.

In nineteenth-century Bengali literature, the *baithak-khana* (the drawing room) anchors the spatial taxonomy of the city. It is a space of conversation, physically straddling the street and dwelling, public and domestic, and a space that has been profusely talked and written about. Its location, its "looks," as well as the social life it harboured were subjects of literary exploration. It was in the world and culture of twentieth-century Bengali literary modernism that the practice of *adda* was given a "self-consciously nationalist home" (Chakrabarty, 183). In Bengali modernity, *adda* provided for many a site for self-preservation. Literary *addas* of Calcutta in the 1920s were spaces which nurtured and sustained a democratic and cosmopolitan vision of the world. Modern Bengali literature, it would seem, was nurtured in the space of the *adda*. Bengali prose fiction abounds in characters who revel as *addadharis* in an urban/semi-urban setting. Narayan Ganguly's[1] Tenida, a fictional native of Potoldanga in Calcutta, is the leader of a group of four young lads who lived in the neighbourhood of Potoldanga. Tenida was depicted as the local big-mouthed airhead, who, although not blessed with academic capabilities, was admired and respected by the other three for his presence of mind, courage, and honesty as well as his vociferous appetite. Their *addas* on a rowak in Calcutta are indelibly etched in the minds of Bengali readers. Trailokyanath Mukhopaddhyay's[2] eponymous protagonist, Domorudhor, is the narrator of all the adventures he undertakes. Though fictional, *Domoruchorit* draws from the "charit" tradition in Indian literature: Banabhatta's[3]

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[1] Narayan Ganguly (4 February 1918-6 November 1970), Indian novelist, poet, essayist, and short story writer, was one of the leading writers of modern Bengali literature who created the endearing character of Tenida.

[2] Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay (2 July 1847-11 March 1919) was an Indian civil servant who served as a curator of the Indian Museum at Calcutta. He was also a renowned author who wrote both in English and Bengali. One of his most famous works is Damru Charit, a collection of humorous and satirical short stories published posthumously in 1923. The stories, set in colonial India, recount the life and times of the antihero Damrudhar, a dishonest man who rises from a lowly shop-assistant to a landowner.

[3] Banabhatta was a 7th-century Indian Sanskrit prose writer and also a poet. He was a poet in the court of King Harshavardhana who reigned in north India from 606-647 CE. Bāna's principal works include a biography of Harsha, the *Harshacharita* (The Life and Deeds of Harsha) and one of the world's earliest novels, *Kadambari*.

Harshacharit, and, of course, Tulsidas's[4] well-known *Ramcharitmanas*. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay[5] used this literary tradition to the fullest mock-heroic effect in *Muchiram GurerJibon Chorit* (*The Life of Muchiram Gur*). In one of his adventures, Domorudhor mounts a peacock which transports him, faster than a railway train, across the "lunar space, solar space, and space of the North Star". In another story, he is swallowed by a tiger but continues to write letters to his employees from the beast's belly. In another tale, he invokes a genie who arranges for his marriage with Sheherazade of the *Arabian Nights*. The manner of his narration, punctuated by questions from his *adda* group, captivates the readers of all ages transcending the divide of time. Amitav Ghosh's Tridib continues this rich lineage of Bengali *addadharis* and their incredible tales.

Adda in *The Shadow Lines*

The Critical Reception of the Novel

The Shadow Lines (1988) is Amitav Ghosh's acclaimed masterpiece. The novel won the Sahitya Akademi award, India's most prestigious annual literary prize, as well as the Ananda Puraskar in 1990. Engagingly, *The Shadow Lines* has had a diverse critical reception. For Maria Elena Martos Hueso, the novel is "structured as a *bildungsroman*, as the unfolding of the narration reveals the maturing progression of the narrator's consciousness" (2008: 198). Going a step further, Meenakshi Malhotra believes that "it is possible to wrench a female 'bildungsroman' out of the narrative of *The Shadow Lines*" (2003: 166). Ian Almond, on the contrary, thinks that although the novel "does narrate the development of an imagination", it is "not quite a *Bildungsroman*" (2008: 61). If for R. K. Dhawan *The Shadow Lines* is a "family saga" (1999: 20), for Indira Bhatt it is a "'once upon a time' type of story narrated autobiographically yet with a multiple perspective" (2000: 33). The novel brings together "the forms of the autobiographical novel and the family chronicle", counterclaims Louis James "to subvert both" (1994: 158). A counterblast to all this is Arvind Chowdhary's assertion that the novel is "neither a novel of character nor a novel of plot but a 'novel of ideas'" (2002: 5).

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[4] Tulsidas (1497-1623 (?)) was a Hindu Vaishnava saint and poet, renowned for his devotion to the deity Rama. He wrote several popular works in Sanskrit and Awadhi and is best known for his epic *Ramcharitmanas*, a retelling of the *Ramayana* in Sanskrit.

[5] Bankimchandra Chatterjee (27 June 18388 April 1894) was an Indian novelist, poet and journalist. He was the composer of *Vande Mataram*, India's national song. Bankimchandra wrote thirteen novels and many serious, serio-comic, satirical, scientific and critical treatises in Bengali. His first fiction to appear in print, *Rajmohan's Wife*, is the first published novel in English by an Indian. The novel was serialized in 1864 in *Indian Field*, a Calcutta based weekly magazine. *Durgeshnondini*, his first Bengali romance and the first ever novel in Bengali, was published in 1865.

Like its form, the novel's theme too sharply divides its critics. "Sadness […] is the key function of *The Shadow Lines*", contends Ian Almond, "the epitomizing theme of the book" (2008: 58). Ulka Joshi, conversely, examines the novel's subtle humour in "family jokes and gossips which are cherished in family gatherings" (2000: 101). While Seema Bhaduri focuses on Ghosh's treatment in *The Shadow Lines* of the "changing middle-class ethos in India during the pre- and post-Independence era" (1999: 105), Shubha Tiwari believes that "childhood" is a "major theme of this book" (2003: 23). Alpana Neogy explores in the novel the "theme of being an exile or being at home through three generations of women" (2001: 216). Claire Chambers examines the novel's representations of the phenomenon of post-1947 communal violence. For her the novel "revolves around the trauma of the 'vivisection' of India and its continuing reverberations decades later" (2008: 37). Interestingly, despite Amitav Ghosh's avowal that "[by] instinct I'm non-political" ("Shadow Script", 2000: 32), Novy Kapadia asserts that the "overall focus" in the novel is on the "meaning and shades of political nuances in contemporary life" (1999: 122). Indeed, *The Shadow Lines* is so intensely orchestrated that it can sustain interpretations from disparate points of view.

In *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh thematizes the migrations of people(s), the importance of connections between the past and the present, the changing status of nation-states, the fluid nature of boundaries, intercultural communication beyond nationalism, the spread of Western modes of production, and encounters between different cultures – all of which are the fallout of globalization. The son of a diplomat, Tridib rejects his father's peripatetic lifestyle and lives in Calcutta pursuing his research in archaeology. Thamma discards research as a "lifelong pilgrimage" (SL: 7) and dismisses Tridib as a "loafer and a wastrel" (SL: 3), "an essentially lightweight and frivolous character" (SL: 6), an irresponsible man who spends much of his time in the tea stalls "determined to waste his life in idle self-indulgence" (SL: 6). Thamma's derogatory attitude to *adda*s stems from the very idea of human activity that civil society champions: "the telos of a result, a product and a purpose, [that] structures its use of time and place on that developmentalist and utilitarian logic" (Chakrabarty, 2001: 204). Unlike Thamma, who thinks that Tridib's wasted time stinks, the narrator delights in the gravitational pull of Tridib's conversations: "he never seemed to use his time, but his time didn't stink" (SL: 4). The narrative vividly creates an urban *adda* space at the street corner of Gole Park near NathuChaubey'spaan shop which was flocked by students, would-be footballers, bank clerks and small-time politicos who "gravitated" (SL: 8) towards that "conversation-loving" (SL: 8) stretch of road between Gariahat and Gole Park. The entire region used to hum with their "loud quicksilver conversations" (SL: 8). It is the sheer love of conversation that drew these people together in that neutral, impersonal space where they could come, talk and go away without indulging in any intimacies.

Tridib, the Addadhari, in his Gole Park Addas

The most important person in every *adda* is the *addadhari*, notable not for his status among the group, nor for his standing in society, but important because of the role that he plays in keeping the *adda* going. Although this person is neither elected nor nominated, he is the central character of any *adda* who holds people together in place, acting like a centripetal force. According to Chakrabarty, the *addadhari*, who would also typically be the host for *adda*s that meet at private venues, has to be an ideal listener – sincere, patient, respectful, knowledgeable, and compassionate. He also needs to be an expert moderator who can always come up with fresh and exciting conversation starters or conversation turners whenever the discussion appears to all as starting to get redundant. In his Gole Park *addas*, Tridib fits the role the *addadhari*. Such is the magnetic attraction of the *adda* that he rejects his aristocratic lifestyle and aligns himself with the lower-middle-class milieu. He frequently initiated discussions on topics as diverse as "Mesopotamian stellae, East European jazz, the habits of arboreal apes, the plays of Garcia Lorca" (SL: 9); in fact "there seemed to be no end" (SL: 9) to the topics of discussion. Tridib usually was the centre of attraction holding all captive with "the oddly disconcerting streams of talk" that would spontaneously come "gushing" (SL: 9) out of him.

The range of Tridib's intellectual interests is matched by his fluid personality. To his *adda* acquaintances, he is anyone from a slum-dweller to an aristocrat. To explain the reason for his absence, Tridib spins up one tale after the other to impress his audience sitting "on the steps of an old house" (SL: 11), a familiar *adda* setting in Calcutta. He weaves stories about his relatives in London from where he has just returned, his relations with an English lady named May, which has an enchanting effect upon the listeners. Just when they are going to extol Tridib as an extraordinary figure, the naïve narrator's innocuous remark that Tridib had been nowhere but remained confined in his room the previous month pricks the bubble of fantasy and the fabricator is greeted with "a howl of laughter and a chorus of exclamations: You fraud, you liar, you were just making it all up, you haven't been anywhere" (SL: 12). In a later reflection on the incident, the narrator muses that Tridib recited that made-up story at Gole Park the day he received May's photograph from London. But the event, apart from establishing the democratic, dialogical space of *adda* explores the relationship between the narrator, his narrative and his audience. A successful fantasy tale combines the narrator's strategies for inventing believable impossibilities with the reader's strategies for enjoying, challenging, and conspiring with the text. "Fiction, like stage magic", contends Attebery "is an act of illusion between performer and audience. The storyteller pulls a clump of sentences out of his hat, waves a magic wand, and tells us that those sentences have turned into people, scenes, and events. And we say, yes, I see it all" (1992: 51). Unless the storyteller is extraordinarily incompetent or insistent in letting us in on his secrets, his audience is more than willing to be fooled. The audience prefers the pleasures of illusion to the smugness of skepticism. (Attebery, 1992: 51). Unperturbed by the fact that his "stories" have been detected as sheer wishfulfilment, Tridib, in a tone of humour, "shrugging good-naturedly" declares: "If you believe anything people tell you, you deserve to be told anything at all" (SL: 12).

If Tridib is the narrator's mentor, Ila is the narrator's antithesis. Like Tridib, Ila is the child of a diplomat, a world traveller. But she is the obverse of an imaginative traveller, her consciousness is the product of a "worldwide string of departure lounges" (SL: 21). Ila shares a house in London with a group of people who are activists in various movements like the Fourth International and the Anti-Nazi League. The intimate manner of conversation of Tridib's Gole-Park haunts is replaced by the "almost always severely practical” (SL: 97) mode of exchange between the members of Ila’s associates. The narrator emphasises the difference between the atmospheres of these two spaces quite categorically: “There were no explosive arguments nor any shouting as there would have been among like-minded people in Calcutta or Delhi” (SL: 97). Their controlled arguments, which the narrator could hardly recognise as arguments, revolved around small points of tactics and strategy often referring to a “long history of personal political decisions” (SL: 97) stamped with a seriousness of intent.

The *Adda* and the Collective Memory of a Shared Past

The memories of the 1964 riot haunt the narrator but he successfully suppresses them. A “merest accident, a chance remark” (SL: 218) in 1979 by his friend Malik prompts him to delve into the past and unpack the trauma of his uncle Tridib’s death in detail. Quite significantly, the entire discussion about the riots springs “over our half-pots of tea in the canteen” (SL: 220) in the Teen Murti House Library in New Delhi when the participants in that *adda* were discussing India’s war with China in 1962. What unites this band of interlocutors is the collective memory of a shared past when the sovereignty of the nation was threatened by a common enemy:

> […] we recalled how quickly we had taught ourselves to distinguish the shapes of their aircraft from ours, how our mothers had donated bangles and ear-rings for the cause, how we’d stood at street-corners, taking collections and selling little paper-flags. We could all remember how the euphoria had faded into confusion as we slowly realised that the Chinese had driven the Indian army back; how we had wondered whether they were going to occupy Assam and Calcutta. (SL: 220)

The tall, bearded, Marxist Maliks’s remark that it was “the most important thing that happened in the country” (SL: 220) during their childhood initiates the spar, customary in an *adda*, which propels the narrator to the memory of the riots of 1964 in Calcutta. The group, mostly consisting of men who had grown up in Delhi, was sceptical of the riots; the narrator, the only Calcuttan, was equally determined to “persuade them of its importance” and not to let his “past vanish without a trace” (SL: 221).

> There was a riot, I said helplessly.
> There are riots all the time, Malik said.
> This was a terrible riot, I said.
> All riots are terrible, Malik said. But it must have been a local thing. Terrible or not, it’s hardly comparable to a war.
> But don’t you *remember*? I said. Didn’t you read about it or hear about it? After all the war with China didn’t happen on your doorstep, but you remember *that*? Surely you remember — you *must* remember? (SL: 221)

Each participant brings his own opinions and subjectivity to this practice, but at the same time there seem to be certain commonalities in themes and orientations. There is also a moment where an alternative interpretation is brushed aside in a very subtle manner when Malik patiently remarked that the narrator “imagined the whole thing” (SL: 222).

Memory intervenes again when the recollection of the events of the day – the narrator as a child waiting for the school bus, the cricket Test match between India and England, the wicketkeeper Budhi Kunderan (the name was recollected by Malik) cracking a century – finally help the narrator to ransack the yellow pages of the old newspapers to find out the reports about the riot in Khulna. This riot happened in Pakistan, and finally to the newspaper section which reported: "*Curfew in Calcutta, Police Open Fire, 10 dead, 15 wounded*" (SL: 224, italics original). *Adda* is thus a space where individual cultural subjectivities contribute to the making of society and simultaneously the social identity of its members. It also initiated the narrator's "voyage into a land outside space, an expanse without distances, a land of looking-glass events" (SL: 224), an intellectual journey which determines the crux of the whole narrative. The discussion which started with self-conscious exclusivist nationalism and little acts of patriotism in their childhood during the 1962 war culminates in the realisation that newspapers do not take the riots into the national narrative they support because this would entail giving them meaning. The communal and religious riots are left outside the national secularist narrative because this serves the interests of the national discourse.

Here, too, as in *The Circle of Reason* (1985), Ghosh's fascination with chance is quite evident. This is reminiscent of the chance memory that launched the narrator into a journey backwards in time in Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. Embarking on his project the narrator realises the enormity of the task before him:

Every word I write about those events of 1964 is the product of a struggle with silence. It is a struggle I am destined to lose − have already lost − for even after all these years, I do not know where within me, in which corner of my world, this silence lies. (SL, 1988: 218)

He acknowledges his defeat to this insuperable "silence" because "it is not a presence at all; it is simply a gap, a hole, an emptiness in which there are no words" (SL: 218). The narrator shockingly realises that the riots have disappeared into a "volcano of silence" (SL: 230) and are preserved only in personal memory. He thus boldly outlines the thrust of his micro-historic project and engages with the occlusions of nationalist historiography. Furthermore, the narrator reflects on the most terrible of all silences, "the silence that lies in the gap between words and the world":

> This is a silence that is proof against any conceivable act of scorn or courage; it lies beyond defiance − for what means have we to defy the mere absence of meaning? Where there is no meaning, there is banality, and that is what this silence consists in, that is why it cannot be defeated − because it is the silence of an absolute, impenetrable banality. (SL: 218)

One of the great quests of modern philosophy has been to discover how language is able to generate meaning, and what meaning actually is. Surely Tridib's shocking death is a moment where language fails; it is an abyss that language is unable to bridge. Meaning can only be formed when there is perfect correspondence between the world and the word, between the world of experience and the method of representation. Nationalist historiography and newspaper reports create gaps and fissures because by excluding the reports about the riots they push the riots into the "chasm of that silence" (SL: 219). Reports about party congresses and elections are foregrounded in newspapers and histories "as though words could never exhaust their significance" (SL: 228), but for these riots "we can only use words of description when they happen and then fall silent, for to look for words of any other kind would be to give them meaning, and that is a risk we cannot take any more than we can afford to listen to madness" (SL: 228). The riot in question is an unreconstructed subaltern past which remains an unassimilated fragment inexplicable in the language of modern history and the political logic of the nation which is the "theatre of war, where generals meet, […] the stage on which states disport themselves" (SL: 226). Historiography reduces "the lives of men and women to the play of material interests, or at other times to large impersonal movements in economy and society over which human beings have no control", acknowledges Gyan Pandey, which "often leaves little room for the emotions of people, for feelings and perceptions" (1992: 40-41). Official histories can offer only silence and absence of meaning. The narrator's father had no inkling of the turn of events because the Calcutta based newspaper "run by people who believed in the power of distance no less than I did" (SL: 227) did not mention it. He was "merely another victim of that seamless silence" (SL: 227). So complete is that "silence" that it takes the narrator fifteen years to discover that there was any connection between his nightmarish bus ride back from school in Calcutta and Tridib's death in Dhaka. Confronted with this paralysing silence the narrator can "only describe at second hand the manner of Tridib's death: I do not have the words to give it meaning. *I do not have the words,* and I do not have the strength to listen" (SL: 228, italics original). By allowing stories to be told in the victim's own voices − Robi's account of his dream and May's reportage of Tridib's death − the narrator hauntingly evokes the horror and meaninglessness of Tridib's death. Urbashi Butalia stresses the importance of orality in remembering the trauma: "Stories are all that people have, stories that rarely breach the frontiers of family and religious community: people talking to their own blood" (2004: 253). This is perhaps an appropriate way to narrate Tridib's predicament as he believed that "[e]veryone lives in a story […] because stories are all there to live in, it was just a question of which one you choose" (SL: 182). Thus, by relying on the dynamics of memory, the narrator proposes to recapture the absences of written words and by coalescing both "analytical" and "affective" histories create "humanely constructed and independent histories that are fundamentally knowable, although not through grand theory or systematic totalisation" (Said, 1993: 377). The past is represented through an amalgamation of official history and personal imagination, and "each of these […] realities must imagine its own discursive-epistemic space as a form of openness to one another's persuasion" (R. Radhakrishnan, 2003: 61). The narrative thus becomes the whole which interweaves "history, the discipline, and other forms of memory together so that they can help in the interrogation of each other, to work out the ways these immiscible forms of recalling the past are juxtaposed" (Chakrabarty, 2001: 93-94).

How does *adda* enrich the lives of its participants? The answer to this question leads to a discussion of *adda* as a performance. Richard Bauman used the idea of speech as "verbal art" or performance within the field of linguistic anthropology. He used it to study folklore and very specific cultural and artistic performances. But in his later article ("Verbal Art as Performance", 2001), Bauman acknowledges the use of the performance metaphor in analysing everyday speech practices. This later development in his thinking was due to the increased recognition of the negotiated terrain of cultural/social identity formation.

Speech accomplished both material and semiotic functions for identity formation. *Adda* as a speech genre also serves the latter purposes. *Adda* (as speech) helps in the consolidation of group identity. In that sense *adda* is a verbal performance involving self-interpellation. But *adda* is also a performance in the conventional sense (of performance).

The narrative moves from a London restaurant in the 1980s, the narrative present, to the Calcutta of the 1950s and 1960s when the narrator was a student and even further back to London in 1939. These multiple narrative strands are held together by the central narrative voice which remembers and seamlessly weaves the narrative in a complex web. Malik's chance remark in 1979 at the Teen Murti House Library in New Delhi triggers the narrator into recollections of the Calcutta riots in 1964. Different temporal and spatial contexts coalesce in his mind as he recalls his relatives and his conversations with them. A proliferation of stories exists to narrate this "truth". The stories lack veracity as the products of imagination. But each tale individualises the teller by situating him in a particular social and economic background. Moreover, by celebrating the egalitarian spirit of oral tradition and storytelling, the narrative dismantles the notion of a single, determinate authoritative meaning.

The possibility of plural interpretations rules out authoritative value-judgements and closures of meaning. By reviving the ancient tradition of storytelling, the narrative exhibits self-reflexivity. It projects the vision of "an exhausted centre" and "a vital margin" (Rushdie, 1996: 48). The valorisation of the personal elements of oral storytelling debunks the impersonal narrative of realistic Eurocentric novels by giving each teller a distinctive voice which resists appropriation by a master narrative. A narrative is a form in which events are described as having a meaningful and coherent order. It imposes on reality a unity which it does not inherently possess. It should be accepted, nevertheless, that in its vitality and richness, experience far exceeds the expression. Hence, "stories cannot be seen as simply reflecting life as lived, but should be seen as creative constructions or interpretations of the past, generated in specific contexts of the present" (Eastmond, 2007: 250). Thus conceptualised, stories negotiate the past and its meaning and seek ways of going forward.

Amitav Ghosh's Ethical Commitment and the (Re-)Presentation of Violence

The interplay between experience and expression is a dynamic one. Experience gives rise to narratives; it acquires form and meaning in the telling. Marita Eastmond, following E.M. Bruner, distinguishes between "*life as lived*, the flow of events that touch on a person's life; *life as experienced*, how the person perceives and ascribes meaning to what happens, drawing on previous experience and cultural repertoires" and "*life as told*, how experience is framed and articulated in a particular context and to a particular audience" (2007: 250). A chance remark in 1981 by Rehman-shaheb, a Bangladeshi restaurant owner in Clapham, transports Robi back to the events in Dhanmundi in Dhaka in 1964 and Tridib's violent death which can be accorded a fourth level, *life as text*. Experience is never directly represented. It is edited and interpreted at different stages of the process from life to text.

Ghosh's first commitment is to his art. The question that has engaged him a lot is whether this commitment excludes all other commitments. He has to admit that "a writer is also a citizen, not just of a country but of the world" (Hawley, 2005: 11). Whether a writer should be a responsible citizen or an insouciant aesthete is the issue that occupies him in the essay "The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi". His point of departure is Dzevad Karahasan's essay "Literature and War", touching on the relation between modern literary aestheticism and the contemporary world's indifference to violence. Karahasan holds that "The decision to perceive literally everything as an aesthetic phenomenon – completely sidestepping questions about goodness and truth – is an artistic decision. That decision started in the realm of art, and went on to become characteristic of the contemporary world" (cited in *The Imam and the Indian*,[6] 2002: 60). Ghosh abhors Karahasan's brand of aestheticism and plumps for moral activism:

> Writers don't join crowds – Naipaul and so many others teach us that. But what do you do when the constitutional authority fails to act? You join and in joining bear all the responsibilities and obligations and guilt that joining represents. My experience of the violence was overwhelmingly and memorably of the resistance to it. (II, 2002: 61)

By advocating resistance to violence and rejecting the "aesthetic of indifference", Ghosh is squarely denouncing the postmodernist dogma of pan-aestheticization as enunciated by Patricia Waugh: "Postmodern theory can be seen and understood as the latest version of a long-standing attempt to address social and political issues through an aestheticized view of the world, though it may be more thoroughly aestheticizing than any previous body of thought" (1992: 6). For Ghosh, it is "the affirmation of humanity" that is more important, "the risks that perfectly ordinary people are willing to take for one another" (II, 2002: 61). Ghosh thus straddles the currents of both modernism and postmodernism. Meenakshi Mukherjee underscores Ghosh's refusal to be categorised, but she does so with respect to Ghosh's rebellion against the templates of genre (Hawley, 2005: 4). Ghosh is too eclectic to embrace any particular -ism and in the process stifle all his innate dynamism. He is rather a typical amphibian, partaking of all ideas and isms that are congenial and pertinent to his artistic pursuit.

In his essay "The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi", Ghosh explains that for his next novel (*The Shadow Lines*), and for descriptions of violence in general, he needed to find a strategy of representation that would not reduce experiences and representations of riots, or violence in general, to mere spectacle. He had difficulties in finding a way of writing about the riots directly "without recreating them as a panorama of violence – 'an aesthetic phenomenon'" (II, 2002: 60) in the sense Karahasan means. In his quest for a form that could accommodate the "apocalyptic spectacle" of violence as well as "the civilised willed response to it" (II, 2002: 61,62), he opts for a mediated mode of representation. Robi's description of the riot that led to Tridib's death (SL: 243-246) is narrated by him in the form of a recurring dream, a nightmare that ends before Tridib is actually killed. The description is dramatised and creates the effect of a film with rapid cuts. It seems that here Ghosh the writer does allow for a dramatised, spectacle-like description of violence. But, significantly, Robi's version of the incident is represented as a frightening dream; it follows the form and content of a stereotypical nightmare and does not claim to be a realistic account of the event.

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[6] Henceforth, abbreviated II.

> Sometimes it's a crowd, sometimes just a couple of men. […] The odd thing is, that no matter how many men there are—a couple, or dozens—the street always seems empty. It was full of people when we went through it […] all the shops are shut now, barricaded, and so are the windows in the houses. […] Then the men begin to move towards us – they're not running, they're gliding, like skaters in a race. They fan out and begin to close in on us. It's all silent, I can't hear a single thing, no sound at all. (SL: 243-244)

Thus the only dramatised description of violence in the novel – the only turning of violence into a predominantly aesthetic phenomenon – is presented as a dream. What is more, this dream is silent, which implies that it somehow unfolds in an ethical dimension outside language.

The contention that riots are exceptional to South Asia is repeated in *In an Antique Land* (1992). Not to speak of communal tensions, micro nationalist factions subvert the myth of the homogeneity of the Indian nation-state. Robi reflects on how terrorist and separatist outfits in Assam, the north-east, Punjab, Sri Lanka, Tripura utter the rhetoric of freedom to fragment the nation: "And then I think to myself, why don't they draw thousand of little lines through the whole subcontinent and give every place a new name? What would it change? It's a mirage; the whole thing is a mirage. How can anyone divide a memory? (SL: 247). This clearly resonates with problems of contemporary India, where the tension between the state and the numerous ethnicities is evident. The state uses its power to keep the nation together as a political concept, while the various religious and ethnic communities tear it apart. Reflecting on Tridib's death, Robi tells Ila and the narrator that freedom is both an illusion and an impossibility: "If freedom were possible, surely Tridib's death would have set me free" (SL: 247). By describing national borders as "little lines," Robi diminishes their importance, implying that they are meaningless optical illusions that do little to separate the people living in one country from the citizens of another. Recollections, he implies, further impede the political separations that nations attempt to achieve because they excite in the minds of individual Hindus and Muslims images of their former alliance and of the disputes that have embroiled the two groups since before Partition. An intangible quality, an element of common humanity, binds him to his brother's murderers to such an extent that a chance remark by a Bangladeshi in a neutral location enables him to purge himself of the burden of those horrible recollections. Such a realisation is, in some ways, crippling, an enfeeblement the narrator illuminates all the more stirringly when he describes himself, Ila, and Robi as "three children of a free state, together clinging" (SL: 247). The juxtaposition of "free" with "clinging," which evokes desperation, despair, and loneliness, illustrates the narrator's own realisation that there is always an emotional cost to the pursuit of ever-elusive national independence.

Adda transcends national spaces

Adda is primarily a Bengali institution but Ghosh's use of this trope in a transnational space and contexts transcends its Bengaliness and increases the global reach of a particular cultural practice. Since it is not a written genre, language (orality) becomes the only way to document it (apart from the recent use of the internet). Language is inherently dialogic and not a closed system; therefore *adda* as a cultural practice has an emergent quality (Bauman 2001a). The current rise of Internet *adda* alters the oral nature of *adda*. In comparison to other speech genres like "*tarka*" (debate), "*majlish*", "*jalsha*", *adda* has been able to survive the test of time to be practised in rural, per-urban, urban and diasporic locations. So protean are the modes and moods of *adda* that it resists any kind of pigeonholing. The participants' interest and inclination shape its informing spirit. The history of *adda* is thus a manifestation of a desire to create particular identities, and hence the performative aspect is important. Butler writes that "the speech act as a rite of institution, is one whose contexts are never fully determined in advance, and that the possibility for the speech act to take on a non-ordinary meaning, to function in contexts where it has not belonged, is precisely the promise of the performative, one that positions the performative at the center of hegemony" (1997: 161).

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BORDERLESS AGEING. A READING OF AMITAV GHOSH'S *THE SHADOW LINES* FACE TO FACE WITH CATERINA EDWARDS'S *FINDING ROSA*

What History Teaches and Geography Cannot Learn

Carmen CONCILIO

ABSTRACT • In this essay, I would like to analyze two novels which share similar concerns with borders, nationalities, and identity. In spite of their historical and geographic distance, Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and Edward's *Finding Rosa* stage two elderly women, who are clearly confused about their whereabouts and express longing for home, although home is an elsewhere that has become also a different nation. The two ageing women have difficulties in accepting the new borders, dictated by nationalist claims, and in their confused mind – Rosa has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's – they idealize their home, now a foreign country, while still speaking the local dialect. "Partition" and "Irredentism" are the two historical moments that shattered their certainties and identities, transforming them into migrants and thus unleashing their mental journeys back to a home that does no longer exist. Under scrutiny here is ageing with its pathological performative modes, seen through the lenses of ageing studies in conjunction with border studies.

KEYWORDS • Postcolonial literature; Ageing; Alzheimer's; Memory; History; Borders; Partition; Istria; Refugees.

1. Old Women and Borderless Countries

"The death of an old man or woman is the destruction of a library" (Edwards 2008, 265). This line resounds eerie in times of Covid-19. A whole generation of elderly people in Italy – as well as elsewhere – has been lost, together with memories of the Second World War. Statistics claim that in Italy nearly 85 percent of the victims were elderly, aged 70 years and older.[1] It is impossible to measure, assess and evaluate what that loss amounts to.

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[1] https://www.statista.com/statistics/1106367/coronavirus-deaths-distribution-by-age-group-italy/. Last accessed August 23, 2020.

It might happen that an elderly person is the only repository and treasurer of places that no longer exist on world maps. Yet, elderly people carry those landscapes in their mind's eyes, in their memories of land crossed, soil that bears a special smell, colours and sounds typical of a local culture and familiar habits; also, a peopled landscape, resounding with a specific language, dialect or idiolect. It might happen that those mindscapes are only theirs, and once those people die, their landscapes are lost forever.

"The death of an old man or woman is the destruction of a library." This is a recurrent refrain in the memoir by Caterina Edwards, *Finding Rosa* (2008), a non-fictional text, dedicated to her mother, who died of Alzheimer's, carrying away with her the Istria of her mind and of her infancy. Similarly, Tha'mma – not at all a secondary character in Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988) – dies at an old age. With her, her past dies too: what is only her own, like those borders – the new borders between West Bengal and East Pakistan – that she had to learn anew. Exactly like Rosa who had to learn and unlearn the multiple, shifting borders of Istria.

This essay aims at juxtaposing these two gender-related and age-related literary works and these two ageing women: old grandmothers, whose geography was messed up by history, by wars waged about territorial disputes and the violent imposition of new national borders. This aim can be achieved more easily, because "post-colonial literature is a brilliant medium through which one gets an access to a disturbed past that one can hardly cherish or treasure" (Dutta 2018: 187).

The two texts are only apparently distant in terms of genre, space and time. One is a non-fiction, an autobiographical and family-memoir, set in Istria, in England and in Canada. The other is a Partition novel, or memory novel – ("the story nevertheless persistently revolves around one issue – the issue of partition" Panigrahi 2015: 65) – set in India, in Calcutta, Dhaka, and London. One is a memoir, an autobiographical narrative by a daughter turning into a caregiver to her ageing mother. It is written in an elegiac mood: "to lament, contextualize and possibly grant larger and lasting meaning to a person […] who has passed away" (Goldman 2017a: 9). The other is a novel told by a grandchild reconstructing his grandmother's last years. Both narratives pivot around displaced, diasporic elderly people, who speak their own dialects. They are written in English, although English is resisted, questioned, misused and, sometimes, even rejected by the older protagonists.

These two works somehow mirror each other, and since the (Lacanian) mirror is a central metaphor in Ghosh's novel, I would suggest that it becomes a structural metaphor in this essay, too. Contested borders engender similar narratives: twin narratives, mirroring grief and sense of loss, mirroring traumas, while remaining a constant, central topic in most postcolonial literature. One contested border gave way to what is known as "Partition", the other one to "Irredentism": both events became pivotal and more dramatic around 1947,[2] both terms became hateful, as stigmas, which stand for ethnic cleansing, forced removals, violent diaspora and unchosen forced migration, but also symbols of resilience for those who stayed (Ballinger 2003). Particularly after the Second World War, history reproduced itself as in mirror metastases on the geographical body of the earth.

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[2] "At the Bologna train station in 1947, the refugees were denied water; in Southern Italy, food relief. In Ancona and Venice, the exiles were greeted with the slogans *Fuori i criminali fascisti*, away with the criminal Fascists" (Edwards 2008: 285).

In both narratives two ageing women are protagonists. The narrator tells us how Tha'mma had always been a proud, strict, and moody woman, how she was widowed and worked hard all her life as a schoolmistress to support her son and his family, how she started slowly to decay and lost interest in family matters after her retirement, till she became obsessed with nationalism and with the idea of going back home in order "to rescue" her old paternal uncle. In its first part, "Going Away", the novel tells the story of her ageing process and eventually her death. Then, it tells the story of her past rooted back in Dhaka, in its second part, "Coming Home". Similarly, Caterina, the narrating I of the memoir, starts from her mother's death, then retrospectively describes her mother's slow transformations due to Alzheimer's disease; proportionally, the more her mother withers and becomes reticent, the more Caterina's interest in her mother's past back in Istria grows.

2. Ageing, Extended Families and Care Giving

In traditional cultures, all over the world, elderly people are cherished, respected, held dear sometimes for their wise and ancient knowledge and, sometimes, because of their more fragile status. When the protagonist of Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* claims his deference to senior people ("…my traditional sense of deference to one's seniors…" Hamid 2007, 21), he does so by exposing the behaviour of his young and rampant American friends, who scornfully address "Greeks twice their age" irreverently (Hamid 2007, 21). This opposition between traditional and respectful manners and modern practices also hints at the global change from the once common extended family to the by now more typical nuclear family.

Both works present an extended family. Three generations live together under the same roof. Interestingly, Amitav Ghosh's novel never questions this family structure, as if to say that in India senescence is a natural and acceptable stage of life that is taken care of within the family. This is further proven by the choice of a young man in his thirties, Tridib, a central character, to go and live with his own grandmother, in Calcutta.

Tha'mma is the heart of the house, she occupies the central and best room, she is the most authoritative character and everybody obeys her. She presides over her grandson's homework and life, well into his college years. When her health deteriorates, the whole family mobilizes around her, a doctor and a nurse are hired day and night and an oxygen tent is erected in her room.

In Canada, Caterina's family discusses the various options at hand: whether to take the grandmother to a nursing home, or to host her in their own house. Caterina feels it to be her duty as a daughter to take care of her mum – actually, her husband did the same for his ageing and dying father – a less common choice in North America, than elsewhere in the world:

> I didn't know any other family that had an older generation living with them. Old people lived either in "homes" or on their own, often on the other side of Canada or in a different country completely. (Edwards 2008: 156)

This concern is confirmed in sociological and historical studies that highlight how elderly people are taken care of within the family: “They gave up the older people to institutions only when they needed care beyond the capacity of the family” (Johnson, Thane 1988: 201). While Amitav Ghosh portrays a well-off household, who can provide medical care for the old grandmother in the house, night and day, Caterina Edwards writes about a widely shared experience:

> Throughout history women had combined the care of older people with both paid work and heavier domestic work, with larger families and less convenient homes. […] married women went to care for elderly relatives and keep them in the community, despite the demands of their immediate families and of paid work, as they always had. (Johnson, Thane 1998: 202)

Caterina Edwards illustrates very clearly the difficulties in dedicating herself to her mother, to her own family, a husband and two young daughters, and to her job, with psychological and even physical psychosomatic consequences for her and her family members.

> In Italy as in Canada, the extended family is in eclipse, and a growing percentage of mothers and fathers are being placed in nursing homes. Still, among Italians and Italian Canadians, the idea that you should take care of and be close to your aged parents persists. It is your duty to look after them as long as you can, particularly if you are a daughter. (Edwards 2008: 93)

As often happens, she has to renew her house, in order to be able to host her mother in a bedroom with *en-suite* bathroom. She has produced evidence of what it means to take care of an Alzheimer’s patient in the wake of what I would suggest is a new genre in Canadian Literature, that is Alzheimer’s narratives, such as Alice Munro’s famous short story *The Bear came over the Mountain* (Goldman 2017b, Concilio 2018) or Sarah Leavitt’s graphic novel *Tangles: A Story of Alzheimer’s, My Mother and Me*, among others, and, above all, the outstanding and exhaustive study by Canadian scholar Marlene Goldman, dedicated to the genre (2017a). Yet Caterina Edwards, like Ghosh, manages to move away from a simple chronicle of gerontology narrative on ageing and care giving, in order to create a much richer text, in what soon becomes a compelling historical novel.

Both Tha’mma and Rosa are bossy, proud and easily enraged, even, sometimes, violent women. They are both respected and feared. Tha’mma decrees who is worth welcoming and for how long, whose bad influence is to be avoided: “I don’t want to see you loafing about with Tridib; Tridib wastes his time” (1988, 4). Rosa storms into Caterina’s adult life as she used to do in her childhood: “Hurricane Rosa would blow into town three or four times a year and devastate me and Marco and our apartment” (2008, 6). They interfere with family matters, always imposing their strong will.

Care giving soon becomes necessary in both contexts for the two aged and ageing women. Yet, old age status is functional to a discourse about history, memory, wars, traumas and contested borders and in both works all these topics are skillfully interwoven.

3. Languages, Dialects and Contact Zone

Alzheimer's is a no-man's-land, a contact zone, where contacts ("synaptic loss," Goldman 2017a: 14) become less and less frequent, loose, vague, hardly reminisced, impossible. Both Tha'mma and Rosa cohabit in this borderless space. Tha'mma is not affected by Alzheimer's – at least the novel never claims so – but possibly from some insurgent form of impairment or dementia.

After losing interest in her whereabouts, after retirement, Tha'mma gets a new spark of life when she hears rumours from fellow immigrants from East Pakistan that one of her cousins lives not too far away, on the outskirts of Calcutta. She also discovers that her old paternal uncle, Jethamoshai, still lives in the old house in Dhaka, within a Muslim family of refugees from India, who had occupied it soon after the Partition, in 1947. The house is now – in the year 1962 of the narrative timeline – in East Pakistan, a country, under a different legislation and is inhabited by people speaking their own languages and belonging to a different religious faith. Tha'mma's reaction is one of horror: "Poor old man, my grandmother said, her voice trembling. Imagine what it must be like to die in another country, abandoned and alone in your old age" (Ghosh 1988: 166). This passage sounds ironic, for the old man is in his ancestral home, in his birth place, in the same country as ever. From that moment she becomes obsessed with the idea of having to rescue him and bringing him to India. She behaves consistently with her "fervent militant nationalism" (Malathi 2013: 303) and conservatism rather than out of love or affection for the old man.[3]

Yet, when the propitious moment comes, after her sister's family moves to Dhaka, to pay a visit to them and to her old uncle, she is frightened and confused, first of all for having to cross a border she had never experienced before in her life, for in the past it was easy to travel back and forth between Dhaka and Calcutta, both Indian cities. Her questions about the visibility of the border from the plane sound odd, considering that they are asked by a former teacher. She expects to see trenches, soldiers, guns, or at least strips of land that might correspond to her idea of "no-man's-land". When her son tries to reassure her, saying that she will not be able to see anything, apart from clouds or green land, she is even more confused and asks:

> And if there's no difference, both sides will be the same; it'll be just like it used to be before, when we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us. What was it all for then – Partition and all the killing and everything – if there isn't something in between? (Ghosh 1988: 186)

This passage has been commented upon by Malathi as follows:

> It is easy to see why her simplistic, yet logical mind is unable to understand that the border is like a mirror, a looking-glass border, where in one looks beyond to find self-reflections

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[3] "This feeling is not due to any family bondage or family feeling but is due to her feeling of nationalism." (Sharma 2015: 339).

> which mirror conflicts and riots for the sake of preserving a self an exercise that seems arbitrary and meaningless. (Malathi 2013: 305)

Her questions highlight the artificiality of borders. The absurdity of wars waged to conquer borders, defend borders or establish new borders is exposed here as an historical nonsense. More than anything else, these wars about and around borders determine the failure of existing multicultural realities, for “the cultural root of the divided nations goes back to one larger cultural whole of which they all were parts” (Panigrahi 2015: 67). The cohabitation of Hindus and Muslims that still persists after Partition – the evidence being that old Jethamoshai, a Hindu who happily lives within an adoptive Muslim family – has been erased by Partition and the creation of new national borders. “For, it is humans as multidimensional and intrinsically socially sensitive beings who make the place we live in, not the lines and dots drawn on maps” (Wilson, Donnan 2012: 413).

At the airport, Tha’mma has to write for custom officials that she was born in Dhaka, but she has Indian and not Pakistani nationality and citizenship, that she is coming home to a place that is now a foreign land: “she had not been able quite to understand how her place of birth had come to be so messily at odds with her nationality” (Ghosh 1988: 187). Tha’mma is part of a mass migration of people who have become “refugees in their own country” (Peeters 2008: 32).

A similar dilemma is presented in *Finding Rosa*. Rosa’s story starts with a mistake in the birth date on her passport. Confronted by her daughter’s outraged questions about her lies, Rosa answers that “The passport is wrong. […] Two world wars. […] Documents were destroyed. […] Tito wanted to obliterate the presence of Italians. Pretend they were never there. Archives were burned” (Edwards 2008: 33).

Caterina is sceptical, she was born in England and grew up in Canada – around 1963, when the Beatles became pop idols, so the novel’s timeline goes – now, she does neither believe nor understand how a passport may be wrong. Till the mid-nineties, when she heard on the radio a report from the war in Bosnia, where Serb soldiers shot, captured and drove out the Muslim and Croat inhabitants of a small village, then invaded the town hall and destroyed all signs that those people had ever lived there. They burned birth, marriage and death records. Years later, in a novel entitled *La Foiba Grande* (1992), Carlo Sgorlon describes a similar cleansing of people and registers in a village at the end of the Great War. But that, too, was fiction after all.

> The passport was as I remembered it. *Rosa Pia Edwards née Pagan, born August 30, 1910 in Lussingrande, Italy*. […] My mother was not born in Italy. In 1910, the island of Lussino was in Künstenland, a province of Austria. It wasn’t ruled by Italy until after the Treaty of Rapallo in 1920. So was it a typo? Had she actually been born in 1920 as she sometimes claimed? Impossible. Nor was Lussino in Italy when the passport was granted in 1989. (Edwards 2008: 34)

Rosa, too, like Tha’mma was born in a contested geographical area. She was born on one side of a border that disappeared in the turn of two World Wars. Thus, when Alzheimer’s came to claim her memory, that land was already lost in oblivion. Istria did not exist any more. The history of Istria is not so different from that of Partition:

> Former Istrians were not allowed to return for a holiday until 1970. […] The Titini (Tito's men) did not only, or even primarily, target former Fascists. According to the exiles I interviewed in Canada, there was no pattern […] The victims were either shot and cast into the *foibe*, the natural karst caves and bottomless ravines that dot the Istrian landscape, or thrown into the *foibe* alive, often manacled to a corpse, which is why the word *foibe* has come to stand for all the violence and suffering of that time in Istria. […] The exiles may have considered themselves Italian, and the Yugoslavs may have considered them Italian, but the Italian Government and the Italian people did not. They were not welcomed but spat upon and ostracized. (Edwards 2008: 55)

Istrians were forcedly removed to refugee camps in Italy, many of them migrated to Australia, Argentina, the United States and Canada. Caterina is the daughter of such an Istrian diasporic mother. Even though she visited Lussingrande once in 1953 and then in the 1970s for short summer holidays, she did not develop an interest in the place's history until her mother was affected by Alzheimer's and was no longer able to provide answers.

Tha'mma has difficulties in talking about going and coming, arriving and departing to and from Dhaka, to the point that in spite of being a school teacher she is teased by all the family members for her inability:

> I could come home to Dhaka whenever I wanted.
> I jumped to my feet, delighted at having caught her out – she, who'd been a schoolmistress for twenty-seven years. Tha'mma, Tha'mma! I cried, How could you have 'come' home to Dhaka? You don't know the difference between coming and going! […] You see, in our family we don't know whether we're coming or going – it's all my grandmother's fault." (Ghosh 1988: 188)

Both in English and in Bengali the two verbs are not interchangeable. Tha'mma's confusion is not only due to a history lesson that geography cannot learn ("What the novel *The Shadow Lines* truly challenges is the validity of geographical boundaries", Panigrahi 2015: 68), but also to language. It is due to the difference Homi Bhabha senses between languages *lived* and languages *learned* (2004: x):

> But, of course, the fault wasn't hers at all: it lay in language. Every language assumes a centrality, a fixed and settled point to go away from and come back to, and what my grandmother was looking for was a word for a journey which was not a coming or a going at all; a journey that was a search for precisely that fixed point which permits the proper use of verbs of movement (Ghosh 1988: 188).

Indeed, Tha'mma's inability in speech and her spatiotemporal confusion might be signs of insurgent senile dementia (Andrews 2017: 71-72). Thus, what is considered a joke and becomes a family pun and idiolect, might be an ageing-related symptom (Goldman 2017a: 14). Scholars in Border Studies

> writing of India's Partition claim that border making displaced old ways of belonging for everyone. These displacements need not be external or visible to the eye but may also be internal ones that reconstitute individual subjectivities. Scholars of displacement have

> documented how those who experience the creation and imposition of new borders frequently express an interior sense of displacement, the sense of being 'strangers in our own home' (Wilson, Donnan 2012: 394).

Caterina, too, when she stubbornly starts to research her mother's roots, travelling to Lussingrande (now Losinj) with her husband, off season, in order to retrace her mother's past, immediately falls back into her mother's dialect:

> He [Marco]'d point out that I was declining 'to be' or 'to have' incorrectly or that a word I was using did not exist. […] the first words that come to me, the grammatical constructions that feel right to me, are the ones I learned from my mother, before I began to speak English. I will fall into not broken Italian but correct Istro-Veneto. (Edwards 2008: 59)

Like Tha'mma, who never felt at home in Calcutta, Rosa, Caterina's mother, never felt at home, being a migrant all her life, unwelcome in Italy after leaving Istria, lonely when in England with her husband's family, a foreigner in West Canada. Still fluent in the Istro-Veneto dialect, she has never managed nor wanted to master English properly. Her daughter acts as translator with doctors and nurses who have to diagnose the insurgence of Alzheimer's disease. One of the most moving passages in the novel is a meeting between two elderly Istrian women in Edmonton Hospital. Caterina accompanies Rosa to a gerontology clinic, and while waiting, hears on the other side of the cubicle two women, another old mother and another middle-aged daughter speaking Slovenian, with the nurse's disapproval:

> "Your mother doesn't speak English?" A hint of disapproval in the tone.
> "She speaks Slovenian, Italian, and French." Aha, I thought, Istriani.
> […] They were indeed Istriani, from a village across the Slovenian border from Gorizia. They had left in the early fifties, during the time of the great migration. They'd travelled through several refugee camps, lived for over ten years in Belgium, and finally came to Canada.
> […] My mother is a *Lussignana*, I said. Didn't grow up there but went back a lot – summers.
> "Bring her in," the daughter said. "They'll talk."
> The two older women looked each other over. Mjriana spoke first. "I went to Lussino on vacation once." She used the Venetian dialect. Mum's face cleared; she connected, and they began chatting away. […] Mirjana took both her hands and began to sing: *Ancora un litro de quel bon* (Another liter of the good wine). Mum joined in on the repeating line. (Edwards 2008: 196)

Paradoxically, the two old women are there to be diagnosed in terms of their cognitive loss and impairment, but what they have lost is a borderless motherland, unmeasurable.

Istria was inhabited by a multicultural society: Italians, Austrians, Slovenians, Croatians, Rumanians, Hungarians lived in that contact zone, there were of course intermarriages, thus ethnic cleansing and separatism were quite hard to achieve. The luckiest managed to change their names, Italianizing or Slavicizing their surnames, according to the new rulers. Most people had to leave, particularly in the "Great exodus", after the Second World War, when Italian-Istrians were expropriated and expatriated. But some stayed there: "I Rimasti" they are called, or "emplaced", as opposed to those "displaced" (Wilson, Donnan 2012: 393).

Tha'mma, too, with her sister Mayadebi speaks their old Dhaka dialect, "the two sisters standing and talking together while holding each other's hands look as if there was a mirror between them" (Ghosh 1988: 43). Their past belongs to a different world and a different geography. Calcutta is no home. Most of the times Tha'mma sits looking out of the window, imagining her old abode in Dhaka.

Rosa's linguistic competence is even more complicated and her rejection of English more radical:

> if she had been at school in the early twenties, as she once claimed, she would have learned to speak proper Italian. […] But Mum only spoke a combination of Istro-Veneto and Venetian. (When I was growing up in Calgary, I remember a British friend of my father often suggested that Mum take a course in the English language. Mum rejected the very idea. And when a friend brought over a book of basic English grammar, Mum waited until the woman left, then threw it into the garbage. (Edwards 2008: 243)

All this brings Rosa to develop a very personal idiolect:

> *Lui combackerà* – she'd say. (He'll come back.) *Osbondo* (husband), *frendyboy* (boyfriend), *tereeble* (terrible). To explain that she'd been working hard, she'd say, *working come un mus* […] For Mum, words were an outlet, an expression of momentary impulses, of passing emotions. (Edwards 2008: 249).[4]

4. Going Back Home, Abroad

Going home is a wish and a symptom in Alzheimer's patients. Caterina knows that all too well: "I want to go home" (Edwards 2008: 316), her mother repeats incessantly. Which home? The one of her infancy in Lussino, Istria, or the various apartments she had moved in and out of in Canada?

> The repeated request to be taken home is considered a symptom of the second stage of Alzheimer's. It's connected to the loss of an essential body sense – that of direction, of orientation. […] Those suffering from Alzheimer's often wander. They do not 'get lost'. They are lost permanently. And since everything around them is unrecognizable, they search for a place of certainty and familiarity that they (and we) call home. (Edwards 2008: 318)

In 1964, Tha'mma eventually manages to travel back home, to Dhaka, together with Tridib and Robin, her grandchildren, and May, Tridib's English friend. As soon as she disembarks from the plane she starts asking “where is Dhaka”? She cannot recognize her own birth place. “She lives in the frozen past” (Malathi 2013: 304). She is as lost as ever. Both Rosa and Tha’mma are driven by “nostalgia, *le mal du pays*, exile, homesickness. *Unheimlich*: the opposite of belonging to the house or being at home” (Edwards 2008: 319).

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[4] "Working come un mus" means "working like a mule or a donkey". It is an interesting cultural shift from an Italian idiomatic sentence "lavorare come un mulo o come un asino" to an adaptation to Canadian, local fauna: the moose, although mispronounced.

> I can guess at the outlines of the image that lived in her mind, but I have no inkling at all of the sounds and smells she remembered. […] Perhaps, they consisted of some unique alchemical mixture of the sounds of the dialect and the smell of vast, milewide rivers, which alone had the power to bring upon her that comfortable lassitude which we call a sense of homecoming. […] I could see all that, because people like my grandmother, who have no home but in memory, learn to be very skilled in the art of recollection. (Ghosh 1988: 237-238)

Tha’mma had lived all her life inside her own mindscape, her own idiolect of smells, sounds, people and places. She had practised the art of memory, distancing herself from politics and history, to the point of becoming blind to history, to the new Pakistan. She quite consistently defends nationalism and justifies the need for national borders, yet her radicalization might well be a product of her confused mind in her old age: “she was *not* a fascist, she was only a modern middle-class woman”, claims her grandson (Ghosh 1988: 78, author’s emphasis). Perhaps, she is not only physically, but also mentally “dislocated” (Peeters 2008: 33).

In the days of the family “rescue”, on October 11, 1964 riots broke out both in Calcutta and in Dhaka, the spark that triggered the riots was the stolen relic of the Prophet at Srinagar in Kashmir, Muslims and Hindus were respectively assaulted in the two “mirror cities” on both sides of that artificial border between India and East Pakistan: “a land of looking glass events” (Ghosh 1988: 275). “Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely related to each other than it had been before, so that the narrator had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka” (Malathi 2013: 306).

The narrator thus summarises the quintessence of the subcontinent as *mise-en-abyme* of History’s larger influence, resorting once more to the mirror metaphor:

> It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the subcontinent from the rest of the world – not language, not food, not music – it is the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one’s image in the mirror. (Ghosh 1988: 250)

This is why the narrator makes a gesture that goes in the opposite direction to the drawing of borders as straight or continuous lines,[5] cutting across once united lands, according to a geopolitical logic in vindication of separatism and nationalism. He rejects drawing lines that should magically separate countries as if they were "shifting tectonic plates" and could all of a sudden float apart from each other (Ghosh 1988: 257). On the contrary, in a moment that recalls Marlow's display of maps in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, he draws big circles with a compass on his world atlas, so as to create new possible geopolitical spheres. Although not necessarily an attempt at abandoning "the Euclidean geometry of maps" (Wilson, Donnan 2012: 413), circles are encompassing, inclusive, they create a new perspective and new meanings in terms of proximity and distance (Chambers 2011: 19). They are idiosyncratic ways of mapping as well as anti-colonial gestures (Thieme 2012: 61). Casually, the pin of the compass falls on Milan and he draws a circle that moves from Scandinavia to Turkey to the Middle East. What could separate those countries? The answer is "None, that is, other than war" (Ghosh 1988: 285).

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[5] “The fascinating cartographic experiment performed by the narrator towards the last part of the text adds further insights to the general notion of the futileness of boundaries between different nations in South East Asia” (Panigrahi 2015: 67).

And Milan and a war brings us straight to Istria, for "in Europe, too, the borders between nations are shadowy, unable to monopolize the social relations between the people on either side" (Peeters 2008: 36). "The Italian Nationalists and the Istrians exiles organized alternative ceremonies commemorating the victims of the 'Foibe massacres' and denouncing the Italo-Yugolslav Peace Treaty of 1947, which gave most of Istria to Yugoslavia" (Ballinger 2003: 97-101; Wastl Walter 2016: 80).

As the Partition of India and Pakistan starts in 1947 and provokes a second wave of recrudescence between 1965 and 1971, until the creation of the state of Bangladesh in the place of East Pakistan, Istria's history is characterized by subsequent waves of violent expulsions and shifting borders. In 1915, during World War I, Istrians were deported to Italy, under Austrian orders, to a refugee camp in Sicily. This is what happened to Rosa's family when she was five years old: "The Italian citizens of Losinj had been sent back to Italy and had ended up in a camp in Caltagirone, near Catania" (Edwards 2008: 216). A witness who joined the Istrianet blog and chat – kept alive by diasporic Istrians from all over the world – explains that history reproduced itself as if in a mirror: "In Istria, one historical event often echoes another – with slight variations" (Edwards 2008: 216).

> Our house had been full of everything. When we came back from the camp, there was nothing left. They took everything but the walls."
> And then after World War II, again everything was seized. "The Yugoslav soldiers took our savings, our gold coins. This time they took the walls, too. (Edwards 2008: 215)

> The Italians viewed the annexation of the Alto Adige and Istria as a culmination of the unification of the nation that began in 1860. […] Italian troops were in Istria, including Lussino, at the end of the war, but the territory was not ceded to Italy until the signing of the Treaty of Rapallo by Italy and Yugoslavia in November 1920. (Edwards 2008: 220)

Istria then fell under fascist rule. Croatians and Slovenian Istrians lost their schools, jobs and institutions. Yet, Istria was a very complex reality, a proof that borders are blurred and hybrid places: although politicians and ideologues speak of Istria as being either Italian or Croatian, historically the region has also been home to people who identified themselves as Austrians, Romanians, or Serbs.

> "Many declared themselves Italian one day, Slavic the next, according to the benefits accorded them," Petacco writes in *A Tragedy Revealed*. Under the Austrians, it was better to be Croatian or Slovenian; under the Italians in 1941, a greater percentage declared themselves Italian. Sometimes the shifts in ethnicity are mysterious. The population of Veli Losinj did not change much between 1900 and 1910, increasing by 50 to 1,992. Yet, in 1900, 60 percent of the inhabitants (or 1,174 inhabitants) claimed to be Croatian, and 24 percent (or 473) Italian, whereas in 1910, only 36 percent said Croatian and 43 percent Italian. (Edwards 1988: 263)

As the previous quotation shows, in Istria happened exactly what the old uncle in Ghosh's novel is predicting. Jethamoshai does neither need nor want to be rescued. He has survived Partition as a Hindu hosting Muslims in his own house so that they might take care of him in his old age. When faced by his parents wanting to bring him to India, he shouts hysterically:

> I don't believe in this India-Shindia. It's all very well, you're going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here, and I'll die here. (Ghosh 1988: 264)

Jethamoshai was born in India, and died – in fact, he was slaughtered together with Tridib and his own rickshaw driver by a riotous mob – in East Pakistan, in the same city, yet abroad, in the 1964 riots. Not differently, Istrians had to flee, went into exile, leaving behind all their properties. Their presence had been erased from cemeteries, from registers and official papers, and they had to choose alternative ethnic belonging for mere survival:

> I see this fluidity of identity not simply as opportunistic but as reflective of the multicultural and multiethnic nature of families in the old Istria. If you had an Austrian father and an Italian mother, did you have to choose one ethnicity over the other? Was identity necessarily singular? (Edwards 2008: 263)

Indeed, Ghosh's novel involves a similar attitude and message, borders are porous: "The novel by giving the illusionary nature of lines and boundaries, demonstrates the cordial relationship among people across international borders" (Sharma 2015: 340).

4. Conclusions: Silence, History, Memory

Thirty years after the publication of *The Shadow Lines*, the novel acquires new resonance and strength particularly if read face to face with Caterina Edwards's *Finding Rosa*. Both works are strategically relevant in times of Covid-19 for they enact "an endeavor to bridge the rift between bordering generations" (Eleftheriou 2019: 178).

Both works start as reports of ageing and care-giving, for the protagonists are two aged women on the verge of losing their mind because of dementia or Alzheimer's. They are taken care of within an extended family, with all the practical difficulties involved in such cases. But soon both texts turn into historical novels or (post)memory novels (Eleftheriou 2019: 177), born out of silenced traumatic facts:

> Every word I write about those events of 1964 is the product of a struggle with silence. It is a struggle I am destined to lose – have already lost – for even after all these years I do not know where within me, in which corner of my world, this silence lies. […] It is a gap, a hole, an emptiness in which there are no words. […] So complete is this silence that it actually took me fifteen years to discover that there was a connection between my nightmare bus ride back from school and the events that befell Tridib and the others in Dhaka. (Ghosh 1988: 267-268)

It took Caterina years to reconstruct the history of Istria and of her own mother's family. Ghosh's younger protagonist has to start a research in the college library to look for the Calcutta newspapers reporting news of the 1964 riots. Caterina has to pursue a longer and strenuous research in Church and Municipal archives, interrogating the Internet and a few diasporic witnesses, over eight years and many journeys to Italy to interview relatives and friends, the so-called *Rimasti*.

> Why such a long silence? As if those intertwined events, the *foibe* and the exodus from Istria, had never happened, as if any acknowledgement, any discussion, were taboo. A half century of silence. […] But why the silence in Yugoslavia and, more significantly, in Italy, where everything is debated? (Edwards 2008: 282)

Most of all, both narrators are mobilized by silence and oblivion, by the mystery and the shame that surround those traumatic historical events.

> The massacres – revenge killings committed by the Yugoslav Partisans, when they entered the region in 1945 and targeted against fascist collaborators, political enemies, and 'unwanted elements' – were not a subject of public debate for decades (Wastl-Walter 2016: 81).

The result of all that is the defeat, failure, and burial of multiculturalism. In India, too, Ghosh urges us to "renarrate national modernity as marked by the failure of state institutions and by the persistence of transnational memory and modes of community" (Kumar 2016: 132). Thus, both works are attempts to restore a "lost library," for as the Arab proverb says "The death of an old man or woman is the destruction of a library."

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SIGNIFICANT GEOGRAPHIES IN *THE SHADOW LINES*[*]

Francesca ORSINI

ABSTRACT • Approaches to world literature often think through binaries of local/global, major/minor, provincial/cosmopolitan, taking them as given positions on a single world map. To an extent, this is true of Amitav Ghosh's prize-winning essay "The testimony of my grandfather's bookcase" (1998), which reflects on his grandfather's collection of world literature books to think about the relationship between his grandfather's provincial location in Calcutta and the world. Yet in *The Shadow Lines* Ghosh takes a much more complex and interesting approach to space, the world, perception and narration. In the novel's complex narration, space, time, and self always appeared mirrored through other people, times, and spaces. Places also acquire reality and meaning only after they are first narrated and imagined, often several times, and *before* they are experienced directly. This is a stance that has deep existential but also epistemological implications that go beyond "simply" critiquing colonial and national border-making. This essay explores how (and which) spaces become "significant" in the novel, and how the novel's approach to space can be productive for thinking about world literature.

KEYWORDS • The Shadow Lines; World Literature; Literary Geographies.

1. Location

In his 1998 essay "The Testimony of my Grandfather's Bookcase" (1998), Amitav Ghosh reminisces on his grandfather's (and later uncle's) impressive library in Calcutta, a monumental collection of mostly non-English writers that strikes Ghosh as somewhat incongruent with its location and its owner. Apart from modern Bengali classics (Bankim Chandra, Sarat Chandra, Tagore, Bibhuti Bhushan, Bonophul and Syed Mustafa Ali),

> The rest were in English. But of these only a small proportion consisted of books that had been originally written in English. The others were translations from a number of other languages, most of them European: Russian had pride of place, followed by French, Italian,

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[*] This article is an output of the Multilingual Locals and Significant Geographies project which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 670876.

> German and Danish. The great masterpieces of the 19th century were dutifully represented: the novels of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Turgenev, of Victor Hugo, Flaubert, Stendhal, Maupassant and others. But these were the dustiest books of all, placed on shelves that were lofty but remote. (Ghosh 1998: no page number)

The prominently displayed books "were an *oddly disparate lot* – or so they seem today", he continues. Beside modernist classics like James Joyce, or William Faulkner "that can still be seen on bookshelves everywhere", many others like Marie Corelli, Grazia Deledda or Knut Hamsun "have long since been forgotten":

> Other names from those shelves have become, in this age of resurgent capitalism, symbols of a certain kind of embarrassment or unease – the social realists for example. But on my uncle's shelves they stood tall and proud, Russians and Americans alike: **Maxim Gorky, Mikhail Sholokov, John Steinbeck, Upton Sinclair**. There were many others too, whose places next to each other seem hard to account for at first glance: **Sienkiewicz** (of *Quo Vadis*), **Maurice Maeterlinck, Bergson**. Recently, looking through the mildewed remnants of those shelves I came upon what must have been the last addition to that collection. It was **Ivo Andric**'s *Bridge on the Drina*, published in the sixties. (Ghosh 1998, emphases added)[1]

That most of the twentieth-century foreign non-Anglophone authors are Nobel prize winners suggests to Ghosh that the globalisation of literature is an older phenomenon than we usually assume, dating from the early '900s and not the 1990s. But it also reflects the provincial asymmetry and dependence of knowledge typical of the colonial subject, who learns about modern Italian and Swedish writers while Italian or Swedish readers remain likely ignorant about contemporary Indian writers (save of course Rabindranath Tagore).[2] The essay goes on to contrast the monumentality of world literature on the bookshelf with his uncle's inconsequential life. This uncle never travelled and his broad-ranging library appears like a form of vicarious travel, a provincial's dream of membership in the world republic of letters from a peripheral location. (In the end, he even stops reading and switches to watching popular Hindi films with equal, but now unseemly, passion.)

I begin with this essay and Ghosh's puzzlement because they resonate with understandings of space and location – and particularly of "peripheral" location – that are common to approaches to world literature (Casanova 2004, WRAC 2015). As I have argued elsewhere (Orsini 2015), such objectivist approaches posit a single world map with well-defined centres and peripheries that are viewed from an apparently neutral bird's eye perspective, and imagine literary influence governed by laws that dictate that the peripheral local must be "dominated" by metropolitan trends. But is this what the eclectic display of grandfather and uncle's library shows?

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[1] Ghosh offers many interesting observations on which books did not qualify as worthy of being placed on his uncle's bookcase ("Textbooks and schoolbooks were never allowed; nor were books of a technical or professional nature") and on the social and symbolic importance of books in marriage negotiations and other social "performances" (part of what Leah Price calls "non-reading"). The books worthy of display included mostly novels, and "a few works of anthropology and psychology" that "had in some way filtered into the literary consciousness of the time" like *The Golden Bough*, the *Collected Works of Sigmund Freud*, Marx and Engels' *Manifesto*, Havelock Ellis or Malinowski; www.amitavghosh.com/essays/bookcase.html [accessed on 8 July 2020].

Before I return to this question at the end of the essay, let me just note that such objectivist understanding of space could not be more different from that of *The Shadow Lines*, in which space is deeply conditioned by time and self, and gaze is always located. In the complex narration of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, space, time, and self are always mirrored, reflected or refracted through others "as through a looking glass":[3]

> So, as we stood outside on the pavement, I tried to recall for [Ila] how Tridib had told us that Alan Tresawsen, Mrs Price's brother, had worked here before the war, in the Left Book Club; that it must have been here, perhaps even in that office which we had just entered, for the Club had been a part of Victor Gollancz's publishing house…
>
> Ila looked at the window, with mild interest, shrugged, and said: Looks like any old musty old office now, doesn't it?
>
> To me it didn't, for having seen it first through Tridib's eyes, its past seemed concurrent with its present. (SL: 36)

The protagonist learns to live through Tridib and through him establishes relationships to other people. Self-knowledge and self-discovery involve a recursive process of anamnesis in which the subject must revisit and piece together stories and fragments of memories that connect and collapse disparate places and times. This is an argument about individual consciousness. But it also a postcolonial argument about the persistent consequences of colonialism in individual and collective consciousness and national histories: in India in the shape of Anglophilia as a provincial mentality, but also as the *divide et impera* policies that led to the multiple Partitions of Bengal and underpinned communal faultlines.[4] In England these consequences take the shape of post-imperial amnesia, guilt, and/or nostalgia. The intertwined histories of Tridib's and the Tresawsen-Price families form a kind of extended "(post)colonial family saga" illuminating and connecting different aspects of this relationship – from the interracial friendship of Lionel Tresawsen and Tridib's grandfather, both judges at the Calcutta High Court, to May Price's guilt, the protagonist's obsession with the Prices and Nick Price's amnesia.

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[2] I discuss this asymmetry of knowledge and the ignorance about contemporary literature in early-twentieth century Europe, despite the work of Orientalists and the movement of books, in "Present Absence" (2020); for discussions of Western (and Asian) literatures in Indian periodicals around the same time, see my "World Literature, Indian Views" (2019).

[3] All page references are to Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* (London: BlackSwan Books, 1989). I thank Alessandro Vescovi for inviting me to the *Shadow Lines* conference and for his comments on this essay.

[4] See Chambers (2011).

But, as we shall see, the Calcutta-London axis, though the most obvious, is not the only axis in the novel. At a more general level, this and Ghosh's subsequent novels make the case that *any* process of learning and discovery – of the world and of the self in the world – requires an investment of the imagination beyond the familiar. It involves reckoning with one's position, realising that distance and closeness are relative and subjective, remembering forgotten histories, actively looking for resonances and connections, and – particularly in his climate novels – (re)orienting one's entire life.[5] As such, *The Shadow Lines* lays out what we may call Ghosh's poetic of space.[6] It provides a wonderful example of what I and my colleagues have called "significant geographies". We offer this term, in the plural, as alternative to singular terms like "world" and "global" at work in world literature (Laachir, Marzagora, Orsini 2018). Unlike neo-positivist systemic approaches to world literature that posit the operation of a single world literary system, "significant geographies" foregrounds subjectivity and positionality. It underlines how "the world" is not a given but is produced by embodied and located actors, for whom the world is constituted by *particular* geographies and trajectories.[7] Significant (as in "significant others") directs us to those geographies, trajectories and spatial imaginaries that *recur and/or matter* to actors and texts. "Recur" acknowledges the fact that this is not a free play of signifiers but that specific positions and imaginaries persist, while "and/or matter" stresses the imaginary possibilities of reinvention and reorientation that literary texts offer. In this essay, I explore how "significant geographies" animate *The Shadow Lines*, and how the novel's dynamic, located, and layered understanding of the world and the self ricochets on Ghosh's own take on his grandfather/uncle's bookshelf.

2. Learning to See

For the narrator in *The Shadow Lines*, places acquire reality and meaning only after they are narrated by others and imagined by him, often several times, *before* they are experienced directly:

> Tridib had given me worlds to travel in and had given me eyes to see them; [Ila], who had been travelling around the world since she was a child, could never understand what those hours in Tridib's room had meant for me, a boy who had never been more than a few hundred miles from Calcutta. I used to listen to her talking […] about the cafés in the Plaza Mayor in Madrid, or the crispness of the air in Cuzco, and I could see that those names, which were to me a set of magical talismans because Tridib had pointed them out to me on his tattered old Bartholomew's Atlas, had for her a familiarity no less dull than the lake had for me and my friends. (SL: 26)

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[5] *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *Gun Island* (2019).

[6] Long recognized by scholarship on Ghosh, e.g. Chowdhary (2002).

[7] Along similar lines, Sartori and Moyn in their preface to *Global Intellectual History,* propose that "global" be treated "as a native or actor's category—a concept that belongs to the archive and is itself the object of investigation, rather than as a meta-analytical category belonging to the investigator" (17).

Familiarity dulls the mind, while curious ignorance excites it and transforms toponyms into “magical talismans”. We could zoom in on the “tattered old Bartholomew’s Atlas” as a “colonial geography lesson” that inducted generations of imperial children into a single and standardised cartographic image of the globe (Ramaswamy).[8] But to me, in this and other similar passages, it is Tridib’s narrative and the protagonist’s own imaginative investment that matter. In fact, whether Tridib is or is not a reliable narrator, as the passage about his dealings with the people at Gole Park shows just before this quote, is of no consequence. What matters is that he is a good, effective and inspiring narrator. He can conjure places and the histories and stories that are connected to them, making these places alive and meaningful to the listener.

Part of the narrator’s remarkable knowledge of places that he has never been to – particularly in London – is definitely cartographic.[9] He has pored over the A to Z street atlas of London that his father brought him until he knows the Prices’ area, “page 43, square 2, by heart” (SL: 63), and he can unerringly lead Ila and Nick Price to the family house on 44 Lymington Road without ever having been there.[10] But the climax of his display comes when he can describe the inner topography of the house thanks to Tridib's stories, stopping only at the limits of Tridib's experience and telling.[11] In fact, the narrator knows more about the topography of Nick Price's family house than Nick himself, and he can find and describe the house in Brick Lane where Nick's uncle Alan and his doomed group of Communist friends lived before the friends were killed by a German bomb.[12] The more literal Nick can only see the current appearance of the building: "His face lengthened in fastidious disbelief as he examined its crumbling masonry and the signboard of the Taj Agency on the ground floor" (SL: 104).

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[8] “In 1826, John Bartholomew set up business as a map engraver in Edinburgh and soon gained an international reputation for innovative cartography, high quality copper plate engraving and printing. The Times Publishing Co Ltd thus contracted Bartholomew to prepare a major, new, home produced, world atlas which became The Times Survey Atlas & Gazetteer of the World (1922). This was the beginning of the long running association between Bartholomew and the Times. A series of universally acclaimed atlases followed, including The Times Handy Atlas (1935), The Times Atlas of the World, Mid-Century Edition (1955-59), The Times Comprehensive Atlas of the World (1967), The Times Atlas of the Moon (1969) and The Times Concise Atlas of the World (1972)”; http://www.timesatlas.com/Heritage/Pages/Home.aspx [accessed 2 July 2020].

[9] See Anjaria (2008); Mongia (2014) interestingly contrasts the use of cartography in Ghosh and Conrad.

[10] “And then I began to show off.
When we came out of the tube station I stopped them and pointed down the road. Since this is West End Lane, I said, that must be Sumatra Road over there. So that corner must be where the air-shelter was… And that house there, that one, just down the road, over there, on the corner of Lymington Road, I know what it’s called: it’s called Lymington Mansions.
[…]
Nick Price inclined his head at me, in polite incredulity. […] Now would you like to have a go at finding your way to 44 Lymington Road?
I could try, I said.
Go ahead then.
It was easy enough on the A to Z street atlas of London that my father had brought me. I knew page 43, square 2, by heart: Lymington Road ought to have been right across the road from where we were. But now that we had reached the place I knew best, I was suddenly uncertain…
But still, as far as I could tell that was where Lymington Road should have been, so I pointed to it and asked whether that was it.
Yes! said Nick. Good boy: got it the first time” (62, 63).

To the other characters, and to Ila in particular, this ability appears pathetic and reflects the tendency of the narrator – typical of a provincial subject – to live life an *Ersatz* life, vicariously through Tridib. By contrast, the narrator observes, Ila lives "intensely in the present". Yet we can read this pervasive stance not only as a subjective characteristic (Thieme 2016), or a narrative strategy that prompts long and detailed descriptions which jump or slide, proleptically as well as analeptically, across time. We can also view it as a deeper existential and epistemological argument about the process by which spaces, events, and people become significant and (hence) real and close. As the narrator puts it to Ila:

> I could not persuade her that *a place does not merely exist, that it has to be invented in one's imagination*; that her practical, bustling London was no less invented than mine, neither more or less true, only very far apart. (SL: 27, emphasis added)

Places have to be "storied" in order to become real. Yet while it "invents" places, the imagination itself is – in this novel, and one could say in Ghosh's whole *oeuvre* – nurtured by prolonged research and attentive observation. Research and a dispassionate desire to know become embodied knowledge; once distilled in one's precise imagination, this embodied knowledge produces vivid stories: "The sights Tridib saw in his imagination", the narrator recalls, "were infinitely more detailed, more precise than anything I would ever see":

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[11] "then Nick, smiling, asked me if I could find my way around the house as I had through the streets.
I had to think a bit to orient myself. I turned to face the door and said: Correct me if I'm wrong, but if I go out of this door and turn right and keep walking straight for a few paces, that would take me to the kitchen, wouldn't it? And if I were to turn right before I reached the kitchen, wouldn't I come upon a flight of stairs that would lead me to the cellar if I were to go down there?
It was my turn to laugh now, at their astonished faces.
It's incredible, Ila sighed, shaking her head. How does he do it?" (73) When he "fails" to re-cognize one side of the house, it's because Tridib had never gone there and never described it to him.

[12] "That's when your uncle lived here! I said. Your uncle Alan.
My uncle? [Nick] said in surprise. Did he live here?
Yes, I said. I'll show you where he lived. […]
Eventually I found the street sign I had been looking for.
There, I said to Nick, pointing triumphantly at the house on the corner. That's where your uncle Alan lived at the beginning of the war" (104).

> He said to me once that *one could never know anything except through desire*; a pure, real desire… that *carried one beyond the limits of one's mind to other times and other places*, and even, if one was lucky, to a place where there was no border between oneself and one's image in the mirror. (35, emphases added)

In this sense, imagination is no phantasising but rather, literally, archaeology, an excavation into historical layers and recovery of buried knowledges, as Foucault (1972) would put it:

> I tried telling Ila and Robi about the archaeological Tridib, the Tridib who was much more contemptuous of fairylands than she would ever be; the Tridib who pushed me to imagine the roofs of Colombo for myself, the Tridib who said that *we could not see without inventing what we saw, so at least we could try and do it properly*. (37, emphasis added)

A few pages earlier, after Ila's mother had described their garden in Colombo and narrated her (hilarious) encounter with a giant monitor lizard and Ila's adventure with a snake and the monitor lizard, Tridib had asked the narrator: "Did you notice that Ila's house had a sloping roof?" (SL: 34). The narrator had puzzled over the question and begun to imagine the sloping roofs of Colombo for himself as precisely as possible, "and soon I felt that I too could see how much more interesting they were than the snake and the lizard" (SL: 35). Unlike the hilarious or dramatic stories of the lizard and the snake, the ordinary roofs require a dispassionate desire to know and imagine them.

This is as much a general argument about perception – that we can never perceive things "directly", without previous mediation – as about learning to see and experience things through the imagination. But it is also an argument about the correlation between "imaginative investment" and the quality and significance of things or events: once things are experienced intensely and precisely in the imagination, they become "permanently available" in one's memory (SL: 35), unlike even intense experiences in real life that are not distilled in the same way.

3. Position as Self-Discovery

Position and location clearly matter a great deal in the novel. The narrator's position as an ordinary middle-class boy in black-and-white, import-substitution era Calcutta, who lives in a "small, puritanical world" (SL: 29) and whose family "never went anywhere" (SL: 38), has a lot to do with this intense investment in the imagination. He savours the "daydream names" of the places Ila travels to – Addis Ababa, Algiers, Brisbane (SL: 26) – in her Technicolor world, or the foreign names of her classmates (SL: 28). His obsession with Ila's family's foreign postings and with recalling – though Tridib – the Tresawsen-Price family in London "in its finest hour" (SL: 57) mark him as a provincial local boy and a postcolonial subject. Looking "up the smoggy night sky above Gole Park", he wonders "how the stars looked in London" (SL: 57/Ibid.), and once in London he at first delights in riding the Underground again and again (SL: 27).

But position – in this and even more so in other Ghosh's novel – is not just a datum, a point on a map, it is a positionality, the discovery of how your context, race, class, caste, gender, history, etc., condense into a *habitus,* a set of bodily and mental dispositions (Bourdieu 1990) that produces your particular, selective, and unselfconscious view of society and of the world. This discovery of one's own positionality is also that of the ("significant") relations that this condensed history entails. In *The Shadow Lines,* as many commentators have pointed out, positionality entails the discovery of the entwined history of Britain and India, of just how close and entangled the relationship between Britain and India remains, and how that close but unequal relationship affects personal friendships and relations in many different ways. There are also indications of Ghosh's future interest in the positionality of Indians, and particularly Bengalis, in upholding the British empire elsewhere in the world: Lionel Tresawsen's imperial career as an overseer in Malaysia, Fiji, Bolivia, the Guinea Coast, and Ceylon (SL: 56) is mirrored to a point by that of the narrator's own grandfather who worked as a civil engineer in Burma.

Position entails discovery also in the sense of Foucault's archaeology of knowledge, which in this novel takes the shape of gradually excavating the silenced history of the narrator's indomitable grandmother: her youth in Dhaka, the house and brother that were left behind, and the riot which wrecks his family and telescopes (in a spatio-temporal trick) in 1964 with the violence of Partition in 1947. So not only does the imagination need to be directed and focused, it hovers and condenses around places and events that particularly matter to an individual or a group. Here the novel pits the silence and euphemisms of families about past traumas and the forgetfulness of news against the individual's desire to know and imagine, and fiction's duty to excavate and narrate traumatic events and histories. By comparison, in *In an Antique Land* (1992) position entails the discovery of the narrator's own commonsensical prejudices (in the unforgettable clash with the Egyptian Imam, 1992: 234-236) but also the excavation of the historical connections between India and Egypt that colonial and areas studies frameworks have erased. If ethnography brings the narrator face to face with his own positionality, a painstakingly precise historical imagination – through the Geniza fragments about the Egyptian merchants Khalaf ibn Iṣḥaq and Ben Yijû and the Indian Slave of MS H.6 – allows him (and us) to recover and imagine a more expansive and entangled history, the hallmark of Ghosh's fiction.

4. Connections, Resonances and "Looking-Glass Events"

If the argument about space and the self so far has been about positionality and "learning to see" through imaginative investment, resonance is the third element at work in the novel's narrative construction. Events and places become "significant" and impose themselves upon the imagination not directly or through a single encounter, but rather refracted through other events – "looking glass events" (SL: 225). The riot that kills Tridib in Dhaka in 1964 (still part of East Pakistan) is finally narrated towards the end of the novel, years later, through his younger brother Robi's *dream* (SL: 244), and further completed by May's story (SL: 250). It resonates powerfully with the narrator's own memory of a different riot taking place in Calcutta at the same time, though it takes him fifteen years to pierce the family silence about what they euphemistically call the 'trouble' (SL: 219) and realise that the two events were in fact not just coeval but connected.[13] Both were connected with the unrest following the theft of the sacred relic of Prophet Muhammad's hair from a shrine in Kashmir. The intense description of the riot in the novel itself refracts two of Ghosh's own experiences: of the anti-Sikh pogrom in Delhi in 1984, which allegedly gave him the idea for writing *The Shadow Lines*, and of the January 1964 riot in Dhaka when a number of Hindu refugees sought shelter in his garden and a mob besieged the diplomatic mansion.[14] This realisation and the pivotal role of his grandmother, for whom the national border between India and East Pakistan does not exist, have prompted others, like John Thieme (2016), to offer a postcolonial reading of the novel in terms of its "clear indictment of political map-making" (SL: 30). But here I am interested in following a different line of enquiry about subjective imaginative investment in "significant geographies".

Imaginative investment in significant geographies works not just for individuals but also for groups or communities. Their ideological and affective investments acknowledge the reality of nations and borders but also transgress them. In what is for him a startling insight and provides another key scene/passage in the novel, the narrator discovers that the terrible riot in Dhaka that wrecked his family's entire life barely registered with his friends in Delhi:

> Suddenly, for no reason that I can remember, I said: What about the riots […]?
> Which riots? said Malik. There are so many.
> Those riots, I said. I had to count the years out on my fingers. The riots of 1964, I said.
> Their faces went slowly blank, and they turned to look at each other.
> What were the riots of 1964? Malik said with a puzzled frown. I could tell that he really had no idea what I was talking about.
> I turned to the others and cried: Don't you remember?
> They looked away in embarrassment, shaking their heads. It struck me then that they were all Delhi people; that I was the only person there who had grown up in Calcutta.
> Surely you remember, I said. There were terrible riots in Calcutta in 1964.
> I see, said Malik. What happened?
> I opened my mouth to answer and found I had nothing to say. All I could have told them about was of the sound of voices running past the walls of my school, and of a glimpse of a mob in Park Circus. The silent terror that surrounded my memory of those events, and my belief in their importance, seemed laughably out of proportion to those trivial recollections.
> There was a riot, I said helplessly.
> There are riots all the time, Malik said.
> This was a terrible riot, I said.

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[13] He writes: "I was a child, and … I believed in the reality of space; I believed that distance separates, that it is a corporeal substance; I believed in the reality of nations and borders; I believed that across the borders there existed another reality" (219); see also

[14] "The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi" (originally published in *The New Yorker*, July 1995, and now available at https://www.amitavghosh.com/essays/ghost.html); *In an Antique Land* (205).

> All riots are terrible, Malik said. But it must have been a local thing. Terrible or not, it's hardly comparable to a war. (SL: 221-222)[15]

In the novel, this prompts a meditation on memory and history: History with a capital "H", the history of wars and political events, against "local" history that matters only to the individuals involved. Everybody in the group remembers the border war with China in 1962, a national event, whereas riots in which members of one religious community take it out against another are local events not "comparable to a war" even when they reverberate across national borders. The narrator remains incredulous: "But don't you remember? I said. Didn't you read about it or hear about it? After all, the war with China didn't happen on your doorstep, but you remember that. Surely you remember – you must remember?" (SL: 222). Even the old Calcutta paper that he consults in the archive ("the date now branded in my memory – 4 January 1964") reports about the local riot but "there was not the slightest reference to it to any trouble in East Pakistan, and the barest mention to events in Kashmir. It was, after all, a Calcutta paper, run by people who believed in the power of distance no less than I did" (SL: 228).

The discovery, then, is that even in the case of public events, emotional and imaginative investment are necessary for them to register and become "significant". Closeness and distance are imagined and subjective. Even groups and nations experience places as relatively close when they are significant to them, however geographically distant they may be. The shock of the missing hair of the Prophet in Srinagar reverberates immediately in Karachi and Dhaka, and its recovery prompts riots in Khulna, Dhaka and Calcutta irrespective of the "real" distance and of borders ("a land outside space, an expanse without distances; a land of looking-glass events", SL: 225).

This realisation prompts the narrator to undertake an experiment with a compass that pits "objective", cartographic distance against common sense and the orientation to the world honed by *habitus*. "Khulna [in East Pakistan] is not quite one hundred miles from Calcutta as the crow flies: the two cities face each other at a watchful equidistance across the border" – and yet the riot in Khulna did not register in the Calcutta newspaper. That Muslims in Khulna should react to an event in Srinagar does not strike him as strange since "the space between the points of my compass was 1200 miles, nearly 2000 kilometres. It didn't seem like much". But it is the same distance "as Tokyo is from Beijing, or Moscow from Venice, or Washington from Havana, or Cairo from Naples" (SL: 232) – cities that in his mind are not only very far but belong to completely different worlds. This point about the macro-geography of the world is true also on the micro-level of urban geography: at times a location in Calcutta – like the tenement during a family visit – feels as far from the novel's vantage points of Gole Park and Ballygunge as Calcutta is from

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[15] Ila makes a similar comment: "Well of course there are famines and riots and disasters, she said. But those are local things, after all – not like revolutions or anti-fascist wars, nothing that sets a political example to the world, nothing that's really remembered" (SL: 107).

Pyong Yang. By contrast, Lymington Road is mentioned together with Stockwell and Brick Lane, which are quite far "in real life".[16]

Going back to the experiment with the map and compass, the narrator then shifts from linear distance to area of purview. He draws a "circle with Khulna at the centre and Srinagar on the circumference. I discovered immediately that the map of South Asia would not be big enough. I had to turn back to a map of Asia before I found one large enough for my circle."

> It was an amazing circle.
> Beginning in Srinagar and travelling anti-clockwise, it cut through the Pakistani half of Punjab, through the tip of Rajasthan and the edge of Sind, through the Rann of Kutch, and across the Arabian Sea, through the southernmost toe of the Indian Peninsula, through Kandy, in Sri Lanka, and out into the Indian Ocean until it emerged to touch upon the northernmost finger of Sumatra, then straight through the tail of Thailand into the Gulf, to come out again in Thailand, running a little north of Phnom Penh, into the hills of Laos, past Hué in Vietnam, dipping into the Gulf of Tonking, then swinging up again through the Chinese province of Yunnan, past Chungking, across the Yangtze Kiang, passing within sight of the Great Wall of China, through Inner Mongolia and Sinkiang, until with a final leap over the Karakoram Mountains it dropped again into the valley of Kashmir.
> It was a remarkable circle: more than half of mankind must have fallen within it. (SL: 232)

Fifteen years after his death, Tridib "watche[s] over" him as he tries to "learn the meaning of distance" (SL: 232). Tridib's atlas shows him that "the tidy ordering of Euclidean space" has little to do with world geography as actually experienced or learnt as part of one's *habitus*:

> Chiang Mai in Thailand was much nearer Calcutta than Delhi is; that Chengdu in China is nearer than Srinagar is. Yet *I had never heard of those places until I drew my circle*, and *I cannot remember a time when I was so young that I had not heard* of Delhi or Srinagar. It showed me that Hanoi and Chungking are nearer Khulna than Srinagar, and yet *did the people of Khulna care at all* about the fate of the mosques in Vietnam and South China (a mere stone's throw away)? I doubted it. But in this other direction, it took no more than a week… (SL: 232-233, emphases added)

This "perplexing" realisation leads to a further experiment, which confirms the contrast between "significant geographies" and the cartographic world of "states, and no people at all" and adds a note about scale:

> In perplexity I turned back through the pages of the atlas at random, shut my eyes, and let the point of my compass fall on the page. It fell on Milan, in northern Italy. Adjusting my compass to the right scale I drew a circle which had Milan as its centre and 1200 miles as its radius.

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[16] I thank Alessandro Vescovi for this point.

> This was another amazing circle. It passed through Helsinki in Finland, Sundsvall in Sweden, Mold in Norway, above the Shetland Islands, and then through a great empty stretch of the Atlantic Ocean until it came to Casablanca. Then it travelled into the Algerian Sahara, through Libya, into Egypt, up through the Mediterranean, where it touched on Crete and Rhodes before going into Turkey, then on through the Black Sea, into the USSR, through Crimea, the Ukraine, Byelorussia and Estonia, back to Helsinki.
> Puzzling over this circle, I tried a little experiment. With my limited knowledge, I tried to imagine an event, any event, that might occur in a city near the periphery of that circle (or, indeed, much nearer) – Stockholm, Dublin, Casablanca, Alexandria, Istanbul, Kiev, any city in any direction at all – I tried to imagine an event that might happen in any of those places which would bring the people of Milan pouring out into the streets. I tried hard but I could think of none.
> None, that is, other than war.
> It seemed to me, then, that within this circle there were only states and citizens; there were no people at all. (SL: 233-234)

We may read this passage in several different ways. We may read it as a critique of the arbitrariness of national borders and a critique of nationalism that dictates that we should feel attachment and belonging to a particular territory and not care at all about what befalls others. Arbitrariness can also be read as a rationalist critique of nationalist, religious or any other attachment the leads to such violent reactions irrespective of closeness or distance. But we can also read this experiment as a call to "reorient" our "spatial attachments" so as to incorporate more and different places – people in Milan should care as much about Casablanca, Alexandria and Kiev as they do about Rome, Paris, or London. Or we may read it as a reflection on how things are: Chiang Mai *may be* nearer to Calcutta than Delhi is, or Chengdu nearer than Srinagar, but it does not *feel* that way, and that is, according to the narrator, a "more real" level of reality than the map. Either way, the passage shows how emotional and narrative investment is what makes places real and significant, and it does so always for particular, located subjects. It's a very different – located, oriented, subjective, creative – understanding of the map and the atlas from the "objective" use of cartography to support global, systemic models of world literature.[17]

5. Other Significant Geographies

The idea of "significant geographies" in the plural as opposed to "one-world thinking" owes a lot to the late geographer Doreen Massey's notion of space as "the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist", "from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny" (2005: 9). Her proposition that space is always "the product of interrelations" and is "constituted through interactions" comes close to the vision of *The Shadow Lines*, in which every space – whether in Calcutta or in London – is "the product of interrelations", and every story is pieced together by multiple narrators across several interactions.

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[17] As I have argued elsewhere (Orsini 2015), this kind of "one-world thinking" employs a primarily cartographic understanding of space and of the world that, among other things, yokes geocriticism to scientific-cartographic advancements and to linear historical narratives of modernity (and postmodernity) and to scientific-cartographic advancements (Westphal 2011, Ramachandran 2018).

But there is another point to be made. Although the axes of Calcutta-London (West Hampstead, Islington, Brick Lane, and Fulham) and Calcutta-Dhaka loom largest in *The Shadow Lines* and in the reader's memory and index the two inter-related histories of colonial entanglement and of the "long partition" of Bengal, there are other geographies that briefly surface and hint at other histories and other entanglements, some of which Ghosh would take up in later novels. As already mentioned, there is Lionel Tresawsen's imperial career as an overseer in Malaysia, Fiji, Bolivia, the Guinea Coast, and Ceylon (SL: 56), mirrored in a minor way by the narrator's grandfather who worked as a civil engineer in Burma (SL: 137). Then there is the post-colonial diplomatic geography of (mostly) Non-Aligned postings of Tridib's diplomat father, the Shaheb: Colombo, Algiers, Indonesia, Addis Ababa, Conakry (Guinea, 46), and Dhaka (150); and the geography of World Bank economic interventions of Ila's economist father Jatin (Tanzania/Dar as Salaam, 157). These geographies speak to the geopolitical and economic alignments of post-independence India and its leading role in the Non-Aligned movement and decolonisation, which is also a history of economic ties and new opportunities, as signaled by the short but telling anecdote about the narrator's father's trip to Conakry connected to his "rather sudden professional success" (SL: 46).[18] In his other novels Ghosh would go on to unearth the Bengalis' involvement in imperial trade and imperial wars (Burma in *The Glass Palace*, China and the coolie colony Mauritius in the *Ibis* Trilogy), as well as the closer transnational history and geography of the Ganges Delta (*The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*), to great effect and acclaim. But already in this novel, I would argue, we can begin to see that the world is not one map with centres and peripheries but is crisscrossed by multiple trajectories and layers of "significant geographies."

In the *Shadow Lines*, the wider world is neither just the postcolonial metropolis nor the bland cosmopolitanism of non-places (the international schools and airport lounges in the passage about Ila) or of the narrator's atlas daydreams. It is unearthed, imagined, produced, evoked, and narrated by located subjects through recursive acts that make particular geographies significant as they unmask and unmake established cartographies and query the relative weight of events and memories.

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[18] The Shaheb, who diplomatically adjusts his conversation to the level he believes his interlocutor occupies, "had his own promotion scheme for the world, and my father had not risen very far within it. So, in the beginning, his conversations with my father were oddly disjointed" till one evening, when "a series of long and very detailed questions about the government's export policy" made his father realise that the Shahe had placed him at "the rank of First Secretary (Commercial)" (46-47).

6. Conclusions

How can we bring to bear the novel's understanding of space as intensely and precisely imagined, subjective, located, and relational – and of the world as made of crisscrossing stories and trajectories (Massey) that matter only when they become "significant"– upon Ghosh's essay on his grandfather's bookcase?

If we morph the uncle/grandfather into Tridib of the *Shadow Lines*, the books in the bookcase appear less like single shelf of world literature and more like overlapping significant literary geographies. Interestingly, English education and its canonisation of English literature as the pinnacle of taste and a model to imitate is not prominent here – as we would imagine from a postcolonial perspective. Rather, what the bookshelf shows is that from the early twentieth century English became the *medium* to reach out to richer and "better" literatures like the Russian or the French, while it was popular English writers like Marie Corelli that were widely read and appreciated (Joshi 2002). What the bookcase also shows is the emerging notion of world literature anointed by the Nobel prize, whose winners figure prominently on the bookshelf up to Ivo Andrič, who won the Nobel prize in 1961. (By contrast, the growing interest in East Asian and literatures evidenced by the prominent Calcutta journal *Modern Review* is absent from the bookshelf, perhaps limited to the pages of the journal?) Another layer of world literature is represented by the "significant geography" of the Leftist canon that includes Maxim Gorky, Mikhail Sholokhov and Upton Sinclair. In this world of overlapping gazes and trajectories, there is no one centre to which Calcutta is only a periphery.

Economists Gibson & Graham (2002) note that one of the effects of the current globalisation discourse is that it makes local actors in "peripheral" places appear *and feel* disempowered by globalisation. Part of their work has been to make these local actors value themselves as agents of alternative economies (they call it a process of "re-cognition" and "re-subjectification"). The current discourse of world literature as a global literary system with clear centres and peripheries, winners and losers, does something similar to readers and writers in "peripheral" locations or "minor" languages. Obviously Ghosh, who writes in English, is immediately translated into many languages and has a wide/global and discerning readership, is not one of them, or is a "winner" of this literary globalisation. But it seems to me that shades of this understanding of "core" and "periphery" colour his reflections and puzzlement at his uncle/grandfather's wide-ranging bookcase of world literatures.

By contrast, *The Shadow Lines* offers a rich spatial epistemology that questions straightforward cartographic distance and instead suggests that closeness and distance are relative to one's imaginative and emotional investment. However distant or unlikely they may be, places, become significant *and* real only after you've listened to stories about them, you imagine them intensely and precisely, and you invest them with meaning. This produces a very different subjectivity for the grandfather/uncle, who, if he read so widely, appears no less worldly because he was not widely travelled. It also prompts us to re-assess his grandfather/uncle's "peripheral" position vis-à-vis world literature and to excavate a more layered and diverse reading of his library – of world literature, and of the world.

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THE BENGALI *BHADRALOK* AS WORLD-TRAVELLER IN *THE SHADOW LINES*

Sumit RAY

ABSTRACT • Bengalis love travelling. The Bengali *bhadralok*, a product of the interaction between the colonisers and the Bengali middle class, by his earlier exposure to Western education, developed a cartographic imagination that has taken him on real and imagined journeys to places far and wide across the globe. The Bengali psyche has always been caught in the dialectic of the home (*ghare*) and the desire for distant places (*baire*). Tagore, perhaps the most iconic *bhadralok* figure, always spoke about thinking beyond the boundaries imposed by nationalism. It is no wonder then that Bengali fiction, another colonial influence, abounds in accounts of adventures to the remotest corners of the world. Amitav Ghosh, whose father's occupation as a diplomat and grandfather's huge collection of novels ensured that he was bitten by the travel bug quite early in life, represents the Bengali *bhadralok* as an apostle of the syncretism between the East and the West. His writings, novels included, have always been invested with travel, and *The Shadow Lines* is no exception. While the title points towards the curious nature of borders/boundaries, it also expresses the desire to transcend those boundaries through the metaphor of travelling. Tridib, the protagonist, belongs to the class of the Bengali *bhadralok* and embodies the spirit of the world-traveller with his encyclopaedic knowledge and romanticised descriptions of faraway places. For him, distance is a challenge that can be conquered by imagination and desire. As he travels the world, he not only engages in cross-cultural encounters but also brings the coordinates of time and space together.

KEYWORDS • Bengali; *Bhadralok*; Travel; World-Traveller.

I sigh
To cross the vast Atlantic wave
For glory or a nameless grave!
Michael Madhusudan Dutt, *Kidderpore*, 1841

Keatsian as they may sound, the lines by Michael Madhusudan Dutt quoted in the epigraph express the intense desire of the poet to transcend the geographical and perhaps political borders that are forced on us. It hardly needs articulating that Dutt is a prominent representative of the Bengali *bhadralok* – the genteel Bengali class that emerged from the influence of colonial education in the 19th century, initially in Bengal and then the rest of the subcontinent.

By the beginning of the 19th century, Hindu society in Bengal and the Indian subcontinent had sunk into the dark abyss of old beliefs and superstitious practices. Social evils like child marriage, *sati* (burning of Hindu widows), polygamy, untouchability, illiteracy and ignorance had become the norm. It was Raja Rammohan Roy, widely known as the founder of the Brahmo Samaj, who played a pivotal role in the introduction of Western (read English) education in important institutions of learning in Calcutta, then the chief centre of the East India Company in India. He fought hard against the inhuman ritual of *sati*, which finally led to its abolition in 1829. Rammohan Roy was ably supported by his associates, David Hare and Dwarkanath Tagore, in bringing reforms in the areas of education and upliftment of women in Bengal in the first half of the 19th century. Later, towards the middle of the 19th century, Pandit Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar became a powerful voice in Bengal's cultural and social life as he fought against child marriage and polygamy, and was the moving force behind the legalisation of widow-marriage.

For these very reasons, the 19th century is considered as the period of renaissance in Bengal. Buddhadeva Bose calls it "if not a Renaissance with a capital R, certainly a renascence of the spirit, a release of creative forces which had long remained stagnant… What happened in religious and social matters was a series of important reforms; in literature it was virtually a revolution." (1964: 49) The latter part of the 19th century saw the emergence of modern genres like novel, autobiography, diary and travelogue. Some of the travelogues written during this period were *Travels of a Hindu* by Bholanath Chandra, *Bharat Bhraman* by Baradakanta Sengupta, *Pather Katha* by Fakir Chand Chattopadhyay, and *Palamau* by Sanjib Chandra Chattopadhyay. One cannot deny the fact that a major reason for this reawakening and literary revolution was the proliferation of Western, especially English, education. The exposure to Western literary texts opened up a whole new world for the Bengali mind and imagination. Dipesh Chakraborty has stressed on the importance of the literary in the formation of modern Bengali identity:

> Sometime in the nineteenth century, in the mist of times that for the *bhadralok* have been partly historical and partly fabulous, things happened in British Bengal that made books and literature central to modern Bengali identity. (Chakraborty 2004: 655)

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and advent of steamships in passenger transport fuelled the desire to travel to farther lands, if not in actuality but at least in the imagination. It must however be added that the Bengali *bhadralok*'s idea of the outer world was mostly a mimesis of what was written in the school textbooks. Bhaskar Mukhopadhyay says,

> our tourists had internalized not just histories and geographies written by Europeans (which formed part of the school curriculum in British Bengal), but also, much of contemporary Anglo-Saxon writing on travel. In many cases, descriptions of scape, monuments, and people are so similar that the inescapable conclusion that many of our travelogues were simply citations. (Mukhopadhyay 2002: 300)

However, very soon some important nationalist thinkers such as R. C. Dutt, Tagore, and Vivekananda, who travelled widely abroad came up with a brand of nationalism that did not mimic European nationalism. Partha Chatterjee calls it "anticolonial nationalism," an attitude that created its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society "by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains – the material and the spiritual" (Chatterjee 1993: 6). While the "material outside" relates to economy, statecraft and technological advancement, in which the west was undeniably superior, the "spiritual inside" bears the "essential" marks of cultural identity that needed to be protected from the siege of Western materialism. Thus started the project of fashioning a 'modern' but non-Western self. Since then, the Bengali psyche has been caught in the dialectic of the home (*ghare*) and the foreign (*baire*). The Bengali intellectual recognised the fact that the global standards of progress were set by an alien culture, Western Europe to be specific, and any blind imitation of those standards would lead to a loss of one's own distinctive identity. They wanted to strike the right balance between the foreign idea of progress and home-grown ancient culture. As Partha Chatterjee says, "The search therefore was for a regeneration of the national culture, adapted to the requirements of progress, but retaining at the same time its distinctiveness" (*Nationalist Thought*: 2).

In an article on Amitav Ghosh's fiction, Makarand Paranjape calls it the "crisis of the bhadrasamaj" (2012: 357) in the private and public domain. Calling Ghosh a literary and cultural descendant of two iconic figures of Bangla culture – Rabindranath Tagore and Satyajit Ray – Paranjape says that instead of taking on this "crisis" head-on, Ghosh tends to be evasive. He argues that Ghosh's preoccupation with foreign lands in the form of diasporic flights in his fiction and much of his non-fiction writings is actually a result of his disappointment with the grand narrative of the nation that was built by the *bhadralok* during the freedom struggle and now seemed to have been shattered by the 1984 Sikh riots that Ghosh witnessed as a young man. I have a different view on this. I believe that, like Tagore and Ray, Ghosh also has a holistic worldview in which the East and the West can syncretise, because as he writes in *The Imam and the Indian* "in the circuitry of the imagination, connections are of greater importance than disjunctions" (2010: ix). His works reveal a cosmopolitan sensibility that is rooted in a homely soil. According to Shameem Black,

> Ghosh's work teaches us to understand the home and the world as collaborative rather than competing realities and this concern for home enables a contemporary cosmopolitanism that critiques masculinist and imperialist visions of world citizenship. (Black 2006: 46)

Contrary to general perception that the home and world are mutually exclusive, Ghosh's fiction shows them to be mutually constitutive. It's through spaces of domesticity and relationships that cosmopolitan visions emerge.

I also believe that a major factor behind this worldview of Ghosh is his own extensive travelling around the world. Travel, whether real or imaginative, has always been an important trope in Ghosh's fiction. Nivedita Sen writes:

> Travelling [is] not just between two geographical locations with two points in history, but is the ability to shift from experience to experience, both in terms of time and space – imaginatively erasing the "shadow lines" between two people's experience in disparate geographical contexts and at discrete historical junctions. (Sen 2002: 131)

Travelling does not necessarily have to be a physical journey; it could be a vicarious experience too through stories, transcending the borders of time and space, between real and imaginary experience.

While Ghosh's novels can hardly be called autobiographical, his delving into the worlds of history, sociology and anthropology, as he travelled the world, definitely informs his fictional work. Patterns begin to emerge as he travels between cultures/lands that diasporas straddle. As Brinda Bose says,

> Ghosh's imagination is as necessarily diasporic as it is postcolonial, being a product of specific histories of the subcontinent in the 20th century. He explores the identity of the so-called world-traveller in his fiction. (Bose 2003: 16)

Even Robert Dixon, taking a cue from James Clifford, stresses on the importance of travel in Ghosh's fiction: "The characters in Ghosh's novels do not occupy discrete cultures, but 'dwell in travel' in cultural spaces that flow across borders – the 'shadow lines' drawn around modern nation-states" (Dixon 1996: 4). What we are talking about here is the porosity of cultures as people cross borders due to forced or voluntary migrations. As Renato Rosaldo says, "In contrast with the classic view, which posits culture as a self-contained whole made up of coherent patterns, culture can arguably be conceived as a more porous array of intersections where distinct processes cross from within and beyond its borders" (Rosaldo 1989: 20).

Ghosh is not doing something that is unusual for the Bengali *bhadralok* class. He has inherited a cartographic imagination that is characteristic of Bengali sensibility. It enables the well-read Bengali mind to conjure up places through the imagination. But of course, that imagination has to be used with precision. As Meenakshi Mukherjee writes:

> Cartographic imagination has characterised an aspect of Bengali sensibility in ways that have yet to be analysed. Whether as a result of a relatively early exposure to colonial education or as a reaction to it, real journeys within the country and imagined travels to faraway places outside national boundaries have always fascinated the Bengali middle class. (Mukherjee 2005: 257)

Besides the abundance of Bengali children's literature about African forests, Arab deserts and glaciers, she gives the examples of Bibhutibhusan Banerjee or Jibanananda Das in adult literature who had never crossed the borders of India yet wrote of the groves of cinnamon in equatorial forests and the prairies across vast continents. It comes as no surprise then that Ghosh, whose diplomat parents' postings in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Iran, as well as his own academic interests, took him to various parts of the world, and whose grandfather's bookshelf contained many of the modern Bengali novels alongside world-famous authors, should invest his writing and characters with a similar cartographic imagination.

Tridib, in the *The Shadow Lines*, continues the narrative tradition that has given us characters like Ghana da in Premendra Mitra's stories, Sidhu Jaetha in the Feluda stories or even the world-travelling uncle in Satyajit Ray's last film *Agantuk*. Like Ghosh himself, Tridib was also "happiest in that book-lined room of his, right at the top of their old family house." (SL: 20) He may not have travelled physically to all parts of the world, but "when he was in the mood and somebody happened to say something that made a breach in his vast reservoirs of abstruse information, he would begin to hold forth on all kinds of subjects – Mesopotamian stellae (sic?), East European jazz, the habits of arboreal apes, the plays of Garcia Lorca, there seemed to be no end to the things he could talk about" (SL: 9). Or those times when he would tell the narrator and his cousin Ila "about the behavioural differences between the Elapidae and Viperidae families of snakes, or the design of the temples at Karnak, or the origins of the catamaran." (SL: 21)

The narrator, who models himself on Tridib's world-traveller spirit, acknowledges that "Tridib had given [him] worlds to travel in and he had given [him] eyes to see with them" (SL: 22). So, when he finally does go to England, he can correctly locate the Prices' house in London like a modern GPS. He finds a kindred soul in Nick because like him Nick wanted to follow his grandfather Lionel Tresawsen in travelling around the world. Padmini Mongia writes:

> Ghosh's narrator traverses borders with ease and reinvents himself with all the liberating energy implied by the postcolonial – a condition that allows for and acknowledges dissonance rather than coherence… For the narrator cultural differences can be collectively contained to create not a fragmented self but a self that belongs to many places. (Mongia 1992: 226)

Despite all this, the narrator admits:

> And still, I knew that the sights Tridib saw in his imagination were infinitely more detailed, more precise than anything I would ever see. He said to me once that one could never know anything except through desire, real desire, which was not the torment of the flesh, that carried one beyond the limits of one's mind to other times and other places, and even, if one was lucky, to a place where there was no border between oneself and one's image in the mirror. (SL: 32)

Ghosh admits in an interview that while writing the novel, his idea was to collapse space. Isn't it interesting how distance can make the confining borders of space getting blurrier and blurrier as one travels away from a place? No wonder, Thamma cannot see any defining lines as borders from the flight above. So, although the two parts of the novel are entitled "Going Away" and "Coming Home", once the characters start travelling from one place to another it becomes difficult to ascertain who is going away and who is coming home. Rather than the binaries, the dialectic of "Home" and "Abroad", the life force of the Bengali world-traveller, remains alive.

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QUASI TRENT'ANNI DOPO LA TRADUZIONE DI *THE SHADOW LINES*

Univ. Milano, 12.11.2018 – Univ. Torino, 13.11.2018

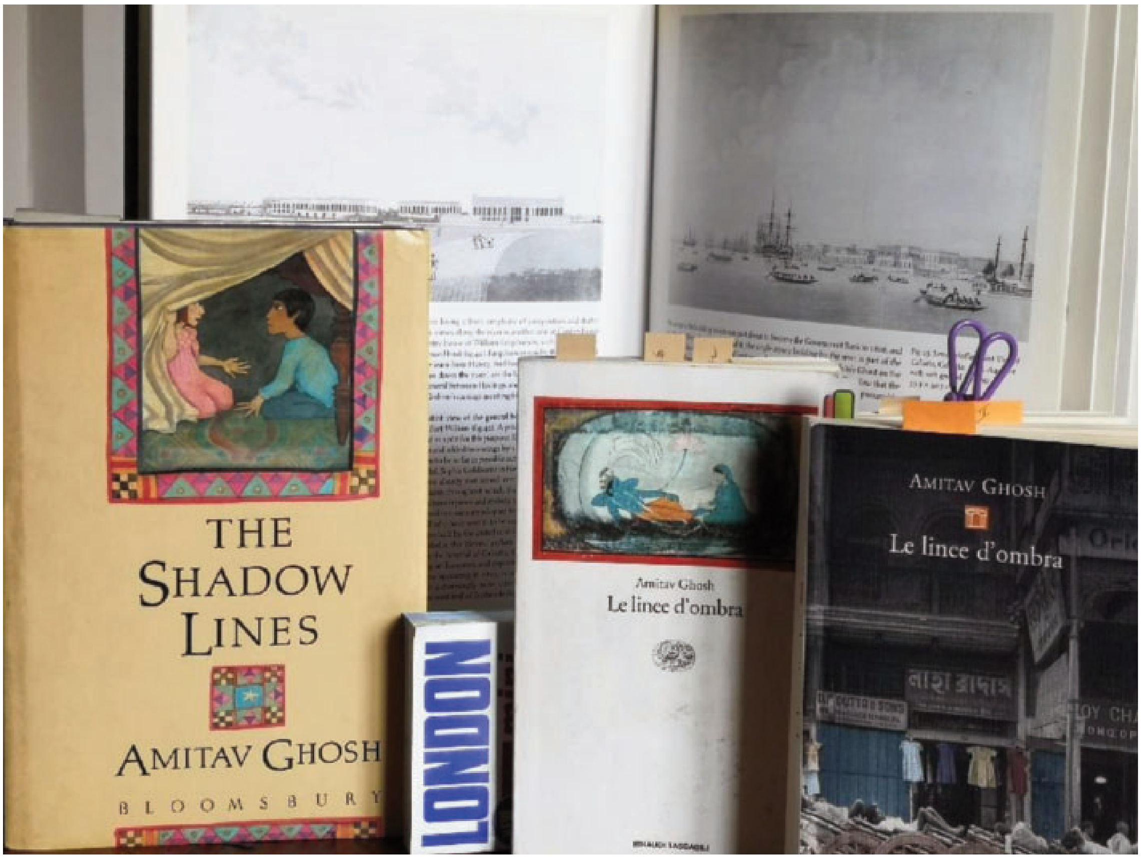
Anna NADOTTI

ABSTRACT • Almost thirty years went by since my translation into Italian of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*. Followed by the translation of all his novels and essays, up to the *Ibis Trilogy* and *The Great Derangement*. Thousands of pages. Reading and translating them a considerable part of my life.
«As though it were a film running through my head in slow motion», writes Amitav talking of memories in the book. Looking back, I feel as if all his books were films I've been watching and watching again, in order to give them in the Italian translation exactly the same texture, the same colours and sounds. I'll try to convey this experience, showing how, as a translator, I entered such a corpus of narratives and got inside dozen characters, inside real and imagined worlds, and a multiplicity of languages. A great experience and, I should say, a never-ending journey side by side with the author, who never failed to help, or discuss and share. Till his unexpected and uncommon choice of learning my language, giving to this Italian linkister, or maybe gomusta, a new task and a very unusual pleasure.

KEYWORDS • Translation; Film; Languages.

Almost thirty years went by since my translation into Italian of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*. Followed by the translation of all his novels and essays, up to the *Ibis Trilogy* and *The Great Derangement*. Thousands of pages. Reading and translating them a considerable part of my life.

"As though it were a film running through my head in slow motion", writes Amitav talking of memories in the book. Looking back, I feel as if all his books were films I've been watching and watching again, in order to give them in the Italian translation exactly the same texture, the same colours and sounds. I'll try to convey this experience, showing how, as a translator, I entered such a corpus of narratives and got inside dozen characters, inside real and imagined worlds, and a multiplicity of languages. A great experience and, I should say, a never-ending journey side by side with the author, who never failed to help, or discuss and share. Till his unexpected and uncommon choice of learning my language, giving to this Italian linkister, or maybe gomusta, a new task and a very unusual pleasure.



Let alone his first novel, *The Circle of Reason* (1986, 2002), I've actually translated and edited all of Ghosh's novels and essays, from *The Shadow Lines* to his recent essay, *The Great Derangement*, going through the *Ibis Trilogy*, an almost impossible task I happily tackled four hands with Norman Gobetti. And I'm now reading the manuscript of his new novel, *The Gun Island.*

While accepting Carmen Concilio's and Alessandro Vescovi's invitation, I wondered about the language I'd use for my speech, now for my essay: his language… he has so many languages, or mine? A big dilemma over which I've been seriously mulling, finally opting for the second solution, first because I've been invited to this International Conference as Amitav Ghosh's translator, second because, as Kanai, one of the heroes in *The Hungry Tide*, I think that "there [are] times when a translator's bluff had to be called" (Ghosh 2004: 321), penso che ci siano "momenti in cui un traduttore dev'essere chiamato a far vedere le carte" (Ghosh 2005: 375).

And like Kanai, "I shall be glad if my imperfections render me visible", "sarò lieta che le mie imperfezioni mi rendano visibile" (Ghosh 2004: 354, trad. 2005: 375). So here I am, with my language and his stories in their new frame – as Antonia S. Byatt says of novels in translation.

Proprio per far vedere le carte, ho deciso di iniziare da un mio errore, o forse fu solo un'imprecisione interpretativa. Quale che sia, al momento della riedizione per i tipi di Neri Pozza, ho corretto. Nel mio mestiere, per fortuna, la possibilità di sbagliare va di pari

passo con quella di correggersi, dipende da quanto tempo si è disposti a sostare sulle pagine, tra le righe e sui margini di un libro, in questo caso un corpus di opere che è cresciuto e maturato mantenendo una straordinaria coerenza tematica (Cfr. Nadotti 2013).

Nella prima edizione delle *Linee d'ombra* (Einaudi 1990), traducevo così i titoli delle due parti di cui il libro si compone:

Going away: Partenza
Coming home: Ritorno

Vent'anni dopo, nel 2010, rivedendo la mia traduzione per la nuova edizione Neri Pozza, ho deciso di modificare così:

Going away: Andare
Coming home: Tornare

Da quel sostantivo quantomeno inesatto sono passata alla forma verbale, ho reso il gerundio dell'originale con un infinito presente. Una correzione tanto più necessaria, trattandosi di verbi di moto.

Il sostantivo dava l'idea di un'azione conclusa, finita. La forma verbale sottolinea invece l'azione in corso, un'azione che continua e potenzialmente si ripete. E proprio la ripetizione rende possibile la memoria, l'atto del ricordare, quel *recalling, remembering*, che è la sostanza stessa del romanzo.

Fin dall'inizio della sua carriera di scrittore, Ghosh ha tematizzato l'andare/venire, il partire/tornare, facendo dei verbi di moto un filo conduttore che attraversa e unisce tutte le sue narrazioni, fiction e reportage, nonché la sua vita. Nei suoi libri tutto si muove: si muovono le persone e le cose, si spostano i confini, si moltiplicano e modificano le lingue, si raddoppiano gli sguardi generando quegli andirivieni e quegli inganni della memoria che producono visioni diverse di una medesima storia, o la cancellano.[1]

Ragione in più per sottolineare oggi quell'antico errore e la successiva correzione. Frutto anche di uno sguardo, il mio, che mutava in un mondo mutante. Le migrazioni e le rovine essendo ormai all'ordine del giorno.

In questi trent'anni abbiamo letto molti, e spesso notevoli, romanzi di autori e autrici del subcontinente e di altri paesi che furono parte degli imperi coloniali europei, ma in nessuno, a mio avviso, il confine assume la stessa evidenza chirurgica che ha nelle *Linee d'ombra*. Definitivo anche quando nella realtà non appare, visibile solo sull'atlante,[2] il confine qui si configura nettamente come il prodotto arbitrario della decolonizzazione, una cicatrice che segna il territorio ma soprattutto altera la percezione di sé e il lessico famigliare che la esprime.

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[1] Si vedano *The Imam and the Indian*, in «Granta» n. 20, 1986. Ora in *Incendiary Circumstances*, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005, pp. 291-292; trad. it. «L'imam e l'indiano», in *Circostanze incendiarie*, Neri Pozza, 2006, pp. 357-58: «Facce filippine, facce indiane, facce egiziane, facce pakistane, un mondo intero di facce […]». Il *Cerchio della ragione*, Einaudi, 2002, dove un gruppo di migranti dal Sudest asiatico e dal Medio oriente vivono in un immaginario sceiccato del Golfo. La trilogia della *Ibis*, attraversata dalla goletta carica di girmityia diretti a Mauritius.

[2] «It isn't geography that counts, but how meaning maps have been overlapped to the territory. All the maps are flat, but not all flatness is a map», notava Sanjay Chaturvedy, docente e coordinatore del Centro Studi di geopolitica dell'Università di Chandigarh durante il «Seminario

> "Vede, nella nostra famiglia non sappiamo se veniamo o andiamo; è tutta colpa di mia nonna… Ma naturalmente l'errore non era suo, è nella lingua. Ogni lingua assume un proprio centro, un punto fermo e preciso dal quale andarsene e al quale ritornare". (Ghosh 1988: 150)

Un punto fermo, oggi? Come?

Anche le lingue sembrano perdere i loro punti fermi, e non per via di fb o twitter, ma perché sempre più spesso ci si deve misurare con l'indicibile. Ogni volta che rileggo le semiultime pagine delle *Linee d'ombra*, là dove il narratore ci racconta infine come morì Tridib, ripenso ad alcune righe dei *Saggi* di Montaigne, quando Cambise chiede a Psammenito perché pianga per la morte di un amico avendo lui stoicamente sopportato la morte del figlio e la deportazione della figlia. E Psammenito risponde: «È perché solo quest'ultimo dispiacere si può manifestare con le lacrime, i primi due oltrepassando di gran lunga ogni possibile mezzo di espressione» (Montaigne 2012: 10).

"Non ho parole," – dice il narratore dopo aver letto il ritaglio di giornale in cui si parla dei disordini del gennaio 1964 a Dacca, di cui Tridib era stato vittima – "e non ho la forza di ascoltare".

Ogni mezzo di espressione negato.

In realtà Ghosh da più di trent'anni cerca le parole per dire anche ciò che appare indicibile. E io credo che sia una delle ragioni della sua ricerca linguistica, del suo scavare nelle potenzialità delle lingue e del suo sommare le lingue. Racconta spostamenti e migrazioni attraverso lingue vive e lingue che lui mantiene vive, ora riscoprendole, come nella trilogia della *Ibis* accade con la lingua dei lascari, ora offrendo ospitalità nelle sue pagine a lingue ibride come lo «zubben, la sfavillante lingua d'Oriente»,[3] o lingue ancora balbettate, come l'inglese della francese Paulette.

Del resto la computer Ava, coprotagonista di *Cromosoma Calcutta* (2008), nel suo ruolo di inarrestabile vomitatrice di lingue e dialetti anticipava la Babele linguistica della *Ibis* e più in generale di un mondo in movimento. Nel quale l'autore si ritrova a registrare un lessico e dei suoni apparentemente inauditi, in luoghi inaspettati.

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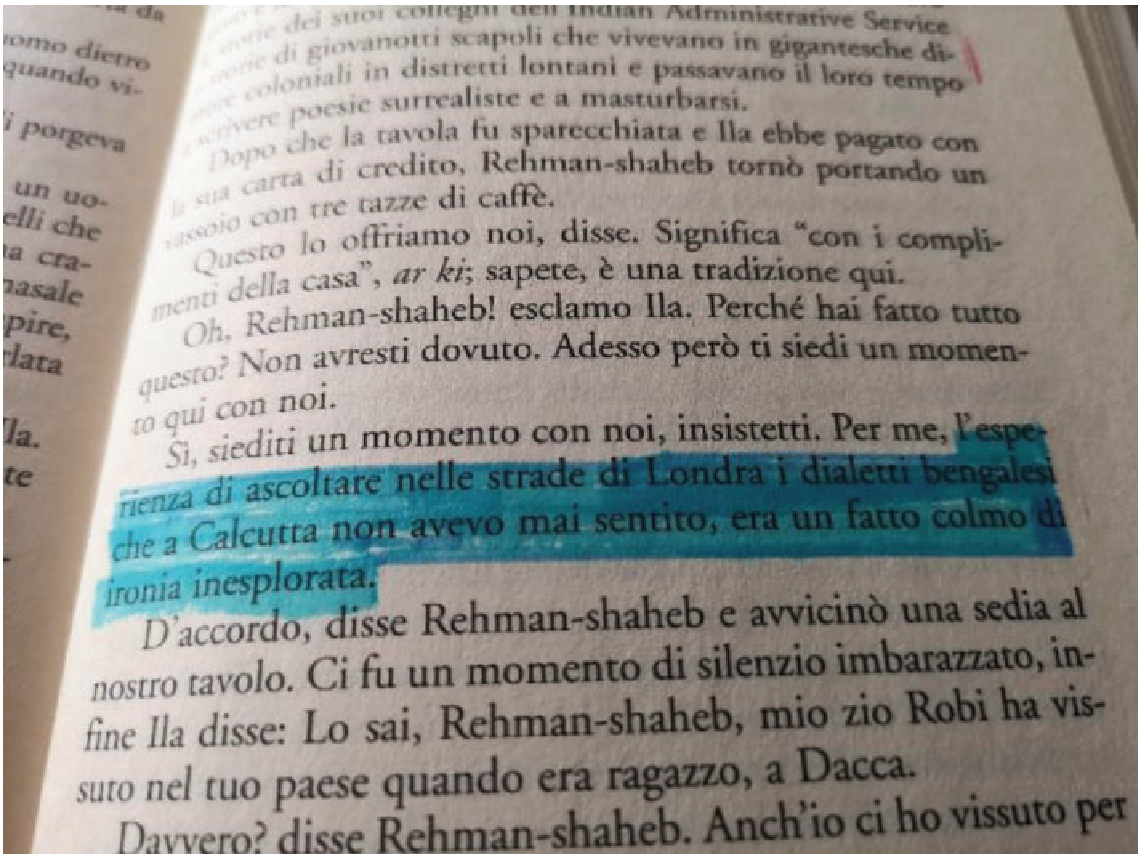
sulle Partizioni» organizzato da Rada Ivekovic, Università Paris VIII, Anno Accademico 2001/2002.

[3] «The zubben, dear boy, is the flash lingo of the East. It's easy enough to jin if you put your head to it. Just a little peppering of nigger-talk mixed with a few girleys…» in *A Sea of Poppies*, John Murray Publ., 2008, p. 43.
«Lo zubben, caro ragazzo, è la sfavillante lingua d'Oriente. È abbastanza facile da capire, se ci mette la testa. Solo una spruzzatina di parole negre mescolate con un po' di oscenità…» in *Un mare di papaveri*, Neri Pozza 2008, p. 58.



dei suoi colleghi dell'Indian Administrative Service
di giovanotti scapoli che vivevano in gigantesche di-
coloniali in distretti lontani e passavano il loro tempo
scrivere poesie surrealiste e a masturbarsi.
Dopo che la tavola fu sparecchiata e Ila ebbe pagato con
la sua carta di credito, Rehman-shaheb tornò portando un
vassoio con tre tazze di caffè.
Questo lo offriamo noi, disse. Significa "con i compli-
menti della casa", *ar ki*; sapete, è una tradizione qui.
Oh, Rehman-shaheb! esclamo Ila. Perché hai fatto tutto
questo? Non avresti dovuto. Adesso però ti siedi un momen-
to qui con noi.
Sì, siediti un momento con noi, insistetti. Per me, l'espe-
rienza di ascoltare nelle strade di Londra i dialetti bengalesi
che a Calcutta non avevo mai sentito, era un fatto colmo di
ironia inesplorata.
D'accordo, disse Rehman-shaheb e avvicinò una sedia al
nostro tavolo. Ci fu un momento di silenzio imbarazzato, in-
fine Ila disse: Lo sai, Rehman-shaheb, mio zio Robi ha vis-
suto nel tuo paese quando era ragazzo, a Dacca.
Davvero? disse Rehman-shaheb. Anch'io ci ho vissuto per

> Per me, l'esperienza di ascoltare nelle strade di Londra i dialetti bengalesi che a Calcutta non avevo mai sentito, era un fatto colmo di ironia inesplorata. For me the experience of hearing Bengali dialects which I had never heard in Calcutta being spoken in the streets of London was still repleted with unexplored irony. (Ghosh 1998: 236; Ghosh 2005: 303)

Ghosh non si è stancato di tendere l'orecchio, di stare in ascolto. Oggi, nelle calli veneziane, dove sta scrivendo *The Gun Island*, rileva con la consueta precisione:

> Soon I was hearing echoes of familiar words and sounds all around me. I wandered down the street, starting conversations in Bangla almost at random: the idea that it might be possible to do this in Venice was, for me, something so novel as to be astounding. (Ghosh 2019: 178)

Il vasto spettro linguistico messo in campo da Ghosh è essenziale nelle sue narrazioni di esodi e mutamenti provocati dalle guerre e dalla pace, non la grande e spesso solo presunta pace dei trattati internazionali, bensì la minuscola pace quotidiana delle persone qualunque, quelle che "open their wallet" dopo lo tsunami, quelle che mettono "a thin curtain" o "a flower in a glass on the windowsill" delle loro baracche a Phnom Penh dopo il genocidio perpetrato dai khmer rossi. Movimenti anche questi, e sembrano dettati da una grazia pasoliniana.

"La Storia è come un fiume, e lo storico scrive di come il fiume scorre e di come in esso le correnti s'incrociano. Ma dentro il fiume ci sono anche i pesci, e i pesci nuotano in molteplici direzioni. Io guardo il fiume dal punto di vista del pesce e guardo in che direzione si muove. Quel che m'interessa è il pesce" afferma Ghosh (Kooria 2012).

La storia ufficiale fornisce un fondale, ma è quella non ufficiale che più gli interessa: Tridib, Kameez, Fokir, il giovane Rajkumar, poi Jodu, Deeti, Neel, appaiono come controparti e controvoci dell'Impero britannico, nonché del Commissario Lin, e delle Sette Sorelle del petrolio. Ognuno di loro un potenziale filo di ricerca. Rajkumar, protagonista del *Palazzo degli specchi*, ha un antenato in Sajjan, *Il cerchio della ragione*, e un discendente in Jodu, il giovane barcaiolo che incontriamo nella trilogia della *Ibis*. Tutti loro mostrano l'indispensabile determinazione ed energia dei migranti.[4] È interessante riflettere sul compito che lo scrittore assegna a Rajkumar, un ragazzino *kalaa*, nero, scuro come la *kala-pani*, il nero oceano che terrorizza i *girmitiya*. È lui che riconosce un rumore per quello che è, e pur con forte accento straniero, sa spiegarne la natura e la provenienza.

Assai prima di scrivere il suo saggio sul cambiamento climatico, *La grande cecità*, Ghosh prestava ascolto alle voci 'minori', alle voci isolate e visionarie come quella di Deeti, o recluse come quella di Ah-Fatt, per raccontare ciò che può apparire impensabile, per registrare coincidenze, perfino per abbozzare statistiche di eventi inusuali. Il vero interprete di Piya, nel *Paese delle maree*, è Fokir, il pescatore che conosce i movimenti dell'acqua e dell'aria, e sa rilevare le anomalie col canto; l'interprete ufficiale, lo specialista Kanai, non può che piegarsi a tale competenza *non* specialistica. E volendo trascrivere per Piya il poema di Bon Bibi si affida alla dizione di Fokir, il quale non sa né leggere né scrivere – significativamente Ghosh non usa la parola analfabeta – ma lo conosce a memoria: «le parole sono diventate parte di lui».

Mi accorgo, scorrendo i miei appunti – metà in italiano e metà in inglese più qualche eccezione, neanche fossi Neel nel *daftar* dell'enclave straniera a Canton – che la consuetudine con l'opera di Amitav fa di me, più che una studiosa, una testimone del farsi della sua opera.

Le frasi mi riecheggiano nelle orecchie, richiamandosi da un libro all'altro quasi automaticamente. Dal confronto con lui, su questo specifico aspetto, emerge concretamente quello strano misto – di aderenza al testo, di invenzione e negoziazione – di cui parlava Eco, ma in parte anche Calvino. Ricordo cose che lui non ricorda (l'esempio che ho fatto sopra).

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[4] «Soltanto una persona nel chiosco sapeva esattamente cosa fosse quel rumore che rimbombava attraverso la pianura, lungo la curva argentea dell'Irrawaddy, fino alle mura occidentali del forte di Mandalay. Si chiamava Rajkumar ed era un ragazzino indiano di undici anni: di certo non una fonte attendibile. Era un rumore sconosciuto e inquietante, un tuono lontano [...]. Quando i primi boati raggiunsero il chiosco, cadde il silenzio [...]. La gente si guardava intorno sconcertata «Che cos'è? *Ba le?* Cosa può essere?» Poi la voce acuta ed eccitata di Rajkumar si aprì un varco nel brusio delle congetture, «Cannoni inglesi», disse, nel suo birmano corretto ma dal forte accento indiano. «Sparano da qualche parte a nord del fiume. Vengono in questa direzione.» In Amitav Ghosh, *Il palazzo degli specchi*, Neri Pozza 2007, pp. 7-9.

Non so quanto tutto ciò sia legittimo da un punto di vista disciplinare. Ma per quanto consapevole di muovermi su un crinale di legittimità molto sottile, vorrei spingermi oltre.

Tridib, protagonista delle *Linee d'ombra* e voce narrante per interposta persona – giacché il giovane narratore altro non è se non la memoria durevole di Tridib, una memoria che va al di là del tempo – trascorre le sue giornate bighellonando, letteralmente e metaforicamente. Nel resoconto dei suoi vagabondaggi fisici e mentali prende forma l'immaginario del narratore; nella passione di Tridib per le mappe il suo senso di orientamento; dai vuoti di memoria della nonna e di Ila germoglia il desiderio del narratore di ricostruire la verità dei fatti, in ciò emulando Tridib, che amava frugare nel passato e al quale "non interessavano i paesi delle fate e voleva semplicemente insegnarmi a usare la fantasia con precisione". Forse non a caso Tridib è un dottorando in archeologia.[5] Nella relazione di Tridib con May, infine, il narratore decifra la volontà di guardare con occhi bene aperti le rovine comuni, e condividerle senza distogliere lo sguardo.

Le rovine comuni come specchio in cui possiamo riconoscere noi stessi, riconoscere e farci riconoscere. È il leitmotiv di tutta l'opera di Amitav Ghosh.

Voglio soffermarmi su uno specifico passaggio, ma mi verrebbe da dire inquadratura, in cui Tridib, il narratore ragazzino e la giovane donna inglese sono in auto, diretti al mausoleo della regina Vittoria nell'immenso *maidan* di Calcutta. Giunti all'incrocio della Lower Circular Road con Chowringhee, May accetta la sfida infantile del narratore a non guardare e chiude gli occhi prevedendo una sorpresa. Ma quando li riapre urla «Mio Dio!» così forte che a sorprendersi sono invece il narratore e Tridib, che frena bruscamente bloccando la Studebaker ai piedi dell'enorme statua di marmo nero della regina Vittoria. May, pallidissima, supplica Tridib di andare via:

> "Non dovrebbe essere qui, è una violenza, un'oscenità", urla.
> "No, non è vero, sono le *nostre* rovine; è ciò che cercavamo" [No, it's not. This is *our* ruin; that's what we were looking for], replica Tridib.
> E May, ritrovando il sorriso, conferma:
> "Sì, sono le rovine che fanno per noi" [Yes. This will do for our ruin] (Ghosh 1988: 266-67; 2011: 166-67).

Ricordando questo episodio insieme a May, molti anni dopo a Londra, il narratore sembra voler dire la stessa cosa a noi, assidui e spesso distratti spettatori di rovine.

Ora, continuando a percorrere lo stretto crinale su cui mi sono avventurata, voglio ricondurvi al punto in cui ha inizio la storia d'amore di Tridib e May, ovvero al cinema. È una scena, quella descritta da Ghosh, che non ho mai visto messa a tema negli studi critici sull'autore, eppure occupa molte pagine ed è bellissima.[6] Puro immaginario filmico al servizio dell'immaginario narrativo. Un lungo piano sequenza per una dichiarazione d'amore davvero fuori del comune.[7]

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[5] Vi rimando all'episodio dell'archeologa ungherese in Amitav Ghosh, *Il cromosoma Calcutta*, Neri Pozza, pp. 14 sgg; *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Ravi Dayal Publisher, pp. 5 sgg.

[6] Il lento svolgersi della pellicola «come se si trattasse di un film che gira nella mia testa al rallentatore.» In Amitav Ghosh, *Le linee d'ombra*, cit. p. 208, *The Shadow Lines*, cit., p. 161.

Mi riferisco alla lettera che Tridib scrive a May raccontandole qualcosa che è successo molto tempo prima, o forse non è mai accaduto.

Ghosh ha scritto *Le linee d'ombra* dopo i gravissimi disordini di Delhi dell'84 (Ghosh 2006), ma Tridib scrive la sua lettera nei primi anni '60 – May arriva a Calcutta nel dicembre 1963 e il 3 gennaio del 1964 partono per Dacca con la nonna e il fratello di Tridib, Robi.

Ciò che Tridib aveva raccontato a May imbarazzandola profondamente, e tuttavia convincendola a partire per l'India, è un incontro amoroso, un amplesso fra due sconosciuti tra le rovine di un cinema londinese dopo il Blitz.

Perché, mi chiesi allora, quella lunga, cinematografica scena d'amore? perché quell'ambientazione? Ogni dettaglio mi rimandava a qualcosa… cosa?

Renoir aveva girato *Il fiume* nel '51. Tra 1955-59 Satyajit Ray gira la trilogia di Apu. Rossellini gira *India Matri Bhumi* nel '58. Truffaut gira *Jules et Jim* nel 1962. Per quanto arbitrario, come non vedere Jeanne Moreau nei panni di Ila, con a fianco i suoi due cavalier serventi?

Non resta abbastanza tempo per analizzare minuziosamente l'intera scena, tuttavia ci provo. Mi preme riflettere su come le immagini sedimentano dentro di noi stratificandosi, ora frutto di ricordi reali, ora di sogni o incubi, ora di immagini prodotte dall'immaginario altrui. Tra queste, le immagini cinematografiche. Può darsi che nel mio caso la traduttrice abbia in parte sovrapposto la propria memoria filmica a quella dell'autore, ma anche se fosse così, credo valga la pena di provare.

> Scrivere e leggere una lettera, entrare in un cinema, vedere un film.
> Diversi soggetti per molteplici azioni: Tridib, May, il narratore-autore, la traduttrice.

Un cinema londinese dopo il Blitz (estate-autunno 1940). "Lo schermo era stato spazzato via. Probabilmente la bomba era esplosa laggiù, vicino allo schermo, forse era sembrata parte del film". La galleria è intatta, e a Tridib piace sedersi lassù e guardare dall'alto. Come non pensare agli occhi sgranati e maturi dei bambini del cinema neorealista? A Ray e Rossellini, e che Giuseppe Tornatore riproporrà in *Nuovo cinema Paradiso?* La luce filtra all'interno attraverso la breccia dello schermo, e Tridib, "raggomitolato in una poltrona, guarda il cielo al crepuscolo" una proiezione all'aperto, il bianco e nero splendente dei film di Satyajit Ray. Affacciandosi alla balaustra, Tridib riesce a vedere, all'esterno, il selciato e piedi che camminano (Truffaut, *L'uomo che amava le donne*, 1977), prima i piedi di una donna e le zampe di un cane e poi i piedi di un uomo; quando, uno dopo l'altra, s'infileranno nella breccia, Tridib vedrà che l'uomo indossa un'uniforme e si accende una sigaretta con gesti che è impossibile non attribuire a Bogart. Il cane abbaia, il ragazzo è preoccupato, non vuole che i due sconosciuti siano scoperti

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[7] Amitav Ghosh, *Le linee d'ombra*, cit., pp. 177-184; *The Shadow Lines*, cit., pp. 135-141.

(ancora Truffaut, *Le dernier metro*, 1980). Ha una sola preoccupazione: assicurare un lieto fine alla scena che sta vedendo.

Esattamente ciò che immagina nella lettera a May:

> …era così che lui voleva incontrare lei, May: come un'estranea in mezzo alle rovine. Desiderava che loro due potessero incontrarsi come due perfetti sconosciuti – stranieri venuti dal mare – ancora più estranei l'uno all'altra proprio perché si erano già conosciuti. Desiderava che potessero incontrarsi lontano da amici e famigliari, in un luogo senza passato, senza storia, liberi, davvero liberi, due persone che si mettono insieme con l'amara libertà degli estranei.
> Ma perché ciò accadesse lei avrebbe dovuto venire in India. Avrebbero scovato un posto come quello; lui era un esperto in rovine.[8]

Se il desiderio amoroso smantella l'autorità del potere, se lo schermo esplode a causa di qualcosa che sembra parte del film – non riesco a non pensare al tarantiniano epilogo di *Inglorious Bastards* (2009), dove lo schermo brucia avvolto dalle fiamme accese con un cerino da una donna europea scampata al nazismo e da un uomo nero venuto dall'altra parte del mare, – si può ipotizzare un'altra Storia. Una misteriosa redenzione finale.

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[8] Una conoscenza che risale a molti anni prima, più immaginata che reale, e in qualche misura kafkiana: «Lui si era avvicinato con molta emozione alla culla e aveva guardato dentro […]. Era corso fuori dalla stanza urlando: Si è trasformata in un insetto, la sua faccia è tutta nera e lucida e la bocca è diventata un lungo muso nero, come quello di un maiale. Più tardi gli avevano spiegato ridendo che era solo una maschera antigas, una maschera antigas da bambino, per proteggerla se i tedeschi avessero sganciato delle bombe a gas. Tuttavia non erano riusciti a convincerlo fino a che non gliel'avevano tolta e gli avevano mostrato il suo viso rosa, morbido, per nulla alterato», in A. Ghosh, *Le linee d'ombra*, cit., p. 209; *The Shadow Lines*, cit., p. 163.

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«QuadRi»
Quaderni di RiCOGNIZIONI
ISSN 2420-7969

è una collana di

RiCOGNIZIONI
Rivista di lingue, letterature e culture moderne
ISSN: 2384-8987

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