

BLOODLINES, BORDERLINES, SHADOWLINES:  
Forms of Belonging in Contemporary Literature  
from Partition Areas

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To Lisa Lena

(1957- 2013)

“the act of writing creates for me a ‘space’ of sorts, an emotional expanse that I have never known before, where death is more than the absolute, unambiguous opposite of life.”

David Grossman

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# “Bloodlines, Borderlines, Shadowlines: Forms of Belonging in Contemporary Literature from Partition Areas”

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This thesis explores cosmopolitan and humanist literary interventions by Palestinian, Israeli, Indian and Pakistani writers to the rise of ‘ethnically’ defined cultural and political narratives of community. It uses a comparative framework to look at contemporary authors such as Amitav Ghosh, Raja Shehadeh, Kamila Shamsie, Uzma Aslam Khan and David Grossman, who deconstruct the biologically defined border as a repressive literary, cultural and political metaphor in favour of more open-ended categories of identity and community.

I argue that in deconstructing the epistemology of the exclusive boundary through cosmopolitan and humanist philosophies, these international writers demonstrate the impossibility of shedding all borders in their own work. Their ‘borderless’ aesthetic that constantly conjures the border is thus indicative of the interrelated nature of cosmopolitan and sectarian identities in a globalized modernity. Moreover, it is suggestive of the ambivalent relationship between politically-conscious postcolonial texts (which draw political lines) and the emerging field of World literature that is coming to be defined by its ability to appeal to the “universal”.

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# List of Abbreviations of Primary Texts

## (By Author)

### **Uzma Aslam Khan**

GOG *The Geometry of God*

### **Amitav Ghosh**

AL *In an Antique Land*

GP *The Glass Palace*

HT *The Hungry Tide*

SL *The Shadow Lines*

### **David Grossman**

BIG *The Book of Intimate Grammar*

BMK *Be My Knife*

TETL *To the End of the Land*

### **Kamila Shamsie**

BS *Burnt Shadows*

### **Raja Shehadeh**

PW *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape*

RT *A Rift in Time: Travels with my Ottoman Uncle*

SH *Strangers in the House*

TW *The Third Way: A Journal of Life in the West Bank*

# Introduction

## The Border Imaginary

Borders run across land but through people.

I. WILLIAM ZARTMAN <sup>1</sup>

“I came to accept this nightmarish reality without self-pity or despair,” Urdu short story writer Sa’adat Hasan Manto writes about the Partition of India. “In the process I tried to retrieve from this man-made sea of blood, pearls of a rare hue ...” (qtd. in Hasan xix). The retrieval of such precious worlds of possibility and humanity, of “dedication” and “remorse” (xix), is the continued endeavour of authors from regions such as India, Pakistan, Israel and Palestine, who seek to come to terms with the trauma of not only partition (like Manto) but also the sectarian politics that have come in its wake. Since the rise of cultural and political narratives promoting exclusive genealogical or ‘ethnic’ definitions of nationhood in South Asia and the Middle East in the 1980s – Hindutva and Islamism, respectively – the metaphorical use of the body in defining the body politic has continued to preoccupy writers as part of a greater literary unease with the role of narrative in delimiting any kind of exclusive territory. Contemporary writing coming out of these regions thus tries to resist cultural narratives that fuel more restrictive views of nationhood, in favour of literary forms that make alternative ideas of ‘borderless’ community and flexible belonging possible. While shaping an anti-border aesthetic, however, these writers also prove the impossibility of overcoming all borders in their own writing and raise important questions about how the literary market place modifies cultural representations of conflict, and how such representations might effectively provide literary and political resistance to oppressive nationalist imaginaries, as this project will examine.

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<sup>1</sup>See “Identity, Movement and Response” in *Boundaries in Depth and in Motion* (1).

Literature from regions which have undergone geographical partition and continue to process social and cultural division such as India and Pakistan and Israel and Palestine (partitioned in 1947 and 1948 respectively) presents us with an interesting cultural terrain that questions how the border as a line of differentiation, boundary and limit, fixes categories in both an abstract and concrete sense. William Connolly argues that territory, which derives from *terra* – “land, earth, soil, nourishment, sustenance” – and *terrere*, meaning “to frighten, to terrorize, to exclude,” (xxii) implies both the pull it has come to have on modern identities and the violent undertones of its juridical-political function in nation states: to occupy territory “is both to receive sustenance and to exercise violence” (xxii). The word territory thus captures the very problems of its application – be it as a domain of culture or knowledge, a defended area, or a geographical space. To belong to or to identify a *terra* requires a delimiting of boundaries and borders through some kind of violence, epistemic or physical. Having lived through the riots, wars and skirmishes that challenge and protect such territories, partition area authors are not only interested in general postcolonial concerns of mirroring the nation space, or writing the national culture, but more importantly, exploring the possibility of moving beyond the border in constructing alternative literary forms of belonging. However, unlike the wider banner of Diaspora literature – under which, arguably, some of the writers studied here also fall – contemporary partition area literature explores deeply differentiated space, in particular, as an opening onto alternative configurations of identity and collectivity.

Our understanding of these different relationships to belonging and borders is aided by literature and the peculiar nature of literary space as conceptualized by Imre Szeman. Literature not only provides the basis of nation theories such as Benedict Anderson’s, which promote the role of the novel and newspaper in imagining the “*kind* of [...] community” (25) that is the nation, but is also fundamental to the “apparatus of cultural fictions” (63) that the nation depends on according to Timothy Brennan in his article on “The National Longing for Form.” The novel, Brennan proposes through Bakhtin’s theories of *dialogism* and

*heteroglossia*, is a “bordered art form”(63) which, in addition to mixing a variety of languages and styles to reflect the very community that Anderson argues its readership will be inspired to imagine, is also finite and fixed. Frederic Jameson’s controversial piece on “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” goes so far as to posit all postcolonial or, as Jameson terms it, ‘third world’ literature as national allegories. Of course, such statements have been widely criticised, particularly by ‘third world’ Marxist critics, on the grounds that they generalize all postcolonial literature as specifically nationalist.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the novel as a cultural construct does to a certain extent always “speak to its context” (Szeman 51), and postcolonial literature cannot be separated from its political background or the unequal circumstances of its cultural production. The nexus of literary space in the novel and the national space it plays a part in constructing, offers not only a mappable – bordered – structure of community as postcolonial theory has demonstrated, but allows an opening up of the problems of “organizing space”(Szeman 6) *per se*.

The contemporary partition area novel therefore permits a reflection on borders – both its own and the socio-political ones it helps to construct through its ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 6) – as a violent reality and a discursive concept. Indian author Amitav Ghosh, Palestinian writer Raja Shehadeh, popular Pakistani novelists Kamila Shamsie and Uzma Aslam Khan, and Israeli author David Grossman are exemplary of such writers who share an engagement with the cultural trauma of partition by seeking out different aesthetic or literary strategies – ‘pearls of a rare hue’ – to resist dominant discourses of national representation and to map alternative forms of community and belonging. These are all worldly, internationally travelled (and read) writers belonging to a contemporary World literature market, who have some awareness of writing for the same audience: Grossman has interviewed Shehadeh, Shamsie has participated in a public conversation with him, Ghosh has been widely translated into Hebrew and was a writer in residence in Israel, Aslam Khan and

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<sup>2</sup> See Aijaz Ahmad “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory.’”

Shehadeh both have work published by Interlink Publishing, etc.<sup>3</sup> Placing the works of these authors, who are all writing after the official partition, in conversation with each other thus shows how there may be a World literature trend developing from these regions that comprises a common engagement with the legacy of the border through similar literary tropes.<sup>4</sup>

Their texts engage with the border not only as a territorial feature that seeks to stem the fluidity of movement and flow (both the expansion of neighbouring states and the migration of people) but also as a categorical marker of culture, custom and religion that delimits community and consequently, identity. The twentieth and twenty-first century border, as these texts verify, falls not only across territories but runs through communities and selves, as Zartman also states in the opening citation of this chapter. Salman Rushdie reflects in his essay on migration, “Step Across This Line,” that if borders contain and impinge, they are often arbitrary – “we did not cross the border” Mexicans residing illegally in the U.S. claim, “the border crossed us” (414) – and provide thresholds which must be transgressed in order for “newness [to] come into the world” (*The Satanic Verses* 8): be that the water edge in the evolutionary development of mammals, the limits of national allegiance or aesthetic practice. “Good writing assumes a frontierless nation,” Rushdie goes on to claim, and “writers who serve frontiers have become border guards” (67). The crossing of borders has, in fact, come to characterize postcolonial literature on the whole. Critics such as Pranav Jani point out that Rushdie’s role as postcolonial author *par excellence* in academic studies has informed a cosmopolitan ethos in the wider discipline, and restricted the category of postcolonial literature to “texts that value postmodern epistemologies and narrative forms” (19). The battle against fixity has thus become inherently associated with a current postcolonial literary

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<sup>3</sup> For the Grossman/Shehadeh interview see Grossman *The Yellow Wind* (145-60).

<sup>4</sup> While the boundaries in Israel/Palestine are still in the process of being negotiated, partition as an official event occurred in both areas in 1947/1948. Even if this was not a moment of independence for the Palestinians (as it was for India, Pakistan and Israel) it has been registered in Palestinian culture as a defining historical moment: *al-nakbah*, the catastrophe.

intellectual project: the contemporary post-independence non-metropolitan text not only can but is expected to question the concept of the border itself.

However, an aesthetic that strives for cosmopolitan ideals often also harbours its own brand of chauvinism, as Rushdie's controversial remarks on writing by non-Anglophone Indian writers demonstrate. In his infamous article "Damme, This is the Oriental Scene for You!" Rushdie claimed that Indian literature in English was "proving to be a more interesting body of work than most of what has been produced in the sixteen 'official languages' of India" (160).<sup>5</sup> Rushdie's comment on local languages does not revive a national frontier, but a blinkered subject position, in which bias constructs its own closely guarded categories. Questioning all borders as an aesthetic necessity therefore raises its own practical problems for writers who, like Rushdie, have and do contribute to not only a particular idea of the nation (in Rushdie's case a specifically Anglophone one) but also a national culture.<sup>6</sup> How to evade adhering to, if not constructing, borders between the community and the foreign, self and others, when actively speaking for some kind of a national project (whether of human rights – like Shehadeh, or a local English-language literary culture like Aslam Khan) is a dilemma that all of these writers face to different extents.

Categorical boundaries and communal borders have in actuality long figured as part of the very philosophies and literary models that have been used to challenge them. Contemporary post-partition writers, for instance, are drawing on and responding to long-standing narrative tropes (in both their local literary cultures and the international Anglophone field) that have constructed borders of their own. Partition texts have employed allegories and analogies that replicate, implicitly or overtly, the rhetoric of ethnic nationalist discourses and have thus contributed to some of the more exclusive genealogical, if politically

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<sup>5</sup> The version of this article cited here is from the collection *Step Across This Line*.

<sup>6</sup> See, *Imaginary Homelands*, where Rushdie states that as an emigrant writer he is doomed to construct "imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind" (10).

popular, metaphors for the community. Epic family sagas frequently provide fertile ground for novelists to portray the horrors of partition: as fictional siblings are torn apart and reunited, different versions of the pre- or post-partitioned nation are cemented by giving credence to specific national bloodlines. Susan Abulhawa's novel of the Palestinian conflict, *Mornings in Jenin* (2010), for example, tells the story of a Palestinian family whose baby son is abducted and raised by a childless Israeli couple.<sup>7</sup> In this work that is hailed by Anjali Joseph as the first mainstream novel in English to depict the Palestinian condition, the abducted boy brutally assaults his Palestinian-raised brother even after – and partly because of – his recognition of their biological link. Eventually, however, in this national allegory the Israeli-raised son is seen to come to his senses and identifies his biological family as his genuine cultural and political affiliation above his adopted family.<sup>8</sup> Thus while the novel tries to understand the reasons behind the entrenchment of violent politics on both sides of the divide – and Joseph claims it succeeds in giving a level of “stability and distance” to the story that most Palestinian narratives, according to her, have failed to – it gives a very troubled account of the conditions of belonging. The kind of narrative tropes it falls back on suggest that Israeli and Palestinian identities are birth-rights rather than cultural constructs, and that political life really is defined by biological life or ethnic identification.

In a similar vein, ‘across-the barricades’ style romances (Samir el-Youssef's *A Treaty of Love*, Sami Michael's *A Trumpet over the Wadi*, Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*, and Mohammed Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* etc.) seek to consolidate communities after division through naturalizing the new nation family. Romances offer a solution, or the failure of a solution, to the ongoing conflicts through symbolically bringing about “national unification” (82) and “ideal states” (76) as Doris Sommer's study on Latin American

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<sup>7</sup> Abulhawa's novel draws heavily on the earlier Arabic short story by Ghassan Kanafani, “Return to Haifa,” which has a very similar plotline.

<sup>8</sup> Nicola Barr in her review of the novel for *The Guardian* argues that it is a “brave, sad book that tells the story of a nation”.

foundational fictions shows. Such narrative trends lean increasingly on the integrity of the body as symbol for the body politic, thereby echoing the more violent nationalist discourses of 'purity,' genealogy and "the exclusiveness of 'blood.'"(Smith *Nation* 16) These biological literary tropes, in turn, have provided the longstanding fodder for both international and nationalist literary products: Saleem's crumbling body provided a synecdoche for the Indian nation in *Midnight's Children*, and Palestinian poet laureate, Mahmoud Darwish, describes the Palestinian condition during the 1982 siege of Beirut with the words "Our stumps, our names; our names, our stumps."<sup>9</sup>

Likewise, the home has frequently come to stand in for the larger nation or territory. Israeli author and peace activist Amos Oz in his memoir *A Tale of Love and Darkness* (2005) shows how metaphorical dimensions are built into the environment of home, what Dirk Wiemann terms "the complex desire for communities larger than home itself" (186), in his humorous depiction of his grandmother's obsessive cleaning. "[L]aundered and cleansed and scraped and disinfected and boiled a thousand times" to an inch of her life, Oz presents his grandmother as riven by a conflicted desire for/repulsion by "that Levant, filthy, sweaty, bestial, exciting to the point of swooning, but swarming with germs." (33) Referring to orientalist visions of Palestine via the physical obsession with dirt is as much a symbolic literary gesture as a reflection of real historical cultural discourses where spatial penetration into the home is associated with "impurity" (157), as David Morley's anthropological study demonstrates. 'Matter out of place' – be it strangers in the homeland or foreign products in the national culture – can be formulated as what Mary Douglas theorized as 'dirt' (Morley 161). The strict bordering of home in fictional narratives thus serves to erase foreigners or certain ethnic groups from the landscape and posit them as 'out of place' in a wider national culture. If Oz appears aware of, and in some sense to be critiquing, such cultural discourses, he

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<sup>9</sup> This citation is from the extract of the poem "In Praise of the Tall Shadow" printed in Darwish's Beirut memoir *Memory for Forgetfulness* (58-59).

nonetheless falls back on the familiar (and familial) image of the nation as a family home in his own political essays. In *How to Cure a Fanatic* he argues that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict requires a “fair and just divorce,” if a peculiar one at that, as both “divorcing parents are definitely staying in the same apartment. No one is moving out” (19). If Israel and Palestine make for troubled bed-fellows in this image of marriage, then such a vision of the state as a familial home still implies that the pre-partitioned nation is an integral entity that cannot be divided.

Narratives of home are therefore used to stress rootedness, in both place and landscape, to reinforce the pre- or post-partition boundary as ‘natural’ or necessary. In partition regions where people have migrated or been forced to move, maintaining a link to a territorial point of origin through popular fiction or return narratives is a powerful cultural impetus. Return is a key political aim of the Zionist movement and the Palestinian Liberation Organization – as the Israeli Law of Return from 1950 and the Palestinian movement for ‘the right of return’ testify – and resonates with the enormous population that was displaced during the partition of the subcontinent (approximately 12 million people moved across the newly created borders between India and Pakistan). It thus figures in many texts as a cathartic exercise for healing family divisions and wounds after the rupture of partition – as seen in Kavita Panjabi’s *Old Maps and New* and Farouq Wadi’s *Homes of the Heart*, for example. Anthony D. Smith contends in *Myths and Memories of the Nation* that culture plays an important role in imbuing specific locations with “the culture and history of a group”: sacred places, poetic spaces, mythic scenes and fields of battle create the pull of belonging that turns territory into *ethnoscape* (150-51). Popular texts both create and sustain such imaginary ‘scapes’, as Mourid Barghouti exclaims in his memoir *I Saw Ramallah*, “Did I paint for strangers an ideal picture of Palestine because I had lost it?” (28). As these examples demonstrate, political affiliations and ideologies are often implicit in certain visions of family (or bloodlines) and the spaces they claim as home.

My contention here is not that such narratives are unable to place a critical eye on the state or resist visible sectarian trends in society, but that they do so in a way that ignores the specifically literary (or metaphorical) dimension of how such identities come to be constructed. Though insightful as cultural outlets for trauma and the desire for political healing, such narratives rarely offer the deeper engagement with the problems of bordering communities and violence (as represented by ethnic discourses) that other narrative strategies do. They tend to replicate the biological discourses of the border, through relying on family tropes, mythic *ethnoscapes* or heavily symbolized bodies, even when they seek to question or challenge the violence of nationalist movements. Bapsi Sidhwa's celebrated partition novel, *Ice-Candy-Man*, for example, explores the rhetoric that casts women as carriers of culture, or preservers of tradition, and renders them victims to symbolically-laden violence such as rape or abduction. However, Sidhwa's novel grapples with this element of nation-making in her portrayal of the effects of partition through the story of the narrator's Hindu nanny or *ayah* who, as the peaceful coexistence between different religious groups in Lahore breaks down, is abducted by her previous (Muslim) admirer. Forced into prostitution, the *ayah*'s beautiful body is broken by the many men who used to compete for her affection prior to partition in a parallel fate to that of the national territory; thus, to use the work's alternative title, "Cracking India," Sidhwa's novel reinforces the very discursive link between the breaking of the female body and the nation as the sectarian violence she seeks to contest. She claims in interview with Alok Bhalla that women "bear the brunt" of the violence of drawing borders ("borders demand blood") since "they are the ones who are rooted in the soil" (233) – echoing precisely the kind of discourse employed by ethnic narratives to draw violent borders around the community.

As these narrative tropes indicate, the border is not only a boundary of nation states and communities but also a frontier that limits ideas and understanding. As such, it comes to signify not only the limit itself, but the very process of delimiting, in the face of fluidity,

hybridity and change. Literature that strives for an anti-border aesthetic consequently has to not only cross, but dismantle boundaries as absolutes which constrain the movement of thoughts (in both nationalism and cosmopolitanism) as well as cultures and people. Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988), for example, employs literary space in such a way to review the notions of a clearly demarcated cultural and geographical territory that nationhood is built on.

Ghosh's narrator reflects on how sectarian violence on the subcontinent can spawn parallel outbreaks across borders in a passage that draws attention to the relativity of any conceptualisation of space at all. Looking at an atlas the narrator uses a compass to measure the distance between Srinagar in Kashmir and the parallel site of violence, Khulna (then in the east wing of Pakistan):

And so, fifteen years after his death, Tridib watched over me as I tried to learn the meaning of distance. His atlas showed me, for example, that within the tidy ordering of Euclidean space, 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 [...using the distance between Khulna and Srinagar as a radius] 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 [...]?(227-28)

Ghosh's text shows us how as riots spill across cities and borders to resonate in other places and other times the fixity of distance and geography become shaken. The incendiary combination of religious solidarities with national ties subverts distance to give the illusion of proximity of certain communities over others. The enmity between India and Pakistan, ironically, creates a toxic intimacy that defies geography. This discovery has its parallel in the simultaneity of time and place in Ghosh's narrative structure: the events of the London, Calcutta and Dhaka of the past cut across descriptions of their present, while the experiences of other characters are remembered and superimposed by the narrator on his own in a manner which defies linearity. Lines of temporality or geographical integrity thus become fuzzy and any attempt to order either, by the narrator or the reader, merely reveals their

arbitrariness. Alongside this unmooring of any rigid notions of history, culture or geography, however, lies the violence that escapes over boundaries and reorders space in new and volatile forms.

Ghosh's novel thus challenges a belief in "reality of space" (SL 214) as an implicit part of any concept of nationhood, and places India in a wider global and historical context where racist, sectarian and national narratives are symptoms of similar, universal, desires to categorize and identify clear limits between self and other wherever they occur. His work thus strives towards a different form of belonging (discussed in chapter one), whereby all borders of chronology and space are crossed and questioned simultaneously, a concept that is also dealt with, although differently, by Palestinian human rights lawyer Raja Shehadeh, in his own form of travel writing (see chapter two). Furthermore, the passage from *The Shadow Lines* above shows how more than just helping "to ratify the state divisions produced by partition or to contest the partitionist mentalities generated by such divisions" (Cleary 2), contemporary literature from partition areas questions the premises behind division or the function of the border in and of itself. Texts such as Ghosh's and Shehadeh's shed light on the constant negotiation of territorial and communal boundaries in partition cultures as they attempt to balance the 'bordered art form' of the text with a literary project of destabilizing space – a rethinking of what it means to draw any border at all.

Such borders or lines, as Zartman and Rushdie remind us, also cross people. The metaphorical use of the body in defining the body politic in many of the more restrictive, cultural narratives of community, has led international writers such as Kamila Shamsie and Uzma Aslam Khan to question how the abstract negotiation of limits (in the territory and community) are determined through narratives of human contact, whether intimate or violent (as discussed in chapter three). Communal and national identities separate not only 'us' from 'them' but, fundamentally, the 'self' from any perceived 'other'. The final boundary then

becomes not only the national limitation between states but a biologically (read ethnically) understood barrier of 'essential' difference between individuals. Hebrew Israeli writer David Grossman's novel, *Be My Knife*, for example, contemplates the barriers that prevent people from truly understanding, empathizing with, or knowing one another.<sup>10</sup> In a bid to get closer to his lover/correspondent, the protagonist Yair takes off his clothes and runs naked around her house during the night:

I tried to argue with it, save myself – What if someone passes by and sees me like this, and calls the police, who arrest me? Then I laughed at myself – I've been a prisoner all my life, so why be afraid now? [...] It happened to me in the space of a few seconds, such a short border to cross – one moment you're dressed, and the next: flesh, animal, less than an animal, as if the skin had peeled off you with your clothes, the epidermis, and the entire pile of skin underneath it. (75)

Circling her house like a compass, Grossman's protagonist draws new lines, like Ghosh's, that destabilize the perceived 'reality of space', the complex systems of categorization that all national communities inevitably live by. Every individual is imprisoned within the social and cultural norms that dictate the barriers of not only behaviour, as implied in the protagonist's fear of arrest, but also what separates the categorical human from non-human or 'animal' – 'such a short border to cross'. The barriers are both perceived to be natural, in the ethnic markers of 'epidermis' and 'flesh', and cultural: discursive, discardable 'clothes'. The construction of these borders through a discourse of biology sustains certain visions of self, identity and communal identification above others. Grossman's novel, which takes an epistolary form, demonstrates a narrative that seeks to shed the physicality of any of its characters in favour of a purely discursive corporeality in a model of belonging different to Ghosh's (discussed further in chapter four). Thus borders become not only arbitrary territorial markers, which operate above geography and topographical distance, but also discursive markers that divide bodies and selves.

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<sup>10</sup> Originally published in Hebrew in 1998, the novel was first translated into English in 2002.

Through engaging with the border as a traumatic structure that seeks to fix fluid histories, identities and often boundaries, contemporary authors such as Ghosh, Shehadeh, Aslam Khan, Shamsie, and Grossman, writing out of or from such 'zones of instability' – to borrow Imre Szeman's phrase to indicate not just the fluctuation in political movements and territorial lines, but also the eruption of state and sectarian violence – demonstrate a concern with cartography in a border imaginary. Their texts negotiate a tension between movement (walks, tides, trespassing) and restrictions; structures of ordering (rifts, shadow lines, geometry, grammar) and freedom. If, as Sam Durrant argues in his work on postcolonial narrative and mourning, postmodernism is haunted by the "limit experience" (3) of the holocaust, and postcolonialism by colonialism, then these partition writers, in turn, are haunted by the experience of the border crossing and segmenting them as the arbitrary violent marker of 'difference' that "radically alters our understanding of what it means to be Human" (Durrant 3). This trauma is inherent to every nation, even if it is more overt in partition cases.

The conflicted relationship to the border – as something which must be crossed, and which is never quite shed – is both a direct reflection of these partition areas' particular concern with biological definitions of community and nationhood, and indicative of the problems of nationalism, and nation narration, *per se*. As such, this post-partition border imaginary, and the alternative less violent forms of belonging it tries to map, may serve as a dual lens for understanding both the particular cultural condition of partition areas *and* the way in which identity politics are negotiated in a global culture in general – or in an international 'World' literary culture in particular – today.

#### **i. Border Politics and Bordered Art Forms**

If Franco Moretti argues in his *Atlas* that there is a "phenomenology of the border" (35) at play in nineteenth-century European novels where the crossing of communal and

territorial lines indicate the simultaneous hardening of borders and dismantling of boundaries by the various nationalist waves that define the period; then contemporary literature from partition areas reveals an unease with narrative and the delimiting of any kind of territory (epistemic, physical or cultural) that reflects the on-going problems of defining cultural identity in the contemporary world. In societies such as India and Pakistan, or Israel and Palestine, where two or more cultural heritages are vying for supremacy, placing a national territory (cultural or geographical) in order to define a place of belonging has been especially problematic, as Gil Z. Hochberg points out when referring to “the modern European socio-political discourse” in which “‘being at home’ means ‘belonging to’ and possessing, a coherent, single, monolingual, identifiable, and authentic cultural heritage” (48). Even if Pakistan is not as seminal to India’s self-imaginary as Palestine may be to Israel’s, the respective partition societies of both of these regions not only have a competing nationalism across the border to which they are tied “in a relationship of fierce hatred and grudging interdependence” (66) – to cite Priya Kumar – but they are also involved in internal struggles to define the kind of nationalism they recognize as the clear ‘authentic cultural heritage’ of their own state. What it means to ‘be at home’ in these partition societies is thus constantly altering when the nation’s *place* is not just changing in political views but literally changing through territorial conflicts over borders in Kashmir or the West Bank.

Although Palestine was only a mandate from 1917 to 1948, and India a longstanding British colony, they were both partitioned in what Robert Schaeffer terms a colonial exit strategy of “divide and quit” (100) – the speed of which ensured that the foundations for future conflict were inherent from the very start. Entire culturally holistic regions such as the Punjab and Bengal were split in two by the Raj in India, and the UN in Palestine allocated over fifty percent of the territory to the Jewish community that made up a third of the population. Borders have been violently challenged and redrawn in both regions (through a series of

border clashes, conventional wars and acts of terror) ever since.<sup>11</sup> Cultural and historical narratives, like literary ones, have therefore played an important part in placing the nation. As Edward Said explains in a conversation with Salman Rushdie, Palestinians always have to go back to the beginning, narrating their origins because “there is nothing in the world that sustains the story: unless you go on telling it, it will just drop and disappear” (*Imaginary* 178). This need to be “perpetually told” (178) as Rushdie terms it, is not only a Palestinian predicament, but part of how communities who perceive themselves as under threat adjust to the changing circumstances of their existence. In the face of constantly shifting territorial lines, national narratives tend to turn to a discourse of biology to fix their visions of the border (as we saw in many of the prevalent partition narrative tropes), recognizing subjects through their ethnicity, and thus attempting to naturalize borderlines through bloodlines. Both regions have seen a rise in majority ethnic narratives in the 1980s and 90s: the *Hindutva* party *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) came to power in India with a parliamentary majority in 1998 and the *Jaama’at-i-Islami* (JI) expanded its electoral appeal through a number of coalitions during the decade of democracy (1988-1999) in Pakistan (Cohen 10). Similarly, Israel’s right-wing Likud gained electoral success in 1977 on a conservative religious ticket, and Hamas became a serious contender for leadership during the *Intifada* of the late 1980s. Alongside this development, these regions have also witnessed an increase in minority groups expressing secessionist desires through ethnic narratives of their own.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> India and Pakistan have fought wars over borders in 1948-49 and 1965 over Kashmir and in 1971 over Bengal. The latter of which resulted in the partition of the East and West wing of Pakistan and the independence of Bangladesh. Israel in turn has participated in multiple wars with the surrounding Arab states over the Palestinian issue (1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982, 2006) and invaded Palestinian territory in 1967 and 2009 (with multiple heavy air strikes as witnessed in 2012), while the Palestinians have resisted occupation in two Intifadas (1988-1993 and 2001 onwards). Non-conventional warfare and violence is also common in both regions, notably through Palestinian (recently, Hamas rocket fire) and Pakistani terrorism (the latest being the Mumbai attacks in 2008). See Farson and Aruri; Cohen; and Shleim.

<sup>12</sup> In India Sikh separatist movements rallied for an independent Khalistan during the 1980s and the Kashmir independence movement remains a persistent force in the Indian territory. Pakistan also faces secessionist movements from the Sindhis, the Mohajirs and the Baluchs (Cohen 201-228). Israel and the Palestinian territories have a much smaller religious and linguistic mix than India or Pakistan,

These partition states thus fear both ‘fifth columnist’ minority populations within (whose ‘prolific sexuality’ might change the nature of the state) and antagonistic states from across the border.<sup>13</sup> Political and cultural narratives therefore tend to seek to justify which ethnic, linguistic or religious groups are considered compatible with society and which are deemed threatening. In such discourses the body becomes a key marker of community as it defines identity and allegiance, even against the will of the individual. As Nicholas Sambanis argues, ethnic violence, in one respect at least, is indiscriminate: it inevitably involves a significant proportion of the population as, regardless of whether they are willingly involved or not, they will be automatically, physically, recognized as the enemy by the rival group. Such a focus on bodies demonstrates what Giorgio Agamben in turn argues about modern states, that the “private biological body has become indistinguishable from [the] body politic” (*Means* 138). Here we have, then, Darwish’s stumps as names again. The fetishisation of the body as symbol during, and as a result of, partition is a case in point. The recovery of abducted women after the Partition of India and the state rhetoric surrounding the violated female body through which the recovery was framed, as Veena Das argues, shows the “metamorphosis [Partition] achieved between the idea of appropriating a territory as nation and appropriating the body of the women as territory” (52). Female lives and bodies became configured as reproductive vessels of the species population and consequently received meaning only as indicators of cultural and national sovereignty. Such examples of gendered discourse emphasize the centrality of the symbolic body in defining the integrity of the state. Similarly, in Israel, the Palestinian body has become a site where Israeli sovereignty is contested through suicide attacks and affirmed through intimate searches at security checkpoints.

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nonetheless, many Palestinian refugee camps are split down sectarian lines with different movements receiving funding from either Shia Iran or regional Sunni countries, not to mention the Christian Palestinians who have felt increasingly alienated by the Islamisation of certain movements (see Lybarger). Israeli politics, in turn, has seen the rise of different religious parties representing Orthodox, Sephardi and Ashkenazi interests respectively, as Ehrlich (60-61) shows.

<sup>13</sup> See Kumar, *Limiting Secularism*, for this argument applied to South Asia, and Newman, “The Formation of National Identity in Israel/Palestine,” for a similar analysis of the partition in the Middle East.

While such biologically-termed political phenomena – a concern with birth-rates, ethnic bloodlines and the bodies of citizens – have become symptomatic of partition societies as Cleary’s and Jassal and Ben-Ari’s studies show, they are also deeply rooted in nationalism and the tropes that different cultures use to imagine the national community. Nationhood is often conceived and articulated through the kind of biological/familial ‘bloodlines as borderlines’ metaphors that have come to be violently implemented by sectarian movements. “[T]he iconography of the familial or the domestic space” (90), Anne McClintock demonstrates in her article “No Longer in a Future Heaven” inspire a sense of shared community:

We speak of nations as ‘motherlands’ and ‘fatherlands’. Foreigners ‘adopt’ countries that are not their native homes and are naturalized into the national ‘family’: we talk of the ‘family of nations’, of ‘homelands’ and ‘native’ lands. [...] In this way, despite their myriad of differences, nations are symbolically figured as domestic genealogies. (90-91)

Difference within the state can be smoothed over through a familial rhetoric of ‘homelands’, and a particular, uniform heritage can be cemented by prioritising the ‘children’ of a certain interpretation of the ‘motherland’ as more legitimate than others. This rhetoric is what aids the “secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning” that the nation offers (Anderson 11). Thus the language of filiation which Edward Said defined as “natural bonds” comes to stand for the “affiliative relationships” of “transpersonal bonds” in a shift from nature to culture (*World* 20).

Partition states, therefore, while often deemed to be more ‘ethnic’ than other nation states, demonstrate what is present in all forms of nationhood. Despite the trend in Anglophone western popular culture, as Barbara McKean Parmenter points out, “to see the Middle East [or indeed South Asia] as a region of irrational and chronic tribal feuding, a land where conflict uniquely inheres in the nature of people and environment” (2-3), such partition areas expose elements of violence and instability that are inherent to all community-

formation.<sup>14</sup> In fact, some nation theorists such as Anthony D. Smith suggest that the nation is based on a “myth of common descent” (or a perceived shared ethnic heritage) which accounts for its popular emotional appeal.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, both Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner, who theorize the nation as related to the rise of print-languages or vernaculars (Anderson) and the imposition of a ‘high culture’ (Gellner), draw on Ernest Renan’s (19) notion that the nation differentiates itself from another by a shared legacy of memories, which has to be controlled or limited. According to Smith’s model, such invented lineages of shared cultural and biological heritage are achieved through the *reappropriation* of past memories, myths and traditions in what could be considered as an “ethno-symbolism.” (*Myths* 9) These reappropriated elements are then held in place and kept current through the structure and framework provided by a national culture (*Myths* 14). The fluid field of custom and tradition is thereby fixed into a national model that sets its own boundaries of cultural and biological heritage as much as territory.<sup>16</sup>

There is, in addition, a long history of anthropological and historical studies which suggest that the particularly biological (or ethnic) nature of the imagined community is linked to not just the nation generally, but specifically the modern state. Before Agamben, Michel Foucault argued that all forms of modern statehood build on a biological discourse of

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<sup>14</sup> This phenomenon has been observed in popular media reports from the past three decades and in more recent academic studies. To give just two pertinent examples: Marc Cherney’s article for *The New York Times* describes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as “shaped by a fratricidal agony: competing centuries-old claims to the same precious strip of land, for the legacy of their common Father Abraham” (qtd. in Schaeffer 11), while Vinod K. Chopra depicts the South Asian partition as “children of the same motherland becom[ing] thirsty for one another’s blood”(10) in his work on *Partition Stories*.

<sup>15</sup> See “The Myth of the ‘Modern Nation’ and the Myths of Nations.” (9) and *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (8), respectively.

<sup>16</sup> For an in depth discussion on the problems of distinguishing between the two elements of nationhood – ‘ethnic’ (as custom, tradition and culture) on the one hand, and ‘civic’ (government, laws and territory) on the other – see Pheng Cheah, who argues that “nationalism is also a universalism” and that the ethnic/civic paradigm overlooks the fact that “both are based on the same normative concept of culture” (8). A ‘bad’ ethnic nationalism, of rigid identities and fixed communities, cannot be contrasted with a ‘good’ civic one of universal humanist values, as legal and political institutions are also a part of any culture (Cheah 8). In addition, Eric Kaufmann and Oliver Zimmer draw attention to Smith’s shift in terminology from ‘ethnic’ and ‘civic’ to ‘organic’ and ‘voluntarist’ in his later work, and suggest that this change attempts to redress these issues by stressing a continuum of processes that overlap and influence one another (74).

bloodlines – of purity and miscegenation – through the rise of *biopower* as a form of sovereignty concerned with entire populations as *humans* (i.e. a form of statehood that determines the biological, as well as political, life of its subjects). Originating from Foucault’s argument that power has evolved from “the ancient right to *take* life or *let* live” to a modern right to “*foster* life or *disallow* it,” a whole field of biopolitics has developed that takes the modern state’s dual concern with the disciplining or “partitioning” of docile bodies and managing the species body of the population (health, mortality, birth rates) as its central focus.<sup>17</sup> In his theory of biopower, Foucault even gestures towards how the kind of vision of nationhood that would drive a politics of partition took shape: he posits in his posthumously published lecture series “Society Must Be Defended” that biopolitical societies are no longer fighting external powers to preserve the sovereignty of their monarch but rather undergoing internal race wars “against those who pose a threat to the biological heritage” (61).

Even outside of Foucault’s poststructuralist model, the idea that ethnic identities are tied to a conceptualization of modernity have taken hold. *Subaltern Studies* historian Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that the seeds of ethnic identification were always present in the inception of the modern state in postcolonial countries such as India. In a similar vein to Anderson, who presented the ‘census, map and museum’ (163) of the colonial regime as the building blocks of postcolonial nationhood, Chakrabarty proposes in *Habitations of Modernity* that the *statistic* – which “has, etymologically speaking, the idea of statecraft built into it” (84) – nature of the modern state, as implemented by the colonial regime to categorize and quantify different groups, drew the kind of boundaries between communities that made ethnic identification possible. Complex multi-faith and multicultural societies did indeed exist in both South Asia and the Middle East prior to the twentieth century which would lend credence to such a reading. Jews have lived in Palestine since early history, though many fled

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<sup>17</sup> See Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* (138-9) for his opposing definitions of sovereignty and taking/fostering life and *Discipline and Punish* (136, 143) for an explanation of the state’s methods of control over bodies.

during the fifth century, creating the modern Diaspora, while Islamic culture and the Indian subcontinent have been entwined since the start of the Mughal dynasty in the fifteenth century. It was the Jewish *aliyah* (return) to Palestine from 1882 onwards that resulted in a change in the population balance between Jews and Arabs in Palestine and a clash between Zionist and nascent Arab nationalisms, and the British colonial policy of 'divide and rule' in the Raj that created political rivalries between the Muslim League and the Congress Party. The rise of ethnic community identification in these areas has thus come hand in hand with a particular version of statehood.

The implication of this survey of nation and state theory is that identity politics, in actuality, operate in tandem with, rather than in opposition to, ideas of transnationalism that have been fostered by technological advances and the spread of capitalism. Anthropologist Jean Comaroff proposes that ethnicity as a mounting global phenomenon is linked to the rise of transnational corporations and liberal movements to popularize 'History' and heritage. As postcolonial nationals come to identify themselves as stake holders in states where governments are in fact macro-managements outsourcing services, they are simultaneously starting to associate heritage with property, defining an age of what Comaroff terms 'Heritage Inc.' In such societies, where history itself can be on trial and perpetrators have to pay off historical debts in monetary reparations, Comaroff suggests ethnicity is being figured as "grounded *both* in a commonality of interest and entitlement *and* in primordial connectedness [...in] myth *and* in materialities like soil, bodies, bones, and blood." (9) The division between a 'regressive' ethnic nationalism and a 'modern' vision of citizenship is thus increasingly difficult to sustain. The contemporary condition of capitalist modernity, centred on the circulation of finance and trade, thus endorses rather than challenges local identities: as the movement and flow of capital and people increases on one hand, the importance of community, identity and consequently borders (physical and epistemic) intensifies on the other. In grappling with the process of bordering territories of any kind (cultural, geographical) as pertinent to any vision

of 'home', contemporary post-partition writers are therefore shedding light on an uneven global modernity where, despite their intertwined provenance, identity politics and cosmopolitan practices are polarizing.

## ii. Literatures of Instability

"[I]t is part of morality not to be at home in one's home" (39), Theodor Adorno wrote about consumer culture in 1944, a reflection that remains equally true of narratives of belonging in the contemporary world. With the rise of ethnic nationalist discourses, as discussed above, it is perceived to be ethical for the intellectual, the writer, the activist, not to feel at home in their home, to express unease, even suspicion at the concept of being 'right' and in place as Said argues in his memoir, and to continuously dismantle all borders as Rushdie encouraged.<sup>18</sup> Intellectual and academic movements in these partition areas have responded, consequently, to the entrenchment of nationalist narratives and communal identities by questioning how 'home' is formulated in local and international cultural discourses. A surge of Pakistani scholarship in the 1990s (represented by Khursheed Kamal Aziz, Sri Raza Mehdi, Ayesha Jalal etc.) identified how the "two nation theory" has dominated Pakistani historiography at the expense of more nuanced understandings of the community.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the late 1980s saw the formation of important revisionist historical schools in the *Subaltern Studies* group in India (comprising Ranajit Guha, Gayatri Spivak, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Gyanendra Pandey, to name but a few of its contributors) and the "postzionist" school in Israel (most notably represented by Laurence Silberstein, Avi Shleim, Ilan Pappé and the now reverted, Benny Morris) who respectively contested nationalist Indian historiography by looking at Indian history from the margins and challenged prevalent Israeli narratives of

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<sup>18</sup> Said states in his memoir, *Out of Place*, that "Now it does not seem important or even desirable to be 'right' and in place (right at home, for instance). Better to wonder out of place, not to own a house, not to feel too much at home anywhere" (294).

<sup>19</sup> This theory suggests that Pakistan and India were always separate nations, even when Muslims and Hindus coexisted in multi-faith principalities and states.

victimhood. Palestinian historiography, in the wake of Edward Said, has also seen a discernible shift towards critiquing Palestinian society itself and its political movements (noted in the works of Amal Jamal, Yasir Suleiman, Ibrahim Muhawi, Joseph Massad and Nur Masalha).<sup>20</sup>

However, the literary space in particular, as part of a 'bordered art form' that must always contain the border it resists, offers writers the possibility of a different kind of engagement with boundaries and the im/possibility of fully crossing them. "I write" Grossman states in *Writing in the Dark*, because "writing creates for me a 'space'" away from absolutes (64), it permits an opening where alternative visions of community can be imagined; "I write" Shehadeh exclaims "so as not to fall silent" (*Yellow* 149-150). Most of these post-partition writers write simply because they feel the urgency to "live better" as Uzma Aslam Khan states in her article on "Fiction and War". They employ the literary space of the text not only as a relief against the "claustrophobia that arises within the words of others" (Grossman *Writing* 19), or the categorical boundaries constructed between the self and others, but as a terrain for mapping alternative forms or visions of belonging, to "recreate, expand, and reimagine the space for articulating, humane, and creative dissent" (*Imam* 285), as Ghosh argues. It is important to note that there is a tendency in postcolonial studies to read the politics of postcolonial literature at the expense of understanding literature as an end in itself.<sup>21</sup> Kamila Shamsie exclaims after facing the 'politics' question in an interview yet again, that she is "not trying to tell people anything. I am just trying to understand."<sup>22</sup> For these writers, if not for all their critics, the literary text is also at times an escape from the political, a recourse to beauty and art in the face of heavily politicised modes of expression.

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<sup>20</sup> These debates about representing partition, independence and nationalist struggles through secular, religious, ethnic and class perspectives have fuelled new partition studies such as Ritu Menon's and Kamla Bhasin's *Borders and Boundaries* (1998), a feminist historiography of Indian Partition; Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* (2000), a partition history from the perspective of its "bit-part players" and Ilan Pappé's alternative history of the *nakbah*, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (2006).

<sup>21</sup> As both Pascale Casanova (in "Literature as a World") and Robert Young (in "World Literature and Postcolonialism" in *The Routledge Companion to World Literature*) point out.

<sup>22</sup> See Shamsie's interview with Commonwealth Writers.

Thus, while interacting with clear material contexts, these contemporary partition texts are also autotelic, ambivalent and unstable, and it is often this ambivalence that writers turn to in articulating alternative forms of belonging or ways of being in the world. Kamila Shamsie, for example, explains her desire to capture a literary space of productive – rather than evasive – instability, through writing:

a city that is the border itself rather than existing within either nation – and in my imagining, the material of which that city, that border, is built dissolves into abstraction and transforms into impenetrable steel as contexts shift around it from one moment to the next. (“Stranger in a Familiar Land”)

Like Shamsie, all the post-partition writers in this study try to capture the border as contingent and illusory in an aesthetic which transgresses and upholds – dissolves and transforms – borders of its own. Straddled between attempting to find a space of dissent at a time when paradoxically, it has “shrunk” as “the world has grown more free” (as Ghosh observes in *The Imam and the Indian*, 285), between surrendering to violent narratives or generating violence oneself, between being a victim or aggressor, these writers work towards what Shehadeh terms a third way, Grossman’s “third, more human option.”<sup>23</sup> They do so by drawing on a cosmopolitan sensibility that attempts to marginalize political, racial, religious and other differences through the vision of a shared humanity. Through such a humanist perspective, however, they reveal the impossibility of not only constructing new borders in their own works, but also that some borders may be ethical necessities in their own right.

While cosmopolitanism is often blind to its own privilege in a world where voluntary mobility is a luxury, historicizing humanism likewise reveals problems integral to its philosophy. As many poststructuralists and postcolonialists have noted, humanism has its roots in the enlightenment rationalism and liberal ethos of emancipation which fed into Western imperial ventures; and its more recent revival as a post-World War antidote to the biopolitical extremes of the Fascist movements (forged by organizations such as the UN and

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<sup>23</sup> See Shehadeh’s epigraph to *The Third Way* and Grossman’s *Writing in the Dark* (66).

contracted by the Human Rights Charter) has, in turn, justified everything from development programmes to military campaigns under the banner of humanitarian intervention. Humanism as an idea and political force has thus revealed its own failings all too well. Critics hasten to point out not only its collaboration with systems of power, but its gender bias, species narcissism and simplification as Mousley summarizes in *Towards a New Literary Humanism* (6). As a philosophy it has, in fact, upheld “the particular nomination of the bourgeois white male citizen to universal subject” (Slaughter 4), and is guilty of ethnocentric universalism, whereby a belief is fostered that one’s own values are “the only values there are” (2) as Tzvetan Todorov similarly concludes. These criticisms could also be levelled at cosmopolitanism, which has similarly suffered from a universalizing tendency that privileges a certain kind of global culture over local forms. There is therefore a form of violence in these discourses of universality too, which levels and homogenizes at the expense of cultural difference.

Some kinds of lines of differentiation in the face of the universalizing, or aggressively expansionist, tendencies of a capitalist understood modernity may therefore be necessary: under the pressure of a globalized world culture, it *can* be moral to be at home in one’s home. Ghosh comments in his essay on “The Fundamentalist Challenge” that in some sense, religious extremism operates as a critique of the political and moral economy of today’s world where “the search for profit [is] the sole or central organizing principle of society” (284-5).<sup>24</sup> It may be, as such, that the local and the ethnic are “the necessary place or space from which people speak” (184) against the homogenizing impetus of cosmopolitanism, as Stuart Hall argues. The rise of a “rhetoric of blood and belonging” (202) – a discourse of kinship and of shared origin – as Szeman also contends, provides a reassertion of difference in the face of the bland universalism offered by globalization. These writers’ ‘borderless’ and anti-border aesthetic and the literary tropes of movement, human rights and cosmopolitanism that they employ to map alternative, more open-ended categories of identity and community, are haunted by

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<sup>24</sup> The version of his essay cited here is from Ghosh’s collection of essays *The Imam and the Indian*.

these other, destructive, if at times necessary, shadow lines – the very systems of bordering that they have sought to deconstruct.

However, people all over the world still suffer from actions of *inhumanity* as Andrew Mousley suggests. Joseph Slaughter, too, points out in his study of human rights narratives that there is an undeniable need to formulate some kind of universal standard by which to hold governments, companies, and communities accountable and tied to an idea of freedom and equality.<sup>25</sup> This need is perhaps most acute in a modernity where, as Said argues, a “politics of identity and partition” rule (*Humanism* 75). Neelam Srivastava argues that concepts such as ‘secularism’, ‘democracy’ and ‘human rights’, while problematic may still “retain a strategic potential for initiating change and providing a lasting framework of values”(14): universalism, despite its pitfalls, may be a necessary evil. If there is an obligation to evade being ‘border guards’, using literary forms (like the novel) that are ‘bordered art forms’ and a literary politics that stems from problematic systems of thought, leaves writers with texts that challenge the border as the limit of community, territory and self – a frontier or threshold that must be crossed and yet which, despite all of this, persists.

I argue, therefore, that this conflicted border imaginary is coming to define contemporary international partition literature in place of its more common signification as a subcategory within the “larger matrix of the Indian novel in English” (Beniwal 1). More than just revisiting partition as a historical event, the contemporary generation of authors are recognizing the “past-in-present-ness of partition as a history that is not done with, or refuses to be past” (Kumar qtd. in Jassal and Ben-Ari 29). Ghosh and Shehadeh, like Aslam Khan, Shamsie and Grossman, demonstrate a deep engagement with narratives which create and defend communities and national identities, without necessarily rewriting the events of partition; and their literature actively engages with the reorganization of political space that

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<sup>25</sup> See Mousley (7) and Slaughter (13).

partition entails, as well as the complex reconstructions of national identity that it elicits. Thus while much comparative work on partition has already been done – Gil Z. Hochberg’s study *In Spite of Partition* proposes a common literary terrain between Israel and Palestine and Joe Cleary has explored the crossover between Middle Eastern and Northern Irish literary traditions; Aamir Mufti’s work on *The Enlightenment in the Colony* looks at Muslim identity in India alongside that of Jews in the Diaspora as examples of a “minor critique”(11); and Ananya Kabir’s study explores the “coexisting multiple borders [...] of competing claims, longings, and histories” (*Territory* 7) of Kashmir – there is a clear post-partition wave of writers from these communities who engage with the body /politic as fluid categories, and who need to be read in the context of a wider global schism between identity politics and cultures of cosmopolitanism.

Starting with the examination of Amitav Ghosh’s conceptualization of a cosmopolitan environment and Shehadeh’s humanist vision of territory in chapters one and two, the thesis moves on to exploring romance and intimacy as models for alternative communities in Aslam Khan’s, Shamsie’s and Grossman’s works in chapters three and four. These writers share more than their regional differences suggest, and the case studies are therefore arranged against the geographical pairings in order to show parallels across not only the borders of specific partition contexts, but also partition regions globally. If Pakistani and Palestinian cultures appear, geopolitically speaking, to have more in common with each other than they do with other areas – terror, Islamism and civil unrest according to popular conceptions – I claim that international texts from these regions resonate equally, and at times more closely, with literature from other, more privileged partition communities. The common geographical focus in Amitav Ghosh’s and Raja Shehadeh’s works, which explore how larger landscapes shape and affect identities, for example, can be juxtaposed with the reverse approach in Uzma Aslam Khan’s, Kamila Shamsie’s and David Grossman’s texts. These Pakistani and Israeli authors map bodies, instead, as metonyms for the community or territory. As a grouping, all of these post-

partition writers are, as mentioned, internationally-conscious, worldly writers, who share a concern with human, territorial and communal cartographies. They map the body, the nation and the state through journeys and intimate relationships: love stories between peoples and people and their land.

There are, of course, some ways in which the regional differences cut across this order of commonality: Raja Shehadeh's and David Grossman's works share a humanist discourse, whether through human rights narratives in the former case, or a re-conceptualized translational humanism in the latter, while the selected South Asian writers express an anti-border aesthetic through a cosmopolitanism that is more general and geographically conceived. While the focus on the human in the Israeli-Palestinian context may indicate an anxiety with the continued violence in the region, the cosmopolitanism present in Aslam Khan's, Shamsie's and Ghosh's texts also serves as a tool to rethink what constitutes a citizen or rights-bearing subject in regions of historical oppression and discrimination (Ghosh for example considers the plight of the refugees in the Sundarbans, and both Aslam Khan and Shamsie touch upon the political demands of the Sindhis in Karachi). The echoes of familiarity and difference (political and cultural) across this cluster of international texts from partition areas, renders them, in Vilashini Cooppan's model, world texts: a category which is shaped by the haunting of a global literary history (*Ghosts* 16).

The writers chosen here are thus not only representative of a particular moment in partition narration – what I have termed a post-partition literature, where the 'post' is both chronological, occurring after an initial traumatic rupture, and a borrowing from postcolonial studies, signifying a *sublimation* of the violent borders stemming from partition – but are also involved in the literary turn from postcolonial to World literature. This project therefore aims to explore questions of citizenship and territory not only in terms of human communities, but also as pertaining to literary texts. Parallel to these writers' investigation of borders *in* the

world, is their self-reflexive examination of the conceptual borders of an emerging world literary space.

Writers who are critical of certain forms of nationalism, have all too often been read by critics as espousing a kind of postmodern cosmopolitanism that has become associated with the disciplinary apparatus of postcolonial studies. A closer look at the literary forms employed by writers such as Amitav Ghosh, however, reveals that the bordered art form of the novel can offer a more complex form of dissent, as my chapter on “Cosmopolitan Places” argues. If the postcolonial or non-metropolitan ‘world’ novel doesn’t put forward a bordered national community or place, it doesn’t necessarily reflect a fluid international space either: celebrations of movement and ‘hybrid’ identities have occasionally been made at the expense of alternative identity formations that are also critical of nationalism, yet which don’t comfortably renounce all forms of local community. Raja Shehadeh’s intellectual pursuit of a “Humane Territory” (chapter two) presents this problem as not just pertaining to the text but to the position of the writer himself in an area that is in a sense ‘post-national’ before having received independence. His travel writing on journeys within his homeland and the wider region, question both how the inside and outside of the national territory are determined, and how such alternating perspectives can inform a literary aesthetic that is at once critical of nationalist, sectarian identities and capable of expressing solidarity in the face of oppression.

Both Shehadeh and Ghosh move towards this common ground between the closely bordered nation and the wider region/world as part of a ‘postcolonial’ literature that is starting to articulate itself as World literature. But such a middle ground is not easily occupied, and sometimes less literary works – such as popular romance fiction – or literature in translation can problematize the ease with which texts travel between the two. Chapter three on “Violent Intimacies” discusses how Aslam Khan’s and Shamsie’s novels explore the validity (and necessity) of writing the local community or articulating cultural difference in a world

literary field that models a form of open and inclusive belonging; while Grossman's oeuvre is exemplary of a withdrawal from the full *worlding* of literature.<sup>26</sup> The final chapter on "Embodying the Political" demonstrates how Grossman shifts away from the celebration of a humanist and linguistic translation between individuals, cultures and texts, as an equally entrenched form of politics.

Like the vacillations between 'home' and 'world' in these partition texts, this project has a double trajectory. It moves both inwards from the wider environmental and national imaginings of Ghosh and Shehadeh, via the interpersonal bonds of Aslam Khan and Shamsie, to Grossman's exploration of the individual human within what he terms the 'armour' of a dehumanizing conflict; and outwards from the novel and the writer-intellectual to finally the World literary field and market. These parallel movements, in their opposing directions, address these questions: is it possible to adequately rethink a humanist cosmopolitanism today as an effective counter-discourse to the biopolitics of nationalism? That is to say, can we redeem the novel, the travel text, the popular romance, as literary works that were "rigorously international from the start" in their circulation but which also, paradoxically, carry the myth of parochialism in their very form, in the exact sense of what Ghosh terms "a parish – a place named and charted, a definite location"?<sup>27</sup> As bordered art forms, can they offer means by which to think past the borders they themselves incorporate?

I propose that reading how these writers wield their authorial power to, as David Grossman claims, "change a world and create a world" (*Writing* 62), reveals a particular understanding of World literature – one arising out of a mergence of 'postcolonial' and 'world' literary and critical practices and which has its parallel in a post-partition aesthetic. In this case

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<sup>26</sup> Djelal Kadir argues in "To world, to Globalize" that "the term 'world' is no longer merely a nominal noun or an expansive adjective" (6) it is also the action of giving literature a "particular historical density" (2) – which is figured more in the terms of a deep temporal experience of cross-cultural and international exchange, than as an engagement with the current political context of texts.

<sup>27</sup> See Ghosh, "The March of the Novel" (18).

'world' is not a nominal for everything written from everywhere, but a category for texts that, as David Damrosch points out, are "present in a literary system beyond that of [their] original culture" (4) where they "*manifes[t] differently*" (6). The contemporary Anglophone international literary field, which has, since the 1980s, been dominated by South Asian literature (as is discussed in chapters one and three) is increasingly infiltrated by Middle Eastern texts by writers in the Diaspora, non-English writers in translation (as seen in the case of David Grossman's oeuvre) and by internationally-conscious 'local' writers like Raja Shehadeh. Such a World literature, coming out of a reading practice that places texts from different regions – Palestine and Israel, Pakistan and India – in what Pascale Casanova terms an unequal 'world republic of letters', differentiates itself from the disciplinary and literary modus operandi of established postcolonial literature. While the latter, as Robert Young states, has a specific political investment, World literature aspires to the universal (217). In other words, if the postcolonial is engaged with the politics of changing the world, to rephrase Grossman, this World literature is, arguably, more engaged with *creating or forging a world*.

Thus while Graham Huggan has suggested that successful postcolonial writers pander to their market or audience, and Pascale Casanova deploys Immanuel Wallerstein's world systems theory to argue that the idea of universality to which texts aspire is exported by the most autonomous regions in the world (*Republic* 86), the conceptualization of World literature that emerges from these post-partition texts denotes neither a purely market-driven field, nor an entirely separate domain from the political and material.<sup>28</sup> It is a category defined by a literary worldliness, a world-making within the text, which both characterizes the text in and of itself and assists it in travelling across geographical and cultural borders.

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<sup>28</sup> Wallerstein proposes that the world should be studied as a discrete global system, which can be divided into more and less autonomous states that have different degrees of agency (355).

# 1

## Cosmopolitan Places: Amitav Ghosh and the World Novel

In attempting to write a literary 'space' for humane dissent, celebrated Indian author and anthropologist Amitav Ghosh explores what the novel can do for a 'borderless' aesthetic that needs to account for both flexibility and singularity under the antithetical discourses of 'limits' and 'freedom' in the contemporary world. Considering the "place-bound nature of literary forms" (5), that Franco Moretti proposes in his *Atlas of the European Novel*, and which partition literature demonstrates in its construction and dismantling of geographies, Ghosh's particular aesthetic 'geometry', of "boundaries, [...] spatial taboos and favorite routes" (Moretti 5), reflects the tension in his own literary philosophy and the predicament of the contemporary non-metropolitan novel. Both are trying to find a fruitful compromise between cosmopolitan and local identity politics. If, as an author, Ghosh has sought to distance his literary output from rigid historical-political categories such as 'Commonwealth Literature' and upheld its role in "building bridges" (Teeman) to other non-Anglophone nations and cultures (even if occasionally politically contentious ones such as Israel, as seen in the recent case of the Dan David prize), his oeuvre has moved in the opposite direction.<sup>29</sup> In his texts Ghosh moves increasingly towards a literary form that reflects not the ever expanding flow and circulation of cosmopolitan *space*, but rather the singular and local movements of *place*. French philosopher Michel de Certeau differentiates between the two in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988), in a useful model that could be applied to how Ghosh's writing has been received: *place*, de Certeau argues, implies a structured "configuration of positions" where each element has its "proper" location, it is thus inherently tied to a stability and notion of

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<sup>29</sup> Ghosh withdrew his novel, *The Glass Palace* (2000), from the nominations list in a letter which stressed how the prize defined nations according to their past colonial status. See "An Open Letter to Amitav Ghosh." In a petition by scholars and writers working in the US, Ghosh was critiqued for accepting (and urged to reject) the 2010 Dan David Prize (given by Tel Aviv University) on the grounds that it undermined the Boycott and Divestment movement set up in aid of the Palestinian cause.

fixity that is not present in *space*, which is “practiced” and “actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it” (117). Ghosh’s resistance towards the border politics of traditional partition narratives has led his oeuvre to be associated with the latter, his writing being read along the lines of de Certeau’s concept of the ‘tour’ – as a story of travel and movement where elements “mingle” (121). Such critical readings, however, have occurred at the expense of an understanding of how the ‘narrative map’ that is “constituted [by] proper places” (de Certeau 121) has informed a more nuanced interpretation of the novel in Ghosh’s work.

Ghosh is concerned with the relationship between a kind of cosmopolitan understanding of lived *space* and the pull of regionally defined allegiances to *place* in a way that has appeared to link literature with a cosmopolitan ethos and the history of partition with repressive nation narratives in highly binary modes. The repeated recourse in his texts to borders and barriers to reflect on categories and limits in any form (and scale) of human interaction reveals a bias for their opposite, movement and flow, which has informed traditional readings of his oeuvre: ‘shadow lines’ come to signify the ‘barrier’ that operate in the perceived difference between classes and ‘races’ (GP 283), that divide families externally (AL 40), and internally (SL 127), and the most private fears that come to bear on our actions (GP 351); while the “imaginary line” that divides conceptions of geography (AL 33) and drives cartography, bases itself on an “explosive barrier of symbols” of cultural difference (AL210) that create the “unbridgeable chasm” between different discourses of ethnicity (AL 263). Ghosh’s works thus portray the border generally, and partition more specifically, as an oppressive cartography where everything has its ‘proper’ location. Such an urge to delimit, in turn, comes to signify both the inherited colonialist and contemporary nationalist urges to categorize difference that shape communities today.

In Ghosh's oeuvre borders not only denote physical phenomena, but epistemic categories as well. They indicate how the delimitations of territory, community and nation become internalized and socialized via narrative processes. For Ghosh, it is clear that narrative should be a boundless, fluid literary space that defies such categorization. In his travel text depicting Egypt, *In an Antique Land* (1992), for example, Ghosh invokes the partitions of the subcontinent and the Middle East to describe the discourses that seek to disrupt and contain longstanding histories of cultural exchange and travel from the twelfth-century Indian Ocean trade to the current day. Ghosh interweaves his experiences as an anthropologist conducting fieldwork on local kinship structures in 'Lataifa' and 'Nashawy' with his research on the medieval Indian slave Bomma (of MS H.6) and his North African Jewish patron, Abraham Ben Yiju.<sup>30</sup> In this account of travel and trade, both contemporary and ancient, he laments the colonial appropriation of the medieval Jewish Geniza documents in Cairo, of which Ben Yiju's letters formed a part, by turning to an analogy of bordering, "It was as though the borders that were to divide Palestine several decades later had already been drawn, through time rather than territory, to allocate a choice of Histories" (95) and later, specifically partition: "the remains of those small, indistinguishable, intertwined histories, Indian and Egyptian, Muslim and Jewish, Hindu and Muslim, had been partitioned long ago" (340). Partition and the process of delimitation it represents thus comes to stand for not only a spatial category, dividing territories and nation-states, but also a temporal discursive one, cutting 'through time' to separate histories and narratives. The novel, too, can allocate such a 'choice of histories', constructing or challenging borders. If narrative is always a "spatial practice" (117) that de Certeau argues can turn either "places into spaces or spaces into places" (118), then Ghosh makes overtly clear that his own work is concerned with upholding the fluidity and mobility of

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<sup>30</sup> These are fictionalized names of Ghosh's actual research locations, as he makes clear in his essay "Confessions of a Xenophile" (5-6).

narratives, as a means to recuperate the 'lost' multicultural world of humanistic – rather than capital – exchange that he portrays.<sup>31</sup>

If spatial categories of borders and barriers for Ghosh come to stand for abstract epistemic divisions upheld by certain narratives (or histories), then these narratives (or novels) in turn can also be categorized and bordered when they enter a larger cultural field. The postcolonial/partition novel occupies a constructed geography in its own right, as Ghosh suggests: it travels in the literary landscape of Casanova's "world republic of letters" or "world literary space" (which in Casanova's terms, truly is "a *space*: a set of interconnected positions, which must be thought and described in relational terms" ("Literature")), where it is often anchored or tied to a national category, received as a spokesperson *for* or representative *of* a particular culture and history. In the wake of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* for instance, much English Indian literature that achieved international success was read through the prism of "a continent finding its voice" (as *The New York Times* review on the Verso editions of Rushdie's novel exclaims). Ghosh's argument for rejecting the 'Commonwealth' title and withdrawing from its associated award, in fact, centred on a particular concern with how larger cultural fields construct certain visions of a literary space and determine the postcolonial novel's place within that market.<sup>32</sup> His disquiet was twofold: first of all, Ghosh argued that the right "to choice, reflection and judgment" – the writer's freedom to choose histories – was compromised by such predetermined narratives (as colonialism of imperialism) filtering our relationship to the past. Secondly, Ghosh suggested that the category of 'Commonwealth Literature' "anchors an area of contemporary writing not within the realities of the present day, nor within the possibilities of the future, but rather within a disputed aspect of the past,"

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<sup>31</sup> Despite this push for intercultural communication that is not driven by discourses of 'modernity' and 'progress', but rather by a humanist discussion of "things that were right, or good, or willed by God" (AL 237), many of Ghosh's novels figure cosmopolitan characters who are mobile precisely because of their participation in trade and commerce. Ben Yiju himself, as well as a host of characters in Ghosh's recent novels *The Sea of Poppies* and *The River of Smoke* are exemplary of this.

<sup>32</sup> See "Ghosh's Letter to Administrators of Commonwealth Writers Prize."

invoking an image of the literary field, like Casanova's republic, as a territory of sorts where texts ought to be permitted to roam freely and find homes of their own. Ghosh sees his own novel as defying the restrictive pulls of categorization on both levels: in terms of the worlds they construct *and* as part of a literary market place that seeks to pigeonhole his text in specific categories. If a dual engagement with historical continuity and rupture, narrative and silence, locality and international exchange thus emerges as the central tenet of Ghosh's literature and politics, his comments on history and narrative specifically collapse the distinction between temporality and spatiality to inform a particular understanding of the cultural sphere as a *space* or landscape wherein texts and histories that uphold their own more or less restrictive imagined communities can be either moored or free to roam. It is this awareness of the novel's dual role in upholding certain categories, both aesthetically and as a consumable object, that renders it possible to reflect on how his conceptualization of the novel itself, as a literary space of dissent, is altered through both overt thematic and implicit formal engagements with the world as *space* and the nation as *place* in an international literary field.

The novel, for Ghosh, must be free to roam outside of such pre-determined limits *and* avoid constructing limits of its own. There is as such a dual concern with the text as what can both restrict, by consolidating certain borders and communities via a 'narrative map', and what can itself be restricted. If the novel, both straddles its "vigorously international form" (17) and the "myth of parochiality" it is founded upon (18), as Ghosh argues in "The March of the Novel through History," *and* can construct or challenge borders via writing the nation community or broader, cosmopolitan configurations of identity, then it also faces a similar dichotomy as an object in a mobile, at times uniform, 'world literary space'. Moretti proposes in "Conjectures of World Literature" the "world system" – of "one but unequal" – as a model for this field, where the market imposes certain forms (such as the novel, Moretti argues) globally. While, as the above example of *Midnight's Children* goes to show, postcolonial novels

have often been read as national narratives (in no small part due to Fredric Jameson's vision that the third world novel is always a national allegory), in Ghosh's case, the opposite reading is clearly true. Contemporary 'Third World' literature or postcolonial novels such as Ghosh's are increasingly read as responding to a certain kind of cosmopolitanism. The blurb of the 2005 Manner Books edition of *The Shadow Lines*, in contrast to *Midnight's Children*, advertises the novel by the observations made by *The New York Times Book Review*: "stunning... amusing, sad, wise, and truly international in scope."

Ghosh, as a well-travelled writer and anthropologist, has become synonymous with a cosmopolitan sensibility that rejects the strict bordering or naturalization of communities on behalf of nationalism and chauvinism, in favour of an engagement with the world that is based on movement and flexibility. Robert Dixon and Shameem Black both cite James Clifford in defining Ghosh a writer who promotes a "dwelling-in-travel" (Dixon 4, Black 52), Bishnupriya Ghosh considers him a "cosmopolitical" writer and Neelam Srivastava and Priya Kumar view his works as 'secular' explorations of the "syncretic identity of South Asia" (71) and an "ethics of coexistence" (xv) respectively. All of his fiction, bar *The Hungry Tide*, is set in more than one, or even two, modern day nation-states and he overtly favours using the novel to map larger, borderless, forms of belonging, exclaiming in a letter to Dipesh Chakrabarty that while "Two of my novels (*The Shadow Lines*, and my most recent, *The Glass Palace*) are centred on families" this focus is "a way of *displacing* the 'nation' [...] writing about families is one way of *not* writing about the nation (or other restrictively imagined collectivities)" (147). It is thus clear that Ghosh is averse to writing anything as closely bordered as the nation, and his oeuvre has consequently become representative of a kind of cosmopolitan ethos. Whereby cosmopolitanism, which translates from its Greek origin as being a 'citizen' (*polites*) of the 'world' (*cosmos*) rather than a specific *polis*, is invoked as not only shorthand for an allegiance to humanity as a whole (rather than the nation or the local community), but as representative

of a certain kind of identity rooted in travel.<sup>33</sup> However, while this critical focus has a clear foundation in Ghosh's work, it has overshadowed a second less visible, but equally strong concern in his literature: the concern with a more productive relationship to locality or fixity and place.

Ghosh's relationship to other more limited or fixed forms of belonging have been overlooked in favour of the dominant interpretation of his work through the prism of travel and 'travelling theory'. Undoubtedly, Ghosh is a writer who is conscious of postcolonial criticism, engaging with both its theory (his correspondence with Dipesh Chakrabarty is only the most overt example of this) and its historical methodology (see his contribution, "The Slave of MS H.6," to the *Subaltern Studies* series). However, both his fiction and non-fiction explore the categories of difference created by colonialism that are inherited and maintained by the rigid boundaries of the nation state *and* the capacity of lived culture and literature to move beyond them, in the latter case, notably, through an exploration of other pre-colonial and postcolonial modes of being or forms of belonging (as we will see in his novel *The Hungry Tide*). As such he is not only a proponent of the kind of migratory and exilic flows and movements through which critics such as Homi K. Bhabha and Arjun Appadurai have theorized postcoloniality, but is also aware of the singularity of regional forms of resistance and categories of identity that are not 'carried across' the globe as Bhabha's metaphors.<sup>34</sup> While Ghosh clearly presents his literary politics as cosmopolitan, his aesthetic practice reveals a more complex relationship to the bordered *place*/fluid *space* paradigm than has previously been recognized. Ghosh is certainly engaged with a cosmopolitan aesthetic enterprise, however he is not quite so unproblematically 'secular' as Srivastava suggests all Anglophone

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<sup>33</sup> See Kwame Anthony Appiah's *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* and Bruce Robbins' "Introduction Part 1: Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism" for a detailed discussion of the different meanings of the term.

<sup>34</sup> Bhabha argues in "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation" that "Metaphor, as the etymology of the word suggests, transfers the meaning of home and belonging, across the 'middle passage', or the central European steppes, across those distances, and cultural differences, that span the imagined community of the nation-people" (291).

Indian writers are, nor is he quite so enamoured with all forms of mobility as this cosmopolitan focus implies.<sup>35</sup> Not only is Ghosh deeply engaged with the kind of dialogue that faiths exercise internally and with one another, but, more importantly for this study, he is engaged with the singular, the local and the untranslatable in a way that is more linked to regional and traditional forms of belonging and belief than his cosmopolitan outlook might suggest. It is this engagement with *place* as intrinsic to the 'bordered art form of the novel' that becomes central to how Ghosh conceives of literature as dissent.

The distinction between the closely bordered national or local culture and community from a cosmopolitan fluidity of identity and mobility is thus not quite as definitive as it might initially seem in Ghosh's texts that appear to embody the virtue of travel. The lived practice of *space* is explicitly tied up in the focus of his literature, and the deconstruction conversely of any kind of fixity of *place* is one of its intrinsic aims, however, in so doing, Ghosh has visibly challenged and complicated his initial cosmopolitan aesthetic. His oeuvre explores the overlap rather than the dichotomy between *space* and *place*, or how *space* interacts with *place*, in order to consider the possibility of opening up Szeman's 'zones of instability' in literature. These unstable literary spaces where 'humane and creative dissent' can be imagined to challenge the oppressive discourses of both bordering and 'freedom' provide not only a vision of different textual, historical and communal forms of exchange and fluidity, but also present a model for alternative forms of belonging. A study of Ghosh's more overtly cartographically engaged novels – *The Shadow Lines*, *The Glass Palace* and *The Hungry Tide* – reveals that the novel itself, for Ghosh, becomes a form which has to negotiate the particular postcolonial locations it comes from if it wants to act as a form of 'humane' dissent against both repressive forms of nationalism *and* a universalizing global culture.

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<sup>35</sup> Srivastava's study explores the different approaches within "the secular framework of the Anglophone novel" (1), which is taken as a given.

### i. Violent Movements

Ghosh's early novel, *The Shadow Lines* (1988), like his travelogue *In an Antique Land*, appears to reflect a neat dichotomy between *space* and *place* as continuity and rupture, coexistence and partition, endorsing the standard readings of Ghosh's cosmopolitanism. The novel itself, which moves between the imperial metropolis and the postcolonial 'periphery' and relates the story of two families – one Indian, the other English – and the intersection of their lives through the Second World War to the early 1980s, often appears to pitch the opposing pulls of 'roots' and fixity against travel and flexibility in a binary which has no doubt come to colour the kind of aesthetic of an 'international scope' that Ghosh has been celebrated for (as we saw earlier in *The New York Times Book Review's* comments on the novel). However, *The Shadow Lines* also depicts a clash between different subjects of narrative – between the nation (that is the subject of a teleological history of modernity as Gyanendra Pandey (2) argues), and a more universal human history, articulated through a thematic engagement with *space* and *place*. This dichotomy becomes problematic, however, as it becomes clear that the discourse of freedom that seeks to challenge the state, or resist the bordered narratives of nationhood, may in itself be part of the type of teleological narrative of modernity that constructs categories of difference as Dipesh Chakrabarty also warns ("Postcoloniality" 11). *The Shadow Lines* increasingly suggests, therefore, that resistance, or the space of dissent, has to come from a narrative of some kind of alternative "subject positions" of an "antihistorical consciousness" (that Chakrabarty proposes), which may be able to negotiate a form of placed cosmopolitanism.

In *The Shadow Lines* national narrative practices come to be associated with a coercive and violent kinship that stands for the tyranny of the 'border' or a reductive and fixed relationship to community and territory. The "placental presence" (118) of the narrator's grandmother Tha'mma represents such an aggressively ethnic nationalist discourse in the

novel. Her domineering character, at the head of the narrator's household, drives both the tragic unfolding of the plot and operates as a foil to the alternative cosmopolitan identities presented in the text. So much so that she comes close to a caricature in the novel – avenging the narrator's attachment to his cousin Ila (of whom she disapproves) from beyond the grave: after Tha'mma's death, the narrator receives a warning from the principal of his college, who, it transpires, had received a letter condemning the narrator's behaviour sent from Tha'mma's deathbed. Her otherworldly influence aside, Tha'mma primarily invokes a particularly violent form of community and ethnic nationalism. She not only emphasizes a link between the body and the security of the state, "you can't build a strong country, she would say, pushing me out of the house, without building a strong body" (8), and the overriding importance of sharing "the same flesh, the same blood, the same bone" (126) as a determining factor in community, but also advocates "that controlled, accurate violence which was the quality she prized above all others in men who had to deal with matters of state" (144). As the tragic unfolding of events come to show, this makes for a potent combination of biologically defined community and statecraft through force that spirals into a near-psychotic blood lust after the narrator's cousin Tridib's death in a riot in Dhaka, as she exclaims when donating her most prized jewellery to the (anti-Pakistani) war fund, "We have to kill them before they kill us; we have to wipe them out" (232).<sup>36</sup>

This discourse of blood and belonging that Tha'mma's version of her personal history and the nation's represent, cements a particularly fixed interpretation of the unity of nationhood and territory that echoes the discourse of the state, which Gyan Pandey argues via Hegel "creates history, the subject matter and the prose of history"(2). As Tha'mma makes clear, the border as a narrative trope, even if constructed (through shared sacrifice) will turn arbitrary, or more flexible elements, into a closely ordered stable structure:

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<sup>36</sup> While Tridib's death is not directly Tha'mma's fault in the novel, it is her insistence on rescuing her uncle from his home in Bangladesh to take him to India that causes the family to be travelling as a riot breaks out.

Everyone who lives there [in England] 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 [...] 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. (76)

In her preaching mode, the retired teacher Tha'mma demonstrates how narrating bloodlines becomes a way of cementing the heterogeneous and fluid cultural, ethnic and linguistic elements of the community into a fixed and bordered nation. Her rhythmic listing of blood reaches a near spiritual vision of historiography.

Tha'mma and her national identity therefore represent the kind of nationalist narrative that Ghosh in *The Shadow Lines* attempts to resist, where communities have their own separate "positions" (de Certeau 117) which are violently naturalized through genealogy. The discourse of fixity is representative of a particular kind of literary partition narrative that, as we saw in the introduction, draws on ethnic metaphors to imagine a community. Tha'mma's narrative of her childhood home in Dhaka forms the arbitrary 'choice of histories' inherited by the narrator. As the relationship between Tha'mma's father and her uncle or Jethamoshai deteriorates, they decide to divide the house with "a wooden partition wall" in a familiar partition trope. "[T]here was no other alternative," Tha'mma explains:

But the building of the wall proved to be far from easy because the two brothers, insisting on their rights with a lawyer-like precision, demanded that the division be exact down to the minutest detail. When the wall was eventually built, they found that it had ploughed right through a couple of doorways so that no one could get through them anymore; it had also gone through a lavatory, bisecting an old commode. (121)

In this family story passed on through the generations, partition is both shown to be an arbitrary act of violence that closes off doorways of exchange and communication (even those that are forged through sewage), the "indistinguishable and intertwined histories" (AL 340) of coexistence with a 'lawyer-like precision', and the ever narrowing concepts of family, and an inevitability: 'there was no other alternative'.

Knowing one's rightful 'place' through a carefully ordered narrative of the history of the community becomes representative of a negative discourse of belonging in the novel which, in turn, is associated with a violently ethnic ordering of nationhood as opposed to the cosmopolitan outlook of more mobile characters. Tha'mma's theory of nationhood, for example, affirms her conviction that Tridib's niece Ila deserved her racist assault in London because she "has no right to be there. She doesn't belong there" (76). *The Shadow Lines*, as such, rejects national narratives as violent and proposes in their stead a border-crossing narrative that unifies not only *space* but humanity. Tridib, the narrator's cousin, comes to stand for this alternative narrative of belonging to Tha'mma's nationalist history. He speaks of "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" (29), as the novel itself aspires to do. The body, less of a marker of difference in Tridib's eyes, operates as a common element of humanity, driving people towards each other and the unknown, crossing borders and the gaps that separate them. This desire for community with all strangers is not only privileged in the text but pitched as predated its opposite, a modern ideology that has placed such a 'primitive' idea of commonality under threat.

*The Shadow Lines* thus proposes a vision of the novel as a necessary tool for carrying one beyond 'the limits of one's own mind' or cultural location that is very similar to the conclusion of *In an Antique Land*. In a poignant moment of Ghosh's recollections of his time in Lataifa he describes an argument with the local Imam in which the Imam's offhand remarks about the 'backwardness' of Indian customs result in a shouting-match about the relative 'progress' of their respective nations in terms of "science and tanks and guns and bombs" (236). Not only the anthropologist, but the writer, it is implied, needs to avoid entering into competing "claim[s] to the technology of modern violence" (237), discourses of 'progress' and

'development' that bring out Rushdie's 'border guards' (as mentioned in the introduction of this thesis). The form of communication and exchange that is presented by "Ben Yiju or his Slave, or any one of the thousands of travellers who had crossed the Indian Ocean in the Middle Ages" (236) calls for a disengagement with the teleological narratives of modernity that fuelled colonialism and which now drive competitive nationalisms.

The novel then offers a *space* where Ghosh stresses it is imperative for the postcolonial or partition area writer to promote as well as portray alternative forms of belonging through movement, travel and exchange. As Tridib reminds the narrator, "we had to try because the alternative wasn't blankness – it only meant that if we didn't try ourselves, we would never be free of other people's inventions." (31) *The Shadow Lines*, as such, uses its own literary space to contextualize all places as fluid and arbitrary constructs, even the territorial border between India and East Pakistan is revealed to be invisible.

But if there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, what's the difference then? [Tha'mma 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 inbetween? (148-49)

There is nothing inbetween, precisely because there are only imaginary differences, *The Shadow Lines* demonstrates both in plot and form. The border as a referent to political discourses of exclusivity and kinship cannot conceal its own arbitrariness. It fails, in fact, to separate mobile and intermingling subjects or to map out any tangible difference. Like Tridib's teaching, the novel itself shows that strictly ordered places like the nation do "not merely exist [...they have] to be invented in one's imagination" (21), thus it is always already mediated through not so much experience as the psychological/ideological borders that people create for themselves. Implied by this image of the invisible border is how all *place* is actually de Certeau's lived or practiced *space*, subject to change through perspectives, narratives and ideologies.

Ghosh's own narrative thus strives for a different vision of 'home' to Tha'mma's, one in which the house collapses instead of constructs all difference into a universal and flexible sense of belonging. If the narrator's cousin Ila tries to order her ideal house like a national narrative (in the same way that Tha'mma's house is a national allegory), the fluid houses in the novel, including her own, resist such a placement. In one sense the house that Ila draws in the basement of the Raibajar house (when they are playing 'houses' as children) is an ideal version of the Price's house in London where she spends some time as a child, an ordering of the world which is neater than reality, just as the story of 'Magda' the girl with "bright, golden" hair and "deep blue eyes" (71) who gets bullied in school and rescued by Nick Price, is a preferable alternative to Ila's own racially-motivated assault in London (when Nick Price is conspicuous by his absence). However, such maps of reality are actually destabilized by the text. This sketched house within another house gives the narrator a map of the Price house, and continuously haunts his time there as not only its own inverse, but the possible map of all houses. As the narrator visits the Price house with Ila for a last time before leaving London, they are drawn to the basement that conjures a vision of the Raibajar basement (178). Ila's 'ideal' imagined house thus offers the possibility for imagining other houses and other kinds or forms of living – both the version of the house with a 'veranda', which the narrator insists Ila adds to her drawing (69), and the Colombo house that is emblematic of a completely other form of living that Tridib urges the narrator to imagine through considering "what it would be like to live under a sloping roof – no place to fly kites, nowhere to hide when one wanted to sulk, nowhere to shout across to one's friends" (29). Instead of constructing a bordered narrative (a 'choice of histories'), Ila's sketched house thus collapses all maps into the one, as all houses begin to recall each other in the text. Cartography becomes redundant: all *places* are in fact *spaces*, habitations of fluid subjects and referents to flexible identities.

The house in Ghosh's text therefore appears to explode any notion of a stable and structured "configuration of positions" or "proper locations" (de Certeau 117). As a 'narrative

map' it is reflected in the novel's own form, and acts as what Foucault terms a heterotopia: the role of the imagined houses in the novel "is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory" ("Other Spaces" 27). The house as a leitmotif assumes the very characteristics of *The Shadow Lines* itself. It is both "enacted utopia", "a placeless place" where "all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted" and a real place, a "location in reality" ("Other Spaces" 24) similar to the novel, which tries to destabilize all narratives within its own. The houses, like the multitude of mirrors in the text, thus challenge the position that the narrator or reader occupies. If Ila tells her experiences through her blonde and beautiful Caucasian doll Magda, then Nick Price in turn "became a spectral presence beside [the narrator] in my looking glass; growing with me, but always bigger and better" (49). Raibajar is the inverse of the Price house, Dhaka that of Calcutta (as Tha'mma cannot decide which one is 'home' and which one is away), and moving between England and Germany during the build-up to the Second World War, Mrs Price's brother Tresawsen comments, is like "stepping through a looking glass"(65). Thus the fixity of the central subject/location is shaken in the text as each character/home gets thrown into a mirror relationship that undercuts any notion of singularity. The houses become referents for the act of mirroring itself, how *place* and *space* interact as geographical realities that are always spatially conceived, imagined, and reinterpreted, "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" (228), the narrator comments. As a bordered art form that seeks to defy national narrative cartographies, like the house, Ghosh's novel thus collapses all locations and chronologies into one in a veritable cosmopolitan aesthetic.

Ghosh's conceptualization of the novel therefore employs family narratives (and depictions of 'home') to uproot and destabilize the fixity of all borders or categories of difference. This is not only evident in *The Shadow Lines* but also in Ghosh's later novel, *The*

*Glass Palace*, which laments the loss of a truly cosmopolitan age where all locations and identities were mobile and fluid. *The Glass Palace*, which tells the story of three different intermarried families from India, Burma and 'British Malaya' trading and travelling the region in the 19<sup>th</sup> -20<sup>th</sup> century, constructs a fluid borderless vision of the region. This globalized space is populated by 'citizens of the world' that, like the well-travelled villagers of contemporary Egypt with "passports so thick they opened up like ink-blackened concertinas" (AL 174), echo the men of the medieval Indian ocean trade, whose "surnames often read like the chapter headings of an epic, link[ing] them to sleepy oases and dusty Saharan market towns, places like El Faiyum and Tlemcen" (AL 55).

*The Shadow Lines*, like *The Glass Palace*, strives for a literary world that would uphold the kind of coexistence and free communication which Ghosh sees as intrinsically linked to earlier literary forms such as the epic. The story of Tristan and Isolde, which Ghosh goes to great lengths to point out predates the novel as a narrative form ("March" 19), and which carries the promise of cosmopolitan resistance to *place* by promoting a "translatability – the dispensable and inessential nature of their locations" ("March" 19), thus becomes the novel's own ideal literary model:

Where did it happen? I asked. Which country? Ah, said Tridib. That's the trick, you see. It happened everywhere, wherever you wish it. It was an old story, the best story in Europe, Snipe said, told when Europe was a better place, a place without borders and countries – it was a German story in what we call Germany, Nordic in the north, French in France, Welsh in Wales, Cornish in Cornwall: it was the story of a hero called Tristan, a very sad story, about a man without a country, who fell in love with a woman-across-the-seas. (183)

While the story of Tristan and Isolde is only alluded to briefly at one point in the narrative when Tridib as a child listens to Snipe's version in the basement of the Price house during an air raid, the reference arrives at the apex of the circular narratives of the first half of the novel, and as such produces a model for not only Tridib's own philosophy – of the mobile ever translatable homes in the text – but also an analogy for his character (Tridib/Tristan) and his

desire to meet May as the “completest of strangers – strangers-across-the-seas”(141). Moreover, Tristan and Isolde as the true universal story, ‘placeless’ and applicable everywhere, is clearly a model for a cosmopolitan aesthetic as Ghosh describes it in “The March of the Novel Through History” (1998). Ghosh comments how “everywhere it went” the story “immediately adapted to new locations and new settings”, making the question about its “original locatio[n]” (19) redundant. This vision of a cosmopolitan literary practice sees the story/narrative as completely disconnected from specific locations – a cosmopolitan literary form that similarly seeks to move through the material world as a perpetually translated fluid literary *space*.

Despite this overt preference for cosmopolitan communities and identities in *The Shadow Lines* – in both form and content – as outlined above, the text in actuality rejects the neat hierarchy it occasionally appears to set up (which has been so appealing to critics) between *space* and *place*. The novel itself comes to straddle the border between a kind of cosmopolitan aesthetic and a more traditional national narrative form. A complete renunciation of all fixed locations and speaking subjects becomes in the end problematic in *The Shadow Lines* in a hitherto unrecognized way, suggesting that *space*, and with that the border-crossing cosmopolitan discourse it stands for, is not entirely positive. Ghosh’s narrative in the novel, for example, reflects Tha’mma’s confusion over ‘coming home’ or ‘going away’.

“[T]he fault wasn’t hers at all,” the narrator comments:

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 (150).

Just as this explanation suggests, some form of mapping is intrinsic to language, and as we will see to Ghosh’s novel also. Tha’mma’s confusion which is both historical (her birthplace and nationality do not align due to the seismic shifts in populations during the Partition) and political – her neatly ordered world view of states and their functioning, an “enchantment of

lines" (228) – does not reflect the messier realities of the blurred edges between communities and families, and cannot be merely dismissed as a regressive fixation with *place* as it comes to have a more intrinsic relationship to the novel itself.

While any attempt to view the world as a neat cartography and the persistent search by people for a fixed point from which to speak from (often provided by ethnicity in the face of the cultural homogenization of globalization, as Stuart Hall argues), are undermined in the plot and thematic of the novel as we have discussed above, they are reflected in the narrative structure of the novel in a way that legitimizes this desire for 'fixed positions'.<sup>37</sup> The novel is divided into two sections 'Going Away' and 'Coming Home', and although the simple trajectory of these terms appears to be interrogated by the circularity of the narrative form, the journey to find a fixed point in language does in the end have its correlation in the text. The narrative, which repeatedly oscillates between the narrator's adult experiences in London and in Calcutta and his, Tridib's, Ila's, Robi's and Tha'mma's childhood experiences in Calcutta, London and Dhaka, rendering no 'coming' or 'going' entirely possible as all geographical concepts become purely relative, in the end breaks into a kind of linearity.

The cyclical narrative in *The Shadow Lines*, rather than mapping cycles of change and exchange (as seen in *In an Antique Land*), revolves around a fundamental trauma. The spinning narrative both builds up to and evades a final disturbing shattering of fixed positions, that can only be dealt with in narrative, paradoxically, through linearity. If the first half of the text oscillates between the many houses, the cyclical nature of the second half breaks into a kind of chronology when revealing the events that happened to Tridib. The violent episode in Dhaka thus has an effect on the narrative that reflects Gyan Pandey's description of Hindutva historical pamphlets where "the circular character of the narrative, which returns to the same point again and again, and in which nothing changes" (81) disrupts into a kind of linearity

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<sup>37</sup> See the introduction (28) or Hall's "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity" (184).

when suggesting a possible conclusion today. This similarity is important to note, as the collapsing of houses, places and times begins to imply a kind of ubiquitous universality of *space* where all places collapse into one another in text, which, if not similar in its aims to the supremacist Hindutva pamphlet, has its echo in the homogenizing force behind sectarian violence.

While 'going away' is indeed a constant return to home, as in fact all places in the text can be read with familiarity through the model of the house that maps on to everywhere, coming home is altogether more problematic. The two return journeys (the narrator's as a child on a school bus during a riot in Calcutta and Tha'mma's return to Dhaka to bring her Uncle 'back' to India) are disrupted precisely by the same kind of cartographic instability, the fact that places can collapse into each other, "the disarrangement of our universe" (199) – this time not a reassuring part of travel and cosmopolitanism, bringing people together through their shared humanity, but a deeply alienating and traumatic recognition.<sup>38</sup> Read in this light, the passage cited in the Introduction of this thesis, where the narrator looks through Tridib's atlas, reveals a more complex aesthetic in Ghosh's work than a straightforward anti-border cosmopolitanism. As he tries to work out the distance between Srinagar in Kashmir (where a Muslim relic is stolen) and Khulna (where violence broke out in response) and draws a circle of that radius with Khulna in the centre, the narrator realizes how violence overwrites cartography to reconfigure the globe as fluid, arbitrary space:

[the circle] 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 Hue 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

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<sup>38</sup> Tha'mma insists on bringing him 'back' despite the fact that born in what is now Bangladesh he had never been to contemporary India.

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. (226-27)

This geographical incantation in the text is worth quoting at length precisely because of the way that proper place names disappear into a cyclical chart where any sense of a fixed point is lost in the dizzying speed at which the globe turns. While this passage could be read as endorsing the kind of cosmopolitan aesthetic that folds all locations into a more positive engagement with the world through fluidity and mobility, this reflection on cartography is rather linked to the “strangest journey” (219) the narrator makes, a voyage into a different kind of land: a land of violence. This land where violence spills across nations and borders to echo in far removed locations follows the logic of de Certeau’s *space* and promotes Shameem Black’s and Robert Dixon’s ‘dwelling-in-travel’ rather than the “the tidy ordering” of a Euclidean cartography of nation states (SL 227).

Violence in Ghosh’s text, despite the discourse of fixity and bordered communities that it often appears to guard, is thus revealed to operate through a concept of geography that is actuated through movement, in the way that de Certeau’s *space* indicates. As Aamir Mufti argues in the context of the Ayodhya riots, sectarian violence is “the only act of communication that could not be interdicted at the borders of the nation-state”(1). This demonstration of how all ordered locations can be turned into relative, overlapping positions effects an awareness of *place* as *space* that is not liberating, but terrifying:

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 the 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, nor 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. (200)

The ‘spaces that surround one’ are for once hostile rather than liberating, and the ability of violence to defy geographical, cartographical or national logic, to break through fixed locations

and cause disarray is pitched as far more terrifying than the more mappable fear that comes from the violence of modern statehood that Tha'mma emblemized, and the natural threats harboured within the particular environment one might inhabit. The full realisation of the arbitrariness of place, the spinning of a globe where any 'stillness of the earth' is no longer possible, results in the terror of the loss of any kind of cartography at all as 'normalcy is utterly contingent'.

If maps and boundaries are perceived as obstacles to the desire for community with all 'strangers' (as Tridib professes), or the type of xenophilia that Ghosh highlights in his work, then the loss of any fixity of geography leads to a different fear altogether, a fear for "the loss of the map" (94) that Ghosh depicts in his essay "The Greatest Sorrow." Despite predating 9/11, the passage from *The Shadow Lines* above neatly reflects Ghosh's vision of global terrorism and the future it implies. Inspired by Martin van Creveld's study *The Transformation of War* (1991), Ghosh argues that warfare based upon a "close intermingling with the enemy" pushes the nation-state to trespass the boundaries set by its own "body of rules, laws, and principles" and so brings down its own legitimacy (96). This realization leaves him, like the narrator of *The Shadow Lines*, with the sense that "a bucket had been upended on the map, making the colours run" (96). The 'loss of the map' here is clearly not the positive collapsing of all homes through a universal ethics of cosmopolitanism; rather, the end of the state's "power over time" (94) that comes from its inability to protect its citizens, and consequently its unsuitability, in a Hegelian sense, to "provid[e] the grid on which history is mapped" (93) and with that the present and the future, results in an 'earth' – and 'identity' – shattering terror.

This version of what Ghosh terms the 'death of teleology' ("Greatest Sorrow" 94) is a thoroughly negative one: flow, exchange and the destruction of closely guarded boundaries are not liberating, but a different kind of epistemic violence to the discourses that determine fixity and borders. In their abandonment of any kind of order, they "tea[r] apart the stories

through which individuals link their lives to a collective past and present” (“Greatest Sorrow” 98) Ghosh reflects. It appears then, that Ghosh’s text, like his essay, may move towards accepting the necessity of narrative (and consequently of the novel) to create some kind of sense of *place* through something approaching a narrative map if not what Anthony D. Smith terms a “myth of common descent” (“Myth” 9).

Reflecting back on the novel, it is possible to spot the loss of the map as trauma in the initial moment in *The Shadow Lines* when the ever transportable model homes, collapsing into one another (as emblematic of the cosmopolitan novel), are introduced: the narrator recalls the moment Ila unveils the table underneath which they come to play houses, when “everything vanished into a cyclone of dust. I can still see it, taking shape slowly within that cloud of dust” (47). Already then, at this moment where text constructs the concept of fluid home and the spinning of maps into each other, the transportable *spaces* carry the threat of destruction in their eye. Similarly, Ghosh’s categorization of all maps as negative elements of modern discourse contains its own contradiction as he reflected when arguing with the Imam about “science and tanks and bombs” (AL 236), that “We were both travelling, he and I: we were travelling in the West” (AL 237). Certain kinds of movement, rather than presenting a positive challenge to fixity and boundaries, may thus be part of the problem. *The Glass Palace*, similarly, presents the highly mobile class of tradesmen and capitalists, who like the military and colonial powers, can afford to harness *place* and its resources for the pure functioning of their own spatial mobility, as a kind of oppressively (if not restrictively) imagined collectivity in their own right. The King of Burma reflects, “What vast, what comprehensible power, to move people in such huge numbers from one place to another – emperors, kings, farmers, dockworkers, soldiers, coolies, policemen. Why? Why this furious movement – people taken from one place to another, to pull rickshaws, to sit blind in exile?” (50). By the novel’s end it is clear that while the British colonial regime had the power to set up such movements of people and resources away from their homes, it is the mobile cosmopolitan tradesmen who continue

this process of 'modernity', engaging with everything around them as malleable and deployable, in "an age when aviation would make the world so small that the divisions of the past would disappear" (253).

It is not surprising then, that the narrative in *The Shadow Lines* begins to follow some kind of linearity as it recounts the events leading up to the riots and Tridib's death. The narrator's 'strangest journey' is precisely one that, like Tha'mma's problem with language, seeks to relocate fixity in endless violent flow. Despite his fear of forcing meaning onto the events, the narrator does, after all, give us a full account of Tridib's death, so much so that May at the end of the novel indicates how we should interpret Tridib's final actions that lead to his death.<sup>39</sup> This is clear, too, in the recourse to nature, which becomes the alternative (rooted) site to the eternally movable *space* of the home. If violence, like the terror it creates, is *not* like that of an 'earthquake', then the only way to contain it, to force it into some kind of logic of speech (which might give the speaking or writing subject Stuart Hall's notion of fixity) is through natural metaphors: as seen in the narrator's description of the streets during riots turning "as hostile as a desert in a flash flood" (SL 200). Nature can thus produce a model for fixing or placing, without bordering.

The vision of the novel as a *space* (in de Certeau's sense of the term) of dissent clearly has a shadow line of its own. This borderless aesthetic, that encourages the reader to let go of any cartographic or temporal moorings, is darkened by a different kind of *place* that foreshadows Ghosh's later aesthetic focus. Beside the collapsing houses of Ila's story and Ghosh's narrative lies another kind of geographical site altogether, one that is neither mappable, a charted fixed location, nor actuated through movement. The shantytown near the narrator's grandmother's relatives, "a patchwork of stagnant pools, dotted with islands of

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<sup>39</sup> May argues that Tridib "gave himself up" and entered the fray during the riots not to save her (who as an "English Memsahib" was effectively untouchable), or even with the conviction that he could save Tha'mma's Jethamoshai and the driver who were under attack, but as a kind of "sacrifice" for his beliefs in a shared humanity. (246)

low raised ground" (131), presents a natural threat that reminds the narrator that even this kind of cosmopolitan *space*, where home can be located in all other homes, can be reduced to the tyranny of a different kind of *place* altogether – not the constructed map of nation-states and fixed identities, but the simultaneous inhospitability and accommodation of nature. The narrator looks at the landscape of shanties and pools of sludge, and becomes aware that "its presence was palpable everywhere in our house," that "if I didn't study hard I would end up over *there* [...] marooned in that landscape" (131). The gravitational pull of this mutating landscape, rooted to the particular environment, hampering social and physical mobility, yet transferable enough to become anyone's home, forms a clear inversion of the house heterotopia. "[T]hat landscape was the quicksand that seethed beneath the polished floors of our house; it was that sludge which gave our genteel decorum its fine edge of frenzy" (132), Ghosh writes in an image that introduces 'nature' as a concept that can disrupt the *space/place* dichotomy in his cosmopolitanism. This becomes increasingly clear in *The Glass Palace* and *The Hungry Tide* also.

Shameem Black has argued, similarly, referencing Anthony Kwame Appiah, that Ghosh develops a kind of 'rooted cosmopolitanism' "invested in a traditional idea of feeling 'at home' in the world' and more committed to recognizing 'the world' through the home" (45). However, while Black contends that this cosmopolitanism through the home is achieved via the social relationships that tie the individual to their family, cosmopolitanism "paradoxically emerge[s] through an embrace of domesticity and kinship" (45), it appears rather that Appiah's definition of a cosmopolitanism that "reconcile[s] a kind of universalism with the legitimacy of at least some forms of partiality" (*Ethics* 223) translates, in Ghosh's oeuvre, to an understanding of the singularity of *place* as location and culture, and not merely kinship.

Treating the loss of the map in Ghosh's text as trauma, *space* takes on a completely different meaning, and placement – as the neat organization of elements or de Certeau's

'stability' – could be considered as something potentially productive. The paradoxical onset of increasing freedom and the closing down of dissent, that Ghosh was cited as commenting on in the introduction, demands a challenge to the problems of cosmopolitanism as well as resistance to restrictively imagined collectivities (as Ghosh stated to Chakrabarty), if literature aims to be both 'humane' and 'creative'.<sup>40</sup> If violence acts through *space*, then the opposite is also true, narratives of *space* (fluid cosmopolitan flow) can also be violent as Robi comments on the perils of a discourse of freedom, "all those pictures of dead people – in Assam, the north-east, Punjab, Sri Lanka, Tripura – people shot by terrorists and separatists and the army and the police, you'll find somewhere behind it all that single word; everyone's doing it to be free" (241). The discourse of freedom in the novel thus indicates how the kind of liberty associated with the free movement, circulation and trade of a cosmopolitan politics, in fact, reflects the movement of violence as precisely a border-crossing phenomenon interacting with the world as constantly translatable *space*. Thus *The Shadow Lines* introduces Ghosh's increasingly paradoxical vision of dissent that promotes a flexibility of identity and community that is not tied to freedom, movement and fluidity, but rather conceptualized through the local, the singular and the bound.

Freedom in the novel becomes increasingly linked to the kind of teleological narrative that reflects the history that the nation state writes for itself. Chakrabarty similarly argues that 'freedom' as constructed by modern political philosophy was invoked in the colonial arena in aid of ideas such as 'civilization' and 'progress' (22), and *The Shadow Lines* demonstrates how as a discourse it has been used to justify not only independence but also violence. While Ila justifies her 'cosmopolitan lifestyle' in a shared house in London through her desire to be "Free of you! [...]Free of your bloody culture and free of all of you" (87), Tha'mma stresses how happy she would have been to join her old classmate in his terrorist cell and kill an English magistrate "for our freedom: I would have done anything to be free" (39). The novel that

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<sup>40</sup> See *The Imam and the Indian* (285), or the introduction (26).

seeks to construct a 'humane' space of dissent thus has to step away from completely embracing such discourses as the narrator of *The Shadow Lines* reflects:

I thought how much they all wanted to be free; how they went mad wanting their freedom; I began to wonder whether it was I that was mad because I was happy to be bound: whether I was alone in knowing that I could not live without the clamour of the voices within me. (88)

There is a recognition here that the only possible route to coexistence is through accepting your bondage, if not specifically to your family (as Shameem Black suggests but which is never specified in the text), then to humanity at large. This kind of affiliation to others has moved away from Tridib's cosmopolitan notion of being "far from their friends and relatives – in a place without a past, without history, free, really free" (141) to a position that recognizes that each individual is inextricably tied to other people, a position which demands not only a recognition of our impact upon one another as humans, but also a recognition of our own limitations.<sup>41</sup>

*In an Antique Land* reaches a similar conclusion when Ghosh explains how slavery in the time of Bomma and Ben Yiju operated under a different form of bondage, revolving around "human connections, pledges of commitment" (263) that had not only a closer tie to apprenticeship but also to loyalty. As the preferred metaphor for devotion for both the Vachanakara saint-poets and Sufis of Bomma's and Ben Yiju's time, Ghosh argues that slavery presented the possibility of transcendence, representing the "perfect act of love" that could turn its object into the slave of their slave (262). In this neat conceit Ghosh captures a philosophy that could bend the needs of *space* to those of *place*. The slave – or the bound – becomes the master through the act of self-sacrifice and therefore presents one of the "other construction of self and community" (10) that Chakrabarty suggests "entail subject positions and configurations of memory that challenge and undermine the subject that speaks in the

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<sup>41</sup> David Grossman, in particular, advocates this idea through his focus on individuals who 'come undone' by each other, as we will see in the final chapter on "Embodying the Political."

name of history”(11). We begin here to see a preference not so much for Clifford’s concept of ‘dwelling-in-travel’, as Ghosh is usually read, but rather for Clifford’s alternative, less quoted, analysis of Ghosh’s essay “The Imam and the Indian,” as a work promoting a “travelling-in-dwelling” (8), whereby subjects can stay rooted and still travel.

The map, then, in Ghosh’s text is not just a definitively negative concept, a hang-up from a colonial world order, inherited by nation-states that seek to fix and patrol difference through increasingly stringent identities. It also becomes the double-edged source of a kind of nostalgia, for order if not for borders, a recognition of the necessary acceptance of one’s own boundaries in connection to both others and geographical locations. Thus while one would expect Ghosh’s novel to function along the lines of de Certeau’s concept of the ‘tour’, writing for an understanding of the world as fluid rather than discretely separated places, which he has been celebrated for, a closer look at the development of Ghosh’s cosmopolitanism, reveals how movement and flow is increasingly questioned as he eventually promotes a form of belonging that is more closely linked to *place*. Ghosh promotes the latter as a site of resistance to oppressive discourses of boundaries *and* freedom, and the novel, also, ultimately comes to capture this fluidity in being bound, as we will see in the different engagement with nature (that seething landscape beneath the cosmopolitan house) as a setting in *The Hungry Tide*.

It is possible, recalling the alternative destabilizing force simmering beneath Ghosh’s houses, to map the same kind of disillusion with *space* in *The Glass Palace*, formulated via the thematic foregrounding of nature. In the context of a natural world, the internationalism of the novel’s main families, based on the flow of trade and extraction of resources, is constructed as a form of negative spatiality. Saya John comments to the youth Rajkumar (whose apprenticeship with him is the start of the interweaving of two of the families the novel depicts) “To bend the work of nature to your will; to make the trees of the earth useful to human beings – what could be more admirable, more exciting than this?” (75). The bending

of nature to one's will, is clearly a far more negative depiction of how *place* is actuated through *space* (mobilities, practices etc.) than the different homes of *The Shadow Lines*: a forced movement of labour and machinery rather than a cosmopolitan pleasure of travel. More importantly, a cosmopolitan mobility appears to work against not only neat cartographies, but nature itself. The movements of the new epoch, the flow related to technological and industrial 'modernity' operates under the guise of nature, "Witnessing the nascency of the new century in America, they were able to watch at first hand the tides and currents of the new epoch. [...]They saw that new patterns of work were being invented, calling for new patterns of movement, new ways of thought" (221), the narrator in *The Glass Palace* reflects. But like the flood that turns normalcy into contingency, these 'tides' and 'currents' stand for a more threatening movement across the globe, the movement of machinery of commerce and warfare (the characters trade in timber and rubber – both products that fuel militaries), where men like natural resources are not only transferable to fight other's battles, in other regions (as seen in the army of the Raj as much as the Second World War), but ultimately expendable. As such, the 'tides' and 'currents' bring an ultimately destructive and dehumanizing kind of deracination into force: turning men into machines.

The international or secular identity promoted by the British army in India, for example, where Indian officers prove themselves not only through "investing in metaphors that sometimes extended even beyond kinship" (278) but also, by "ris[ing] above the ties of their soil, to overcome the responses in stilled in them by their upbringing" (279), becomes a model for a negative de-rooted cosmopolitan identity. The militarized body as excessively regimented and controlled is placed in juxtaposition with more natural metaphors for men, as we will come to see. Arjun (the nephew of Uma, friend of Rajkumar's wife Dolly), who is an officer in the army of the Raj, is portrayed as exemplary of how man separated from kinship and 'soil' becomes mechanized – another cog in the wheel of 'modernity' and 'progress'. Military bodies, like Arjun's, are repeatedly referred to as 'machines' in the text, reduced to

their component parts: Arjun's colleague who increasingly doubts their role in the colonial army explains to Arjun "mercenary's hands obey someone else's head; those two parts of his body have no connection with each other" (347), Alison – Saya John's granddaughter – tells Arjun that his "mind doesn't inhabit [his] body" (376) and Arjun when he decides to mutiny finally contemplates, "it was as if my heart and my hand had no connection [...] It was as if I wasn't really a human being" (407). If the militarization of bodies in *The Glass Palace* is a direct reference to the operation of the colonial machinery, it nonetheless has its echoes in the later texts of this thesis, as shorthand for the biopolitics of modern statehood. People are reduced to their bodies, and their bodies to their component parts, in a manoeuvre that removes not only agency, but an ability to imagine alternative forms of belonging and coexistence. This gesture ties the kind of universalism that the human body can represent to the oppressive discourse that is associated with an aggressive delimitation of community and territory. War itself turns hills and forests into gridlines, "The landscape was like a map" (399) Ghosh tells us, an oppressive cartography with flames "strung closely together in straight lines" (399). The mapped body and the mapped landscape are once again controlled and harnessed by the modern machinery of violence. If Arjun asks, "in what way do I become a human again?" (407), the answer in the novel lies in a movement towards nature.

If the family saga permitted Ghosh to write about other, non 'restrictive collectivities' (as he claims in his letter to Chakrabarty), then nature appears to offer him a way of speaking about community and identity without the notion of national borders, or biological (rather than ecological) 'roots'. Saya John's son Matthew explains how his rubber plantation in British Malaya is run to the sceptical Uma in terms that showcase Ghosh's nature-bound discourse:

'It's no easy thing to run a plantation you know. To look at, it's all very green and beautiful – sort of like a forest. But actually it's a vast machine, made of wood and flesh. And at every turn, every little piece of this machine is resisting you, fighting you, waiting for you to give in [...] An enormous amount of human ingenuity has been invested in making these trees exactly similar. They're called clones [they're all the same except for one tree] It looks all right – no different from the others. Think of all

the human effort that has gone into making it the same as the rest. And yet...’ – he pointed into the almost-empty cup, ‘... there you are’. (232-33)

The highly resonant imagery of a wild forest Eden turned into a vast ‘machine’ of ‘wood and flesh’ points exactly to this combination of man and environment as dispensable resources in a discourse of modernity that follows the flow of capital across the globe. However, built into this attempt to harness and homogenize, to “tame” and “domesticat[e]” (233), to rule with law and order (233), lies resistance: “it’s fighting back” (233) Matthew comments on the tree. This resistance is part of nature itself, and cannot be engaged with simply through science – “Botanists will tell you one thing and geologists will tell you another and soil specialists will tell you something else again” (233) Matthew warns – nor through a directly political reading of the land, as the tappers say “every rubber tree in Malaya was paid for with an Indian life” (233). It can only be understood through a mingling of the two: a recognition of how man interacts with the environment as both a mappable domain, and as a wilderness that men create and alter through their dwelling, a paradoxical merging of *place* and *space* that foreshadows the kind of coexistence between livelihood and science that Piya and Fokir in *The Hungry Tide* represent.

This conceptualization of nature as something that cannot be easily mapped or unproblematically spatialized, a natural order that inherently defies the imposition of any kind of manmade order, whether imperialist or capitalist (Matthew refers to the plantation as his ‘empire’ (233)), does not, however, represent a discourse of naturalized difference such as that of ethnic nationalism. Men, like trees, are ‘lopped off’ not only in the name of movements of trade and exploitation – colonial and neo-imperial – but also in the name of its reverse, exclusive identities like Tha’mma’s form of nationalism. The return of the violently ethnic purist idea of nationhood rears again in *The Glass Palace* as the equally violent double of the movement and ‘flow’ of capitalism across the globe. If commercialized trees reflect the men who work on them in the plantation, then through ethnic violence, men, in turn, are reduced

to dead wood. When Uma visits Dolly in Burma during a Burmese nationalist campaign to expel Indian migrants (and so prevent 'miscegenation') the change in the local community not only coincides with an earthquake – again the 'stillness of the earth' is shattered by the ability of violence to reshape geographies and communities – but the instance of violence that Dolly and Uma witness on the streets of Rangoon yokes men and trees together once more:

They sat transfixed in their seats as the da scythed through the air in a circular motion. The rickshaw-puller had almost reached the far end of their windscreen when suddenly his head toppled over like a lopped-off branch, hanging down over his spine, held on by a thin flap of skin. But the body did not fall instantly to the ground: for a fraction of a second the decapitated trunk stayed upright. (244)

The references to the 'lopped-off branch' and the 'trunk' of the body, no doubt are meant to mirror the arboreal resistance to Matthew's plantation. This passage thus cements a particular kind of vocabulary to think about the human and the body as separate from both a resource based discourse of absolute free trade and flow and the converse extreme of purity and ethnic bloodlines. It is this vocabulary which revolves around reinserting an awareness of location and community, of roots (but natural rather than genealogical) that comes to the fore in *The Hungry Tide* through a conceptualization of "nature: the nature that made these trees and the nature that made us" (233), as Matthew reflects.

Nature as a theme and setting thus begins to meet the dissenting novel's need for *place*. In the ekphratic tropes of *The Glass Palace* we see the development towards a focalization on forms of dissent that are limited and 'bordered', as Brennan defines the novel. While not structurally suggesting a clear solution, the visual nature of Ghosh's text reflects the dilemma between landscape as resource and the singularity of location in a way that introduces a different model for dissent in Ghosh's oeuvre. While the universalizing gaze that harnesses and exploits people and resources, turning everything into consumable *space*, is reflected in the sweep and scope of *The Glass Palace* and its imagery, the novel also contains an alternative form to this violently mobile gaze: the restrictive glimpse of the photograph.

After the story reaches a dizzying pace where the lives of some of its central characters are dealt with in two or three pages, the novel ends with a stalling of time: Rajkumar's adult granddaughter reflects on the single moment of intimacy – and humour – that she witnesses between the elderly Rajkumar and Uma when their dentures become entangled and “their mouths clung to each other as they shut their eyes” (546). The image of the dentures in the tumbler, jaws interlocked, “each reaching deep into the mouth of the other, each biting down on the other's teeth” (546) would provide a rather biting analogy of the capacity for community among the long epoch's survivors, if it wasn't followed by the absurd kiss as Rajkumar and Uma claim their respective sets of teeth. By the end of this epic novel, there is therefore not only humour, but intimacy and joy in these small mundane moments. While the regions the novel covers are flattened into one long cinematic image, landscapes and localities reduced to glossy vistas, *The Glass Palace* also presents an alternative vision for engagement with the world: “it is not what you eat that makes you modern: it's a way of looking at things” (279) Rajkumar's son Dinu, the photographer, says to the deracinated Arjun.

The form of the photograph brings temporality to stagnation, focusing in on the moment, the singular and the framed. When faced with the “vastness of the landscape” of the rubber plantation, Dinu moves “closer and closer” to details with his camera, “following the grain of the lascerite and the pattern of the moss” (349). This capacity for focus in an attentive proximity links the photograph to both intimacy between people – as Alison's and Dinu's intercourse is likened to the process of developing photographs in a dark room, “imprinted” on each other, “for one thing to become irradiated with the shadows of another” (444) (a way of rethinking the community that we will also see in the works of Shamsie and Aslam Khan) – and resistance. Dinu as an old man, living under the Burmese regime teaches students in his photography studio that “new and revolutionary art may awaken a people, disturb their complacency or challenge old ideals” (510) as I would suggest his focus, if not his photographs, also do in Ghosh's following novel. Moreover, the narrative occasionally breaks from its

cinematic gaze to focus in on the single moments that give character to its epochal sweep. The lush scenes of the jungle awakening under the shadow of the peak of Gunung Jerai give way to the isolated sounds and images that break the stillness of the landscape – flocks of birds that “rise screaming from the surrounding trees and that go boomeranging through the skies, only to settle back in exactly the same spots from which they had risen” or the distant echo of the “backfiring of the Daytona” (350). These evocative glimpses bring Dinu’s experience in the forest to life.

*The Shadow Lines* and *The Glass Palace* thus introduce doubt into the free-flowing cosmopolitan aesthetic, as they attempt to marry ‘freedom’ or movement with a complete loss of cartography. If Ghosh’s novels are read as attempts to articulate a literary ‘space for dissent’, to demonstrate both the problem of a sectarian nationalist desire to control *place* and the pitfalls of an aggressive cosmopolitanism over-writing the globe, they struggle to fully combine both in straightforward ‘tour’ narrative of cosmopolitan aesthetics. The easy model of resistance through translation, as presented by the Tristan and Isolde narrative, is abandoned, as the free translation of *places* into *spaces* becomes increasingly problematic (as the plots of the novels indeed show). Thus *The Shadow Lines* and *The Glass Palace* provide no easy models for a literary dissent: while clearly making room for witnessing both the violence of borders and an alternative borderless cosmopolitanism, they harbour their own doubt that cosmopolitanism and its related discourse of freedom and trade may imply a kind of violence in its own right. *The Glass Palace* thematically introduces the possibility of a natural place that could defy both the flattening universal and the aggressively restrictive nation and presents the concept of the photograph – the still and framed moment in time – over the circular and layered narrative of *The Shadow Lines* or the long and epic scope of *The Glass Palace* itself. The model for dissent presented by Ghosh in his subsequent text moves toward an understanding of the flexibility and singularity inherent in specific places as conveyed by a narrative form that makes *place* intrinsic to the narrative of the novel.

## ii. Natural Flows

If *The Shadow Lines* problematizes any easy dichotomy between a negative, ethnic form of nationalism and the 'freedom' of a flexible cosmopolitanism, and *The Glass Palace* introduces an idea of resistant *place* through nature, then *The Hungry Tide* – Ghosh's most rooted novel, set in not only one nation, but a very specific region, the Sundarbans – explores the possibility of not only dissent through *place* but an alternative form of belonging. It does so through its highly focalized natural location and thereby promotes an entirely different vision of the literary 'space of dissent' that the novel can offer. Rather than the cosmopolitan narrative cycles and digressions, that collapse all difference – temporal or spatial – into another universal story of what it means to be 'at home in the world', this text suggests, like Moretti's analysis in his *Atlas*, that a literary form can be intrinsically tied to a place, that "*each space determines, or at least encourages, its own kind of story*" (Moretti *Atlas* 70). Location, Ghosh argues in his essay "The March of the Novel," is "intrinsic to the novel," which must "always be set somewhere" in the "exact sense of a parish – a place named and charted" (18). *The Hungry Tide* provides an exploration of itself as such a *placed* novel, trying to represent both the local *and* the need to dismantle/cross all borders.

The novel clearly promotes a 'bordered' aesthetic model, framing, zooming and focussing on the singular as the theme of the photograph in *The Glass Palace* proposed. Just as Piya the scientist's binoculars first catch sight of Fokir – the local fisherman whose relationship to Piya is one of the central plotlines of the novel – introducing him to the text visually, from a distance, "a stationary speck" "anchored on the far side" (41) that grows – the novel zooms closer and deeper into the Sundarbans, inviting the reader, like two of its main characters, Piya and Kanai, to enter further and further into the landscape. The novel is an obvious reflection on "the tales that animate the struggle over Nature that is now being waged all around the world" (32) that Ghosh elaborates on in his essay "Wild Fictions," depicting the arrival of an

international scientist of Indian descent (Piya) and a businessman whose relatives live there (Kanai), it follows their respective journeys through the labyrinthine waterways to a closer understanding of not only the environment (Piya is researching the Gangetic dolphins) but the human cost of state-enforced environmentalist discourses.<sup>42</sup> However, it is also writing another model of belonging to counteract a cosmopolitan aesthetic via the landscape itself and the various ways that the characters inhabit it. As such, the novel eventually also explores how the text itself operates as a literary ‘space of dissent’, demonstrating Ghosh’s aesthetic vision for how narrative and the novel can engage fruitfully with the delimitation of a cosmopolitan *place*.

The Sundarbans as a setting provides a model that is innately flexible rather than restrictive. Mutation and transformation is part of the landscape rather than a symptom of how people filter that landscape as cosmopolitan home (as in *The Shadow Lines*) or deploy it as commercial resource (as in *The Glass Palace*):

The rivers’ channels are spread across the land like a fine-mesh net, creating a terrain where the boundaries between land and water are always mutating, always unpredictable [...] When these channels meet, it is often in clusters of four, five or even six: at these confluences, the water stretches to the far edges of the landscape and the forest dwindles into a distant rumour of land, echoing back from the horizon. In the language of the place, such a confluence of is spoken of as a *mohana* – an oddly seductive word, wrapped in many layers of beguilement. There are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea. (7)

This description of the landscape presents a natural alternative to the map – the ‘fine-mesh net’ – where boundaries and borders, while present, are impossible to fix. Nature is thus constantly in flux, limits and communities are malleable, as even natural boundaries such as shores and islands are turned into ‘echoes’ and ‘rumours’, subject to change. The shape-shifting islands, which disappear and re-emerge like the “floating biodomes” “with their own patterns of flow [that] chang[e] position constantly” (125), actually provide a flexibility that is

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<sup>42</sup> Kanai’s uncle’s, Nirmal’s, notebook depicts the massacre of the refugees who settled protected land in the area in a last attempt to find a ‘home’.

not universal but unique to the specific location. Thus, to a certain extent, the tide country of Ghosh's novel also functions as an inverse textual heterotopia, "creating a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled" (Foucault "Of Other Spaces" 27). Except, here the ill constructed and the messy are an order in themselves, a model for community and coexistence that marries *place* and *space* through the malleability and flexibility belonging to a highly specific, if not neatly bordered, location.

Riding the waves of its tides, the tide country in fact brings the world to itself, rather than vice versa, remaining a fixed point – a 'travelling-in-dwelling' – through which not only waters but people and languages move: "Everyone who has ever taken the eastern route into the Gangetic heartland has had to pass through it – the Arakanese, the Khmer, the Javanese, the Dutch, the Malays, the Chinese, the Portuguese, the English" (50) Nirmal tells Kanai, and consequently its mud banks are "shaped not only by rivers of silt, but also by rivers of language: Bengali, English, Arabic, Hindi, Arakanese [...] Flowing into one another they create a proliferation of small worlds that hang suspended in flow" (247). Thus the tide country itself becomes the "roundabout" (247) where an ordered movement capable of suspending global movements for a moment – if unpredictable to humans – is rooted in the landscape, suspending for a moment global movements. It therefore echoes the highly situated novel's own desire to reflect a kind of cosmopolitanism *and* a respect for *place* that is against both exclusive ethnic definitions of 'home' (many of the main characters as Mukherjee (116) points out are refugees) and the universalizing tendencies of cosmopolitanism (as exemplified by the state which liberalist concern for the environment does not recognize those without a home or nation).

The setting mirrors the novel's own desire to be read as a placed cosmopolitan object – both singular and open to be read by others. The novel, like the location it depicts, *The*

*Hungry Tide* suggests, has to be open for reinterpretations, for others to inhabit and alter it, in order to avoid policing restrictive boundaries. We can see this in Ghosh's configuration of the landscape in the novel, which permits a fluidity of readings and identities to coexist in the community at once. "[T]he language of the place" (HT 7) holds multiple different visions and discourses, as Nirmal ponders:

in a way a landscape too is not unlike a book – a compilation of pages that overlap without any two ever being the same. People open the book according to their taste and training, their memories and desires: for a geologist the compilation opens at one page, for a boatman at another, and still another for a ship's pilot, a painter and so on. On occasion these pages are ruled with lines that are invisible to some people, while being for others, as real, as charged and as volatile as high-voltage cables. (224)

*The Hungry Tide*, like the region it depicts, embraces a multitude of alternative readings. It promotes "reimaginings of nature" (in plural) that are "as varied as the natural world itself" ("Wild Fictions" 76), through an equality in reading that upholds the coexistence of different narratives of being in the world, rather than choosing the violently nationalist or the blandly cosmopolitan. While the social reformer S'Daniel, the founder of the habitation, envisions a kind of socialist utopia, seeing how the land had lain fallow for hundreds of years, he hopes to create a "model for all of India [...] a new kind of country" (52) where every able-bodied working man is welcome, provided they leave behind their "little divisions and differences" (51); Kanai's uncle Nirmal, the teacher and the poet, reads the landscape through a mix of Marxism and poetry, viewing the regions through Rilke's statement as "life [...] lived in transformation" (282) and embracing an endless adaptability. These dreams for the landscape (as a potential utopia – Foucault's 'placeless place') are balanced by the highly located needs represented by Piya's and Fokir's engagement with the environment. While Piya the scientist observes the area as "a codex that had been authored by the earth itself" (269), a landscape which unique ecosystem and biodiversity have to be protected for the necessary well-being of the planet, "the planet that keeps us alive" (301), rather than the individual or community; Fokir in turn masters the waterways and islands, the rhythm of the environment and its

threats, as a necessary livelihood, a source of life. Undoubtedly, then, the variety of forms of belonging that the Sundarbans permit, operate through a kind of 'environmental unconscious' that Ghosh defines (borrowing from Lawrence Buell who coined the term) as "an overlapping of the pragmatic and the poetic, a broad acknowledgement of mutual dependence, in which rights, mutual obligations and a sense of a wonder are seamlessly merged" ("Wild Fictions" 46). *The Hungry Tide*, as an English novel strives, as such, for the kind of composite quality that the Bon Bibi myth that is upheld by its inhabitants achieves as a "verse form called *dwipoldi poyar*" written by a Muslim and venerated by Hindus (247).

This kind of fluid geography as a model for the *placed* cosmopolitan novel, does not take on the ever-adaptable, perpetually translated forms of the Tristan and Isolde story, but rather reflects a more linear and rigid form where the place itself enacts the plot. Not only does the water defy colonial exploitation (washing away "Englishmen's palaces as well as houses and huts" in 1737 (204)) and commercialization – Lord Canning's project to create a port on the banks of the Matla where they would build "hotels, promenades, parks, palaces, banks, streets" (285) goes ahead despite warnings only to be washed away by a storm in 1867 (287); but it also avenges the violence committed by the state as Nirmal's last words, heard in his final sighting in Canning before his death, "The Matla will rise!" (26) indicate that the flood will likewise punish the landscape for the massacre of the settlers on Morichjhāpi. Nirmal is alluding of course to the cosmopolitan discourse of an environmentalism which causes the suffering of society's poorest, for the benefit of "urban tourists" who perpetuate a "wild fiction" that the forests were ever "pristine" ("Wild Fictions" 63). The flood does indeed arrive at the end of the novel, reminding, as it wreaks havoc on the settlements and causes Fokir's death, that it is always the landscape that overrides the movement of the subjects that inhabit it and that spatial engagements with the region by inhabitants or outsiders are always secondary to the movement inherent in the natural location. Kanai's uncle Nirmal tells the young Fokir "waters must prevail" over the human inhabitations "later if not sooner" (205).

Geography in the novel thus suggests that the placed novel can challenge the violent discourses of both nationalism and cosmopolitanism.

The landscape itself, while constantly in flux, operates within the kind of fixity of language that the narrator of *The Shadow Lines*, and Tha'mma, both searched for. The storms, like the islands and the floods, arrive and retreat in a neat replica of the 'going away' and 'coming home' narrative structure of *The Shadow Lines*, and the novel, which is divided into two sections, interweaves Nirmal's account of the events on Morichjhāpi preceding the violent eviction and massacre of the settlers and Piya's research in the Sundarbans leading up to the inevitable storm that kills her guide, Fokir. In *The Hungry Tide* as such, the focus is not on any one moving subject, but the moving landscape 'The Ebb: *Bhata*' and 'The Flood: *Jowar*' where the inevitable – if not calculable – floods provide their own temporality and movement capturing, if often cruelly, a 'travelling-in-dwelling'. The tide is also a narrative of its own kind, "no place was so remote as to escape the flood of history" (77) Ghosh reminds us via Nirmal, and the circularity of the narrative setting thus reflects the linearity of the plot which sees tragedy as the inevitable outcome of attempting to either fix or translate the place. Thus while *The Shadow Lines* stresses the loss of fixity for the increasingly mobile cosmopolitan subject, *The Hungry Tide*, conversely puts forward the landscape of the tide country, of *bhatir desh* ("*bhati* is not just the 'tide' but one tide in particular, the ebb-tide, the *bhata*" (8)) with its rising and falling, ebbing and flowing, as the subject that speaks. Therefore, although the novel sets up mirrors like *The Shadow Lines* (as the Kanai-Piya-Fokir love triangle has its direct parallel in Nirmal's unrequited love for Fokir's mother Kusum who in turn is in love with Horen), they do not displace the subject, or collapse cartography, but instead re-centre the subjects, bringing them back to 'home'. Kanai and Piya both decide to stay in the Sundarbans at the end of the novel and the novel itself proposes the importance of a *place* named (as in claimed) if not charted. The singularity of its narrative, its movements inherent to the location,

reinserts difference into the novel that strives to reintroduce, as Chakrabarty implores in the domain of historiography, radical heterogeneity.<sup>43</sup>

The novel, as such, provides (as *The Shadow Lines* and *The Glass Palace* also suggested) a strong case for being placed and bound as an alternative construction of self or community that entails a different “subject position to that subject which speaks in the name of history” (110) or the nation that Chakrabarty has presented. Together they represent Ghosh’s ‘needs and rights and wonder’, of an ‘environmental unconscious’, effecting a reconciliation between Bon Bibi and Saint Pierre’s recluse (who presented a discourse on nature as defined by the exclusion of humans), “between the quest of a scientist determined to prevent the disappearance of a species and the needs of a fisherman who must hunt in order to live” (“Wild Fictions” 81) – in other words, between the limit of nature and the limit of man. As Piya does her research from Fokir’s boat she reflects how their opposing needs can be met simultaneously:

the stops required for the layering of the line seemed to be ideally timed for the taking of soundings. [...]It was surprising enough that their jobs had not proved to be utterly incompatible – especially considering that one of the tasks required the input of geostationary satellites while the other depended on bits of shark-bone and broken tile. But that it had proved possible for two such different people to pursue their own ends simultaneously – people who could not exchange a word with each other and had no idea of what was going on in one another’s heads – was far more than surprising: it seemed almost miraculous [...] and] he too was amazed by the seamless intertwining of their pleasures and their purposes. (141)

This redemptive image of coexistence is not only a vision for the human’s relationship to nature, but fundamentally for community itself. Both Piya and Fokir can align their visions, because they are based on not only a similar drawing of lines in the landscape, the identical ‘layering’ of fishing line and GPS routes, but also imaginary boundaries to their own existence. Their similar cartographic activities (mapping the routes of dolphins or intercepting the

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<sup>43</sup> Chakrabarty argues in “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History” for a history that will “look towards its own death by tracing that which resists and escapes the best human effort at translation across cultural and other semiotic systems, so that the world may once again be imagined as radically heterogeneous” (23).

movements of crabs) reflect their own acknowledgement of some kind of limit or line. While Piya lives by her conviction that humanity cannot cross “that imaginary line that prevents us from deciding that no other species matters except for ourselves” (301), and Fokir, like Horen and his mother Kusum, believes that “this chimerical line [separating humans from Dokkhin Rai] was [...]as real as a barbed-wire fence” (224), they are both willing to limit their own impact on their surroundings and freedom, to be bound not merely to each other, but to the place itself. These lines are of course more similar than they initially appear, while Piya is horrified by the inhabitants (including Fokir) killing a tiger, Fokir’s line, in turn, is also about restricting human impact on nature. The Bon Bibi legend which suffuses the entire novel tells of the division of the jungle between Bon Bibi’s realm, where humans are protected, and the realm of Dokkhin Rai – the tiger – permitted to reign over his wilderness in return for the territory he rescinded to human settlement. Thus Ghosh returns to a vision of shadow lines in this novel, this time as a redemptive and productive means for respecting difference, rather than forcing it through violence.

This vision of community through some kind of drawing of lines, even if porous ones, is the only possible form of belonging that Ghosh’s novels come to. Coexistence has to, *The Hungry Tide* suggests, occur through limitation, freedom through being bound, and any kind of cosmopolitanism as dissent has to revolve around travelling-in-dwelling rather than the reverse. Similar to Tridib’s tragic death at the end of *The Shadow Lines*, sacrificing himself, not to rescue Tha’mma’s Jethamoshai and his driver, but to intervene on behalf of his belief in a common humanity; Piya declares her willingness to die for her cause to Kanai, “If I thought giving up my life might make the rivers safe again for the Irrawaddy dolphin, the answer is yes, I would” (301-2), and Fokir, of course, tragically does die – not at the hands of the tiger/Dokkhin Rai that punishes any trespassing into his realm, but at the hands of the flood, protecting Piya. As such the novel promotes a kind of community that is based on the sacrifice of life, both for the environment and for one’s fellow man. Moreover, such a community is

envisioned through the drawing of lines between not only men/women and nature, but also between people:

She imagined the animals circling drowsily, listening to echoes pinging through the water, painting pictures in three dimensions – images that only they could decode. The thought of experiencing your surroundings in that way never failed to fascinate her: the idea that to ‘see’ was also to ‘speak’ to others of your kind, where simply to exist was to communicate. In contrast, there was the immeasurable distance that separated her from Fokir. What was he thinking about as he stared at the moonlit river? The forest, the crabs? Whatever it was, she would never know: not just because they had no language in common but because that was how it was with human beings, who came equipped, as a species, with the means of shutting each other out. The two of them, Fokir and herself, they could have been boulders or trees for all they knew of each other: and wasn’t it better in a way, more honest, that they could not speak? For if you compared it to the ways in which the dolphins’ echoes mirrored the world, speech was only a bag of tricks that fooled you into believing that you could see through the eyes of another being (159).

Fokir and Piya, like boulders and trees, can live in sync with one another and their surroundings, not because of an ability to comprehend each other or even the capacity to communicate, but because of being bound by the limitations of need and location. In this image of coexistence, otherness has to remain absolute, as any kind of movement that attempts to bridge difference produces violence in its own right. Not only the harnessing of nature for human greed as seen in *The Glass Palace*, or the cosmopolitan ideals of universalism as represented by Tridib, but language itself, as the carrying across of Bhabha’s metaphor, turns the singularity of the other, the individual, into something potentially knowable, and therefore dispensable. As such, translation itself carries the dangers of both excessive *place* – the fixing of categories of difference in a cartography of limits – but also the breaking down of all boundaries that occurs through turning everything into mutable *space*. A truly literary space of dissent, *The Hungry Tide* appears to suggest, has to resist all forms of this movement.

However, while fluctuation and movement, flow and change, seem key to this understanding of *place* – and via that to an understanding of the novel as a form that offers a humane space of dissent – it faces translation, increasingly, as a problematic concept. *The*

*Hungry Tide* suggests, as Nirmal does in citing Rilke, that “We are not at home in our translated world” (206), such a world collapses all difference into one in a violent spatializing gesture that leaves some without a map and voice. Kanai himself reveals how the translator in his work serves as “some hapless traveller’s window on the unfamiliar world,” like a guide in foreign places he faces the temptation to “heighten the inscrutability of the surroundings through subtly slanted glosses” (321). The novel too can favour the exotic, heighten the alien and stress estrangement as a tool for its own importance in bringing, like Piya’s binoculars, such difference to light. While the novel wants to translate difference, to show humanity and understanding across the categorical boundaries erected in the name of the community or nation, it also understands translation as a potentially violent discourse that can universalize all difference. Piya’s binoculars, like the photograph or the framed (placed) novel, “fall on the landscape like a shower of rain, mellowing its edges, diminishing her sense of disorientation and unpreparedness” (72). Thus not only the universalizing tendencies of a capitalist cosmopolitanism, but also a literary one, brings closer and tames the unfamiliar and foreign, capturing like the world novel “the water with such vividness and particularity” until the reader, like Piya, forgets about the binoculars, “their weight ceas[ing] to matter”(75).

In times of violence – epistemic or physical – from nationalist political or international cultural forces, authors are bound to some kind of social awareness instead of the unlimited freedom of speech. As Ghosh considers, “in such incendiary circumstances, words cost lives” and “it is only appropriate that those who deal with words should pay scrupulous attention to that they say,” it is “only appropriate that they should find themselves inhibited” (*Imam* 61). Thus, as Pablo Mukherjee argues, the postcolonial novel shows its historical compulsion to “at once stretch and demonstrate the limits of its own forms” (127). The author, like the novel, has to embrace their own limitations, unable to understand or convey all singularity as Kanai demonstrates:

he too had peered into the unknown as if through an eyeglass – but the vistas he had been looking at lay deep within the interior of other languages. Those horizons had filled him with the desire to learn of the ways in which other realities were conjugated. And he remembered too the obstacles, the frustration, the sense that he would never be able to bend his mouth around those words, produce those sounds, put sentences together in the required way, a way that seemed to call for a recasting of the usual order of things. (269)

*The Hungry Tide* thus admits to its own silences, its inability to convey everything, and thereby suggests that it is the novelist's duty to do so. Ghosh's novel continuously alludes to what may be lost in translation ("I'll try to tell it to you as he [Nirmal] would have. But don't forget: I'll be translating in my head – he would have told it in Bangla" (283) Kanai reminds Piya) and what cannot be translated at all: "this is beyond my power, he's chanting a part of the Bon Bibi legend and the metre is too complicated" (309). The final flood washes away Nirmal's manuscript, and the real story of the violent eviction and massacre never makes it into the diary. We are thus reminded that the 'language of the place' should remain, always, slightly inaccessible, in order to preserve its singularity, to permit community to exist without damaging others. The reader has to always be rendered aware of their own monolingualism (like Piya's) in approaching the landscape.<sup>44</sup>

*The Hungry Tide* presents Nirmal and Kanai, both spurned lovers and intellectuals – if a dreamer and a cynic at that – as two different options for the writer faced by all of the writers in this thesis: a poet or national representative versus the translator/cosmopolitan voice. While Nirmal, who (like Fanon's national intellectual) wants to "teach [the settlers' children] to dream" (173), is writing on behalf of the subaltern "to mobilize public opinion" (172), to "speak and testify" (275), which Ghosh also partially embraces; it is Kanai, as an outside observer, whose position comes the closest to Ghosh's own.<sup>45</sup> Left to write the story for the

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<sup>44</sup> This is a monolingualism that doesn't refer to language (after all, many of its readers will be familiar with both English and Bengali) but rather to the other kinds of speech (of the subaltern and of nature itself) which by virtue have to remain silent in the text.

<sup>45</sup> The novel includes a link to the website of the Tagore Society for Rural Development in an author's note that functions as a call to action.

world, it falls on Kanai to translate the events, that Nirmal sought to influence by text, to a global audience.

While *The Hungry Tide*, in its defence of the local that resists being deployed, translated or collapsed into the universal or indeed the narrowly nationalist, attempts to depict a resistance to translation, it does so through a form which nonetheless delivers a narrative of precisely what it cannot translate. The novel, despite its focus on silence and singularity, like Kanai's epiphany with Fokir, strives for an understanding of what "look[ing] through another set of eyes," filtering "the world through a mind other than his own" (327) might entail, and *The Hungry Tide* leans on this analogous understanding of translation as "the act of interpretation [which] had given [Kanai, and can give the reader] the momentary sensation of being transported out of his being and into another. In each instance it was as if the instrument of language had metamorphosed – instead of being a barrier, a curtain that divided, it had become a transparent film" (327).

If we are repeatedly invited to read the landscape as text then, to watch the water like Piya "with a closeness of attention that reminded Kanai of a textual scholar poring over a yet-undeciphered manuscript" (269), the literary space of Ghosh's own dissent, is altogether different to the model provided by his text. The name of singularity is invoked in delivering something that is already being carried across, this time through literature rather than commerce or travel. While the subaltern history that Nirmal writes is lost in the storm, the novel itself, of course, narrates that very context. This is perhaps the paradox of the non-metropolitan novel, which all of the writers in this thesis have to grapple with: that while the very "vastness and cosmopolitanism of the fictional bookcase that requires novelists to locate themselves in relation to it [...] demands of their work that it carry marks to establish their location", the "eloquence with which they communicate a 'sense of place'" invariably comes at "the very loss of a lived sense of place that makes their fictional representation

possible” (“March” 24). To write the singularity of *place* is always to lose it, alter it, and pervert it in the very act of transmission.

An exploration of *space* and *place* in Ghosh’s oeuvre therefore shows us not only how Ghosh himself tries to conceptualize a middle ground between regressive nationalism and aggressive cosmopolitanism, to find an alternative form of belonging, but also how the partition area novel, as part of a wider world literature market, may respond to that particular market’s own universalizing tendency of representing either national narratives or cosmopolitan aesthetics. It indicates how Ghosh’s own vision of dissent in terms of the politics of belonging – the move towards *place*, away from pure cosmopolitan *space* – struggles to articulate dissent in the larger literary market in which his novels circulate, where a borderless literary politics is currently the dominant ethos. In rejecting the assumption that the European Enlightenment is the only possible source or paradigm for principles of equality and shared humanity in favour of more rooted, indigenous forms of dissent, Ghosh thus straddles uneasily the border between a poststructuralist critique of nations and collectivities and the humanist universalism posited in any cosmopolitan alternative.<sup>46</sup> This struggle to find alternative forms of belonging through a non-universalizing cosmopolitanism is visible in the particular discourse of *place* in his novels, highlighted here. However, while Ghosh the author may refuse to ‘anchor’ his literature within the categorical visions of a particular kind of historiographical narrative, or indeed any kind of potentially destructive universalism, as his rejection of the ‘Commonwealth’ prize makes clear; he is nonetheless faced with the daunting task of navigating the paradoxes of an ever expanding literary market that determines the nature of the spaces of literary dissent made possible, when sending off his texts, like the ship in his recent novel *The Sea of Poppies*, as possible heterotopias, “floating piece[s] of space, [places]

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<sup>46</sup> See his correspondence with Chakrabarty (156-7).

without a place,” carrying their singular and local identities to be “given over to the infinity of the sea.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Foucault “Of Other Spaces” (27).

## 2

### Towards a Humane Territory: Raja Shehadeh and Intellectual Pursuits<sup>48</sup>

Caught between representing the collective and speaking as an independent critic, Palestinian human rights activist and writer, Raja Shehadeh, portrays the dilemmas of the contemporary cosmopolitan partition area author who attempts to articulate alternative post-national forms of belonging. Under-theorized but increasingly popular, Shehadeh has a relatively high profile in the English-speaking cultural sphere: he is both a frequent speaker on the literary circuit and a columnist for *The Guardian* and *The International Herald Tribune*. Israel/Palestine's ongoing partition, however, renders Shehadeh's position as an author who assumes a non-nationalist perspective within a 'threatened' community, more difficult than Ghosh's; and his relationship to geographical and literary space is consequently more politically troubled. Like the dilemma presented by Kanai's and Nirmal's respective models for the postcolonial fiction writer in *The Hungry Tide*, Shehadeh can be seen in his travel writing to be both influenced by Edward Said – the deracinated, if highly political, Palestinian literary critic who espoused “the priority of the intellectual rather than national or tribal consciousness” (*Out of Place* 280) – and reflective of anti-colonial thinker Frantz Fanon's revolutionary politics which stood for “national consciousness [ ...as] the only thing that will give us an international dimension” (199). Living on the West Bank, but writing for an international English-language audience, he is neither wholly removed from his context, nor entirely speaking to it. There is as such a double-edged cosmopolitanism in his work, which

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<sup>48</sup> Parts of this chapter have been published under the title “Reflections on a National Cartography: The Freedom to Roam and the Right to Imagine in Raja Shehadeh's Travel Writing” in the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 48.4 (2012): 431-442.

both stresses the importance of non-partisan discourse and comes to demand some form of community for a full realization of its political vision.

Although Shehadeh does not work with the novel and is not traditionally read as a literary writer (his memoirs and travel texts have more often been categorized as 'political', as his receipt of the Orwell Prize in 2008 demonstrates), he is a writer who is overtly engaging with different literary forms and modes in formulating a textual practice of dissent. His travel texts strive towards articulating, in an often dehumanizing conflict, a literary space for recovering the 'human' (both in terms of the individual's voice and as a more inclusive criteria of community) that we will also see in David Grossman's work. This literary space where he resists being confined, like his father was, "by these borders and states of mind" (SH 58), emerges not from a conflict between *space* and *place*, as in Ghosh's oeuvre, but from the struggle to release his own narrative from bordered communal ideologies via the physical and narrative mobility of travel writing. My focus, therefore, is not on how Shehadeh's texts are read as more or less cosmopolitan, but rather on how they come to reflect his own conflict as a writer in positioning himself at once inside and outside of the community he writes about. Shehadeh's two travel texts, *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape* (2007) – depicting his various journeys on seven different walks in the hills of the West Bank – and *A Rift in Time: Travels with my Ottoman Uncle* (2010) – which retraces his great-great-Uncle Najib's flight from the Ottoman officials – combine memoir, nature and historical writing to conceptualise a "land without borders where everyone is free to travel" (RT 232) and where everyone shares "equal status [...as] fellow human being[s]" (RT 221). In his 1992 Amnesty Lecture, Wayne Booth describes this desire to claim the right to discursive mobility, to write a different story for the community or territory, as "the freedom to pursue a storyline, a life plot" (89). In Booth's formulation, the human right to narrate is equated with the freedom to pursue, or in Shehadeh's case travel, an individual course. It is through this claim to the right to plot 'routes' that Shehadeh aims to circumvent the confining discourse of 'roots'; but as he

follows the path of the disembodied intelligence of the critic in mapping a different non-national future for the region, he is inevitably faced with its political present and the pull of a 'national consciousness'.<sup>49</sup> Shehadeh's work therefore provides an interesting perspective on how literary forms of belonging are articulated in areas where the material context is acutely felt. What role does the intellectual have in articulating alternatives to existing political communities, and how far can the literary space resist the context from which it sprung?

Like the other post-partition writers in this study, Shehadeh identifies as an anti-nationalist or non-sectarian writer, writing against the grain of a collective voice, or "group spirit" that literary critics such as Salma Khadra Jayyusi claim "dictates the tone and theme of Palestinian literature" (167). In its stead he favours an individualism that is articulated through a cosmopolitan human rights-based literary discourse that sees rights as resting with the single 'person' rather than the community. Thus, if, as Salim Tamari outlines, the shift from the pre-Oslo to post-Oslo period in Palestinian culture is considered as a shift between a "politics of exile and the politics of statehood" (3), then Shehadeh's writing directly challenges both phases of the national narrative. Much pre-Oslo Palestinian literary output – especially that which has been aimed at or reached a wider international audience – has been engaging with the trauma and turmoil of living in exile, defined as 'marginal' and 'liminal' states of being, which come to be emblematic of the common experience "where the lived present is characterised by an absent meaning" (Muhawi 32).<sup>50</sup> In contrast, remaining resident in the West Bank, Shehadeh's pre-Oslo diaries, and *Palestinian Walks* which draws heavily on their format (and depicts his work for and consequent disappointment with the Oslo accords), stresses the repetitive scenes of loss and abuse suffered by Palestinians living on the land. Lacking the mobility of exiles in the West or the romantic vision of the nostalgic refugees,

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<sup>49</sup> I draw here, of course, on the distinction that Paul Gilroy makes in *The Black Atlantic* between the "intercultural positionality" that he sees as enabled by movement across borders, and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity. (19)

<sup>50</sup> See Anette Månsson, *Passage to a New World*, for a specific example, and Kamal Abdel-Malek's *The Rhetoric of Violence* on Palestinian writing in general.

Shehadeh is fuelled by a need to document the siege-like state of daily living, devoid of the “glorification and heroism” (Tamari 4) with which exiles viewed those who stayed behind.

Similarly, in his later travel text, and contrary to the politics of statehood which defines post-Oslo narratives, Shehadeh’s writing is not so much interested in a “strategy of independence” (Tamari 5) as the possibilities of alternative forms of belonging. Through the development of a human rights-based narrative of universal citizenship, *A Rift in Time* maps out a different landscape whose contours are determined by a movement through time as well as space, with the layering of various historical narratives marking the wider and more expansive territory of a post-national community. Shehadeh therefore locates his own writing in the company of international postcolonial writers and thinkers. His introduction to *Palestinian Walks* clearly outlines his aims to contribute to an on-going intellectual discussion, listing as the larger academic context of his work the blocking of place names on signs (as cultural critic Yasir Suleiman also does), the strategic location of settlements (referring to the work of architect Eyal Weizman) and (as Ilan Pappé explores in his research) the Israel Exploration society, which has left history “mine and that of my people [...] distorted and twisted” (PW xv). His memoirs are part of a burgeoning Anglophone literary field of documenting not just atrocities (such as the late Italian human rights activist Vittorio Arrigoni’s *Gaza: Stay Human*, a journal of the Israeli military operation in 2008) but also the life of a Palestinian intellectual circle.<sup>51</sup> For example, architect Suad Amiry’s *Sharon and My Mother-in-law: Ramallah Diaries*, which documents her experiences during a curfew in 2002, cites many of the same incidents as Shehadeh in his memoirs. What these texts (whether by non-Palestinian parties such as Arrigoni, or Palestinians themselves) have in common is what Anna Bernard has observed via Arabic Palestinian writer Sahar Khalifeh in “Another Black September?” (355-6): they demonstrate a discernible shift in literature from more overt

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<sup>51</sup> Shehadeh’s work, in turn, could be seen as having inspired other English travel texts on Palestine, such as Mark Thomas’ book *Extreme Rambling: Walking Israel’s Barrier, for Fun* which similarly takes a particular tradition of ‘rambling’ as its outset. (See Shehadeh’s conceptualisation of the *sarha* on p.90)

nationalist claims, or national allegories, to a discourse of suffering and the right to representation.

Shehadeh, like Amiry or Khalifeh (as Bernard demonstrates), leans heavily on a legal discourse of human rights in his texts – the universal rights of inhabitation, protected ownership and freedom to roam – driven by a vision of peaceful coexistence and non-nationalist belonging. *Palestinian Walks* and *A Rift in Time* thus demonstrate the development from a documentary discourse of witnessing atrocities to envisioning a European enlightenment narrative of a universal ‘subjecthood’ that informed the *bildungsroman* and which, according to Joseph Slaughter, dictates human rights law. *Palestinian Walks* documents both Shehadeh’s legal struggles to protect the lands of Palestinians from Israeli appropriation and his private battle to sustain the right to walk the landscape that is slowly being annexed by Israeli settlers and infrastructure. *A Rift in Time*, in turn, maps out an ideal, unrestricted landscape that reflects the pre-national rights of its inhabitants as humans and expresses a “nostalgia for ‘democracy’ as a vision of pluralist inclusion [...] a global progress based on the Enlightenment, however ambivalently” (38), which Timothy Brennan deems a trait of Anglophone cosmopolitan postcolonial fiction in his work *At Home in the World*. However, while much human rights discourse is perceived as an ostensibly non culture- or state-specific discourse of natural rather than national rights, Shehadeh’s work – and its clear shift from witnessing to imagining – shows how such a legal discourse is not incommensurable with a form of imaginary, almost fictional, communal mapping that reflects the pressure of a national consciousness.

Operating within an international Palestinian literary circle, Shehadeh is a highly self-conscious writer, aware of the process of signification as an often political act. His reflections on the cultural consequences of partition and the ongoing conflict have centred on the representation of landscape or territory as a means of articulating community in a context

where territory is not merely a backdrop for events, as architect Eyal Weizman points out, “but rather the medium that [both Israeli and Palestinian] actions see[k] to challenge, transform or appropriate” (7). He cites a conversation with Jewish American writer Robert Stone, in his diary *The Third Way*, who explains how he feels that the “Palestinian national rhetoric” often seemed “shallow” in comparison to the Jewish claims for the land, and goes on to use a highly unusual analogy of pornography to explain:

When you are exiled from your land, he said, you begin, like a pornographer, to think about it in symbols. You articulate your love for your land, in its absence, and in the process transform it into something else [...] it is like falling in love with an image of a woman, and then, when meeting her, being excited not by what is there but by what her image has come to signify for you (86).

It is this process of over-signification, Shehadeh concludes, which fuels a violent form of belonging, whereby the national territory haunts its occupiers as a “signifier whose signified does not match its shape or magnitude” (31), as Muhawi also points out about much Palestinian nationalist poetry written in exile. As such, the struggle for an intellectual or national consciousness in his texts undoubtedly moves towards a kind of political ethos in its own right.

Shehadeh makes clear that he wants to avoid in his own work such ideological narratives that only confirm “the viewer’s or reader’s religious or political beliefs” (PW xii) – a fact which has helped him gain success internationally.<sup>52</sup> Just as pornography, according to his friend Robert Stone, arouses desire for an image rather than reality, such rhetorical manoeuvres inform a kind of escapism that, Shehadeh suggests, in its ignorance of reality perpetuates myths of the landscape and thereby inflicts epistemic violence. Consequently, Shehadeh has been read as a proponent of a post-national ecocritical sensibility, worried about the environmental effects of nationalism rather than in pursuit of a specific political agenda. Robert Spencer, for example, argues that *Palestinian Walks* reflects “an

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<sup>52</sup> Shehadeh was an invited speaker at the Jewish Book Week in London 2011, for example, where he gave a reading from *A Rift in Time*.

environmental ethic that transcends a restrictive or defensive attachment to a particular territory” (34). In accordance with Spencer’s reading, Shehadeh is undoubtedly attempting to reclaim a lived experience of the land from the kind of national representations that so many Palestinian writers have romanticized and which have become symptomatic of the conflict in the respective literary canons of the communities involved. His theory of ‘land pornography’, in turn, has lived on in multiple critical works as an insight into the Palestinian canon or culture. Barbara Harlow reads it as evidence of the “fetishizing appropriation of nostalgia” (83-84) and Barbara Parmenter argues that in Palestinian culture it articulates the relationship between people and place “as both necessary and destructive” (86). In addition, Grossman proposes in *The Yellow Wind* that it is also suggestive of the Zionist psyche (9-10), and Jacqueline Rose sees it as a defining factor of nationalist discourse *per se* (*States of Fantasy* 23). It has rarely, however, been used to reflect on Shehadeh’s own troubled position as a non-nationalist, English-language, human rights writer living and working on the West Bank.

Shehadeh himself contextualizes the problem of ‘land pornography’ not in terms of the literary debates it has subsequently been applied to by Harlow and Parmenter, but in opposition to the immediate lived reality of inhabiting the landscape. In his diary he recounts how, when walking in the hills outside Ramallah, “I find myself looking at an olive tree, and as I am looking at it, it transforms itself before my eyes into a symbol of the *samidin*, of our struggle, of our loss. And at that very moment, I am robbed of the tree; instead there is a hollow space into which anger and pain flow” (TW 87).<sup>53</sup> As this renunciation of nationalist tropes suggests, his writing leans on a non-fictional narrative in order to recuperate a basic reality from what Weizman depicts as a “hologramatized ‘Hollow Land’”(15), where competing claims to sovereignty – Israel maintains a monopoly over airspace, the Palestinians their tunnels underground, etc. – are deployed by their respective narratives (Palestinian stories of

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<sup>53</sup> *Samidin* is a term for the practitioners of a non-violent form of Palestinian resistance. Derived from the Arabic term *sumud*, translated as ‘steadfastness’, it encapsulates the policy of staying on the land in the face of violence or injustice, in order to protect one’s claims to the territory and nation.

lost villages and lemon orchards map over the landscape of ‘milk and honey’ of an Israeli imaginary). However, it does so through a lyricism and poignancy that reflects the sense of loss and longing with a force that many Ramallah diaries (Arrigoni’s and Amiry’s included) lack. These are travelogues with a strong awareness of their own artfulness.

Despite their evocative imagery and often romantic style, however, the rhetorical turn towards realism plays a distinct part in Shehadeh’s books’ aims: not to consolidate a communal vision, or challenge competing political discourses, but to alter outside perceptions of the conflict. Shehadeh’s deconstructive discussion about national representation with an American Jew (Robert Stone) – conducted in English, a common language that is framed as permitting a degree of ‘objectivity’ through enabling a friendship ‘across the divide’ – comes to stand for the role Shehadeh’s own writing is attempting to assume in the Anglophone literary marketplace. He posits both of his travel texts as aimed at an audience that is external to the landscape he describes. His aims to spark the question, “could the land of perpetual strife and bloodshed have such peaceful, precious hills?” (xiv) and to encourage a vision of “the whole of this valley as one” (232), in *Palestinian Walks* and *A Rift in Time* respectively, clearly places his works as counter narratives to the Israeli tourist industry “where ecological activism, Zionist ideology and erasure of the past combine” (Pappé 234). Moreover, his books challenge other English-language works on the region, such as Haim Watzman’s *A Crack in the Earth: a Journey up Israel’s Rift Valley* which came out in the same year as *Palestinian Walks*. The title of Watzman’s (who is, coincidentally, one of David Grossman’s translators) and Shehadeh’s respective works on the rift valley couldn’t be more suggestive of the political stakes of nature writing in such a fraught region: while Shehadeh points to a ‘rift in time’, a temporal fantasy of conjuring a now anachronistic political formation, Watzman claims national ownership, oblivious to the *double entendre* of a ‘crack in the earth’. However, in challenging such literary and cultural narratives, Shehadeh does not himself escape the

ideological discursive battlefield, as his narrative cartography takes on a political ideology of its own.

**i. 'Writing is also an exercise of power'**

Shehadeh's concern with mapping a humane landscape reflects the constant struggle between the self and the collective, an attempt to find both the ideal community – of humans rather than citizens – as figured through the landscape he moves through *and* to “find myself in my father's country” (SH 91), untangling the individual, unconstrained, narrative voice from the national story. Shehadeh's father often figures in his texts as representative of a prescribed life in the service of the national cause, passing on a national vision, genealogically, through his narrative as he explains in a letter to his son: he dictates his opinions to him “so that you will believe in what I have believed in and so that you will also assert these values in your children and grandchildren” (SH 85). His presence thus brings a national history into Shehadeh's narrative, whose register shifts under the burden of his father's memory and experiences. As he relates his father's return to Jaffa, for example, Shehadeh narrates his father's shocking realization that “the glittering lights to which his eyes had been riveted for all these years” – as the point of longing, the lost home – “were not the lights of Jaffa but those of Tel Aviv” (SH 61). This third-person account then slides seamlessly into a collective disappointment: “We had been stunned, bewildered, jettisoned across an imaginary border” where, “We didn't allow the new generation to make a new life for themselves because we continued to impress them with the glory of what was” (SH 62). If his father becomes representative of this collective ‘we’ (whose travel into the past has to be forgone for a better national future of “the new Palestinian” – “a forward-looking, bold, assertive, citizen” (SH 64)) – then Shehadeh does not hesitate to confirm that from then on he became a “hostage to *his* historical memory” (SH 64, emphasis added). The individual voice here (in a very similar gesture to Ghosh's) is held captive via a spatial metaphor in a narrative that is inherited, and it

is often with this complicated familial/national history where Shehadeh's inner conflict lies. Both politically active and socially shunned, his father spoke for a national politics (he attempted to negotiate a peaceful two-state solution at several points in his career) and was criticized as anti-nationalist for his willingness, especially, to concede a Jewish homeland. As such, Shehadeh's problematic and ambivalent literary role is perhaps less consciously chosen than is suggested by his attempt to separate his profession (law) from his passion (writing), and his activism (human rights) from his politics.

This ambivalence is also part of the 'routes' that Shehadeh's narratives travel down. His travel texts, which relate journeys – both successful and otherwise – in a familiar (home)land where borders are constantly shifting, follow the postcolonial travel genre that challenges the tropes of its colonial predecessors, performing a kind of "countertravel writing", according to Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, which resists the prevailing tendency to demarcate definitive borders *and* the desire to separate identities (3). Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund suggest that such travel texts can demonstrate not merely a reflection of home or belonging (derived from comparison with foreign cultures and communities in journeys abroad or forays into unfamiliar territory) but also a sense of homelessness through "a disintegration of nation-based notions of identity" (7). Shehadeh clearly channels this latent potential of the travel genre to stress belonging and homelessness simultaneously, employing the genre's close relationship to memoir in order to 're-cite' and 're-site' – as Sidonie Smith argues about autobiography – both offering a counternarrative to the historical events and aligning himself with a "different cultural location" (S. Smith 5).

*Palestinian Walks* maps Shehadeh's journey to extract himself from a collective national consciousness and his father's politics, creating his own cartography "signposted by historical memories and references: this area where Abu Ameen has his *qasr*, that rock where Jonathan and I had a long talk, that hill over which Penny and I had a memorable walk" (189).

Starting with a walk Shehadeh makes alone, reminiscing over his grandfather and his grandfather's cousin Abu Ameen's *sarhas*, or ramblings, in the hills that were a letting go of "time and place" (PW xii) Shehadeh seeks to emulate in the book – a counter narrative to the British land surveyors and Zionist mapmakers who aimed to take control "of Palestinian time and space"(PW 47) – *Palestinian Walks* then goes on to relate various walks with activists, his wife Penny, a returnee PLO official and a myriad of friends through the landscape over 27 years. The repeated conflation of temporality with geography demonstrates a desire to unmoor his own narrative from that of the collective national story, as even the book itself aims to, in Shehadeh's words "travel through time and space" (xii). His first walk, from Ramallah to Harrasha, for example, moves both backwards to map his own ancestry via stories of his grandfather and grandfather's cousin, and forwards showing old familial roots and new routes to his young nephew, Aziz.

Travel writing thus offers Shehadeh a medium for questioning the border itself, as a kind of nationalist or ethnocentric ideology as much as a geographical construct, capturing the physical pursuit of a non-bordered, non-national landscape (de Certeau's *space*- based community) and the narrative quest for an individual critical voice. If Shehadeh is in search of the "third way" (as discussed in the introduction) between surrendering to violence, or generating a violent resistance of his own, then it is travel which gives him the "third choice" as he reflects in *Strangers in the House*, between joining the party of his Palestinian hosts in London when they come knocking, and thus succumbing to the pressure of the collective, or "remaining silent, invisible" (110) in his own room. He is overtly engaged with resisting the "war of words," as Yasir Suleiman terms the prevailing "manipulation of terminology to create *linguistic maps*" (138), which has become symptomatic of the conflict where ethnic literary representations are used to make political claims. *Palestinian Walks* and *A Rift in Time* allow him "the freedom of going by the map inside my head" (PW 180), of pursuing the right to narrate an alternative 'storyline or life plot' (as Booth described human rights) for himself and

the community, instead of submitting to the bordered narratives of an ethnically defined collective, “the makers of the maps [and] their ideological biases” (PW 189). Moreover, his travelogues allow him to dwell on the singular beauty of the landscape that surrounds him, a field of flowers, a throne hewed from stone and a gushing spring – peaceful pastoral vignettes in a region ravaged by war.

These journeys towards an alternative map, however, are marked by Shehadeh’s ambivalence in what he considers his own role, pursuing a life in human rights “documentation” rather than as a “political activist”(SH 148). *Strangers in the House* sets up a dichotomy between Shehadeh the lawyer and Shehadeh the writer that reflects the tension between his own pursuit for intellectual independence and the political pressures of the collective or the national conscious. “I yearned to be one of the shabab [people]” (SH 74), Shehadeh writes of listening as an adolescent to the radio broadcasts of the popular resistance, yet at the same time he desires to step outside of the national narrative and find his own voice as a critic who “despised the collective uniformity that the term [shabab] implied” (SH 74). This antithesis reaches its height in *Palestinian Walks* that applies the binary of law versus writing (“lawyer by day, writer by night” (SH 133); “law would prepare me for a life in society, the writing for the life of the mind” (SH 96)) to his professional work and his human rights activism. By virtue of being a travel text rather than a legal study (of which Shehadeh has also been a prolific author), *Palestinian Walk* foregrounds his *writing* over his professional activities – writing which his father was “unwilling to accept [...] was also an exercise of power” (SH 238). It is with this more creative and personal occupation that Shehadeh associates his human rights work, rather than with the political engagements of his profession: “the role I saw for myself was as an advocate of human rights, not a political activist” (SH 149), Shehadeh comments in *Strangers in the House*. As such, a professional concern with local Palestinian and Israeli occupation law is, in Shehadeh’s case, dissociated from a humanist stance which Terry Eagleton describes in Said as a concern with “justice, not

identity” (2). Shehadeh’s human rights-based travel narrative could be said to evince a stronger “interest in emancipating the dispossessed than in celebrating the body or floating the signifier” (Eagleton 2), but Shehadeh himself would call this a non-political act.

Despite this emphasis on writing over his professional activities, the dichotomy manifests itself in the text which, while attempting to recuperate a vanishing landscape that was once unhampered by border ideologies, also testifies – in a legal discourse – to the destructive force of nationalist narratives and their borders, capturing the paradoxical aim of the narrative to preserve a pastoral idyll, *and* document the forces and results of its destruction. As a writer, Shehadeh is trying to hold on to this unbordered landscape, to resuscitate it in textual and cultural memory and to displace extinction through narration, as Said describes a distinctly post-*nakbah* narrative tradition in *Reflections on Exile*. This personal landscape, where “these hills were my private arena” (PW 51) and which “biography [...] is in many ways my own” (PW 1), offers (at least initially if not later in the book) an escape from politics that is indicative of Shehadeh’s attempt to separate the territory from the ethnoscapes of nationalist discourse. He abandons the “precisely delineated and bounded” images of “house and garden” that coloured the post-*nakbah* literature (Parmenter 43), and which echo narrative tropes that naturalize specific borders, for the ‘sensual’ experience with the land that the poets of the 1950s romanticized. His lyrical descriptions of the hilly terrain, which portray a pastoral haven, or “veritable paradise” (PW 110) of scents – thyme and oregano, the villagers’ *faboon* bread – and sounds of gazelles leaping, donkeys braying and Shepherds’ reed pipes, reveals a yearning for a pre-national time, not emblematic of his grandfather (the lawyer and man of the political world) but of the peasant stone mason, Abu Ameen, whose “spirit roamed freely over the land, without borders as it had once been” (39). This pastoral ode touches upon the utopian aims of his later work, as Shehadeh questions, “How could I claim that my love of these hills cancels out [the settler’s]? And what would this recognition mean to both our future and that of our respective countries?” (PW xx).

The book does end rather humorously with Shehadeh, after arguing over land politics, sitting down with a young Israeli settler to share a heavily opiated *nergila*, or water pipe. If there is hope for redemption in that image, it must be seen as influenced by the inner peace – “slipping back into myself” (202) – that the straight-laced lawyer finds via the help of the settler’s expert hand in preparing the *hashish*. “The young man was an artist at preparing a good *nergila*, I thought. He had talent” (202), Shehadeh reflects in a passage that registers awe, if not respect. Such drug-induced visions aside, the episodic form of the text works against any lasting sense of agreement in the narrative. Specific geographical walks frame each chapter, which jump between multiple points in time, in a narrative that combines the placing or ‘re-citing’/‘re-siting’ urge of the memoir with an even more fragmentary form, the ‘scene’, which Edward Said isolates as the predominant literary style in Arabic prose and prose fiction following 1948.<sup>54</sup> Each scene stresses its own partiality – as a segment or reflection – an incomplete vision that does not attempt to provide a universal perspective or become prescriptive. Rather than offering the kind of holistic developmental personal narrative/national history – of the autobiographical development of a citizen-subject in a clearly bounded nation state, with a neat correlation of the ‘I’ to the totemic life story and national history – it offers a splintered form of national *bildung*.

The scene, as a form, is intrinsically reflective of not the larger map he seeks to preserve by writing, but the reality of a bordered, confined community and territory. If Said suggests that the scene stresses not the importance that it happened but that it is being narrated, whereby the “habitual is exposed as the often lurid abuse of humanity that it is” (51), then the scene in Shehadeh’s text becomes a way of documenting a confusing terrain of national identification and political status, bearing witness to the failure of achieving not only state-formation, but basic human – and specifically land – rights under occupation. Tapping

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<sup>54</sup> See “Arabic Prose and Prose Fiction after 1948.” *Reflections on Exile* (41-60). All subsequent references to Said’s analysis of the ‘scene’ are from this essay.

into the Islamic tradition of “the *isnad* (support, witness)” (Said 50), Shehadeh produces a type of human rights writing – the *testimonio* – that is a historical document in literary form that permits him to bear witness to both life under occupation and the ‘vanishing landscape’ (historical and geographical) which suffers as a result. “I gasped when I saw it,” Shehadeh writes of the “five-metre wall, made of concrete and steel, that enclosed the entire Albina land,” as he recalls the “gentle slope bordered by a few pine trees” that used to be there (PW 84-5). The simultaneity of the past – the gentle slopes of the pastoral idyll – and its present destruction, literary idyll and legal testimony, are held in suspense by the form which is a medium for representing a present so that it is in touch with both “past authenticity and future possibility” through loss and uncertainty respectively (Said 49).

Despite his aversion to politics, which he associates with the national cause and his father’s path, the journeys to map a landscape separate from the political present never quite reach their destination, as “even these paths I’ve been using on my walks are marked on a British-made Ordnance map” (PW 51). The pastoral is disrupted by the testimonial and the private landscape is increasingly infringed upon by public politics. If scenes are metatextual, as Said claims, repeating a history of disaster through rupture and discontinuity, and offering a restorative form (55), then *Palestinian Walks*, rather than offering an imaginary healing, ends up repeatedly reinforcing partition through fragmentary walks hampered by advancing borders. The inherent circularity of the repeated walks, progressing temporally but stagnating spatially (Shehadeh is stopped by both young, masked Palestinians and armed Israeli soldiers), reveals a diminishing landscape curtailed by nationalist ideologies and their competing maps. The constantly changing reality of new settlements, roads and checkpoints (both official and unofficial, Israeli and Palestinian) interrupt the narrative flow as much as a continuous mapping of the land, and paints a picture of a landscape crisscrossed with alternative forms of belonging and ideologies of possession. It thus enacts in narrative what Weizman argues is occurring on the ground:

the linear border, a cartographic imaginary inherited from the military and political spatiality of the nation state has splintered into a multitude of temporary, transportable, deployable and removable border-synonyms – ‘separation walls’, ‘barriers’, ‘blockades’, ‘closures’, ‘road blocks’, ‘checkpoints’, ‘sterile areas’, ‘spatial security zones’, ‘closed military areas’ and ‘killing zones’ – that shrink and expand the territory at will (6).

The fragmentary travel memoir as such bears witness in both form and content to the myriad of competing, and at times overlapping, identifications assigned to different territorial areas – West Bank inhabitants, settlers, Israeli activists, nationalist organizations, PLO returnees, etc. – similar to Weizman’s spatial “archipelago” of different ethnically homogeneous/heterogeneous groups of “full citizenship; weak citizenship; or no citizenship at all” (7).

The past authenticity and future possibility held in suspense by the scene therefore creates in Shehadeh’s narrative the struggle of mapping a post-national future via a pre-national pastoral idyll without being haunted by the discourses of ‘authenticity’ – the bordered national visions that translate to a spatially restricted landscape. The landscape is doubled by its simultaneous ‘idyllic’ past and destructive present in a way that stresses the scene as what Said describes as a ‘rupture’: Shehadeh is neither capable of fully channelling a non-political writing, nor extracting himself completely from the collective voice, resulting in a “rupture, the termination of what for years I had called my narrative” (PW 124).

This rupture in Shehadeh’s own ‘re-citing’ or ‘re-siting’ is the trauma of partition emerging in the text – a trauma of the bordering discourses of thought and community that arises as a national ideology in his writing. The waking nightmare of a “never-never land” (PW 88), where the speed of political change alters the textual documentation of a pastoral idyll into a testimony of its destruction, reduces him as a walker to a kind of haunting presence that is deemed without legitimate status on the land, and to walking as a criminal, moving in his “own country surreptitiously like [an] unwanted strange[r]” (185). Shehadeh despairs of living as a “hunted, haunted human” (PW 50), and thus struggles to fully assert his intellectual

separation from the land or community. He feels hunted not just by the occupation but by the oppressive conditions of his writing: the erection of borders and separation walls and the entrenchment of sectarian movements and national identities form physical and metaphorical traps; he remains, consequently, haunted by a national consciousness that makes itself felt in his literary landscapes of an egalitarian community to come.

If his diary, *The Third Way*, shows how his division of 'lawyer by day, writer by night' becomes increasingly problematized as his nocturnal dreams come to terrorize his daytime professional activities, then *Palestinian Walks* also demonstrates a blurring of these boundaries that causes difficulties in Shehadeh's own representation. When his childhood nightmare of finding himself "in a strange place unable to find my way home" becomes reality as he gets lost among the new settlements that have now entirely re-drawn the map (PW 187), a national consciousness begins to haunt his text like the figure of the vampire he employs to reflect upon the landscape. In *A Third Way* Shehadeh writes:

you treacherous hills, lying there so modest and silent. Soft and unassuming, you are a harlot, slyly seducing these boys. [...] from then on I grew increasingly jealous, possessive and angry at the same time. I finally began thinking of this land as seducing us all into war – calling us into its lap to fall bleeding – a vampire that will suck our blood as we fight for it. (124)

Shehadeh's imagery in his diary is resonant of Fanon's description of the "mental pathology which is the direct product of oppression" (201) that he attributes to a mentally ill Algerian man, haunted by a vampire after participating in the anti-colonial cycle of bloodshed (210). While for Fanon, the vampire becomes emblematic of the state of the oppressed under colonization, Shehadeh's vampire metaphor raises the land itself, rather than its inhabitants, as an image and entity which both defines and betrays the notion of community.<sup>55</sup> As a fantasy, Shehadeh suggests, the nation can collapse in on itself and come to haunt its own proponents like a vampire that demands a very real price in blood for its own spectral

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<sup>55</sup> See Samira Kawash's analysis of Fanon's discourse, where she theorizes his use of the vampire as reflective of his representation of the oppressed as "living death" (247) who "terroriz[e] reality" (254).

existence as an imagined symbol. This is precisely what begins to happen in Shehadeh's own travel text as he increasingly sheds his literary, non-political human rights discourse for a more ideologically-laden communal vision.

His narrative in *Palestinian Walks* is increasingly concerned with the larger public domain of land law and national politics, which he initially tries to evade via a human rights discourse that he dissociates from politics. While the first walk of the book tries to capture alternative modes of living on the land, as espoused by *fellaheen* such as Abu Ameen, by the second walk we are already introduced to the Albina land case that he is representing in court, the settlers whose annexation of the land he is disputing and the twisted legal system coming out of the Israeli occupation's changes to land law.<sup>56</sup> This is followed by a depiction of the problems of the Palestinian political leadership and the post-Oslo state (walk three with the returnee PLO official) and his own disillusionment with the Palestinian political scene and desire to emigrate (walk four). Shehadeh's position as a lawyer and political activist thus takes on more and more of the text than the actual nature he seeks to preserve in writing, depicting not only his legal battles to protect illegally annexed land, but his legal advice in the negotiations leading up to the Oslo Accords and the increasing importance he places on civic duties as an alternative arena for effecting change to the corrupt and embittered political scene (walk five). The antithesis he sets up between human rights and political activism is thus not sustainable in the text as Shehadeh increasingly has to face not only his involvement in land cases, but also the realization that his human rights narrative is undeniably political. Likewise, the egalitarian landscape he seeks to depict begins to yield to the pressure of an increasingly national consciousness, as the depoliticised territory whose existence he wants to rescue and testify to takes on increasingly national tropes.

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<sup>56</sup> The *fellaheen* (which translates as 'cultivators') are the traditional agricultural peasants. The term has since, also, become associated with the common armed resistance (as opposed to elite, military soldiers).

In figuring the land as vampirical in his diary, Shehadeh is already participating in a nationalist discourse which personifies the territory. His use of gendered metaphors – the land is both a ‘seducer’ and a ‘harlot’ that is not only unfaithful, but finally, equally treacherous for all involved – reflects the masculine rhetoric of aggressive nationalist possession which Parmenter outlines as dominating poetry that uses the same feminized trope (43). Shehadeh is thus falling into a similar trap to Fanon by sexualizing the relationship between the land and a specifically male ‘native’ who wants, ultimately, “to sleep in the settler’s bed, with his wife if possible” (30), as Fanon writes, even while exposing it, self-reflexively, as the cause of a cyclical bloodletting similar to Fanon’s vision of the colonial system.

A closer look at the documentary mode in *Palestinian Walks* similarly reveals that while it ostensibly critiques competing national cartographies, a symbolized landscape of a communal imaginary begins to take shape in Shehadeh’s writing through natural metaphors. The landscape gradually comes to reflect the political developments in his narrative: the disappointment of the Oslo Accords sees Shehadeh not only descend into the “lowest point in the earth’s surface” (114), the Dead Sea, but also experience vertigo when passing around a cliff on the return walk. The peculiar depiction of pine trees, which “only make the soil acidic” and give “a different air [...] to these hills” (45), takes on an ethnocentric tinge when followed by the discussion of the arrival of settlements:

All it took was for one tree to establish roots. Then when it seeded, its cones would open, spreading seeds from terrace to terrace, multiplying the pines at the expense of those trees that had been there long before them. (45)

Such a description of the “intruders” (45) – the pines – clearly echo Shehadeh’s arguments against the Israeli West Bank settlers. There is, as such, a kind of collective mode of writing implicit in the text that is overtly trying to reinstate Arabic place names like ‘Wadi Shomr (fennel),’ ‘Wadi El A’rsh (the throne),’ Wadi Matar (rain),’ etc., and resuscitate an obliterated national cartography. While the pines are “forcefully claiming the land,” each of their “roots

remained close to the surface, knotted and smoothed like knuckles, scrambling for the same piece of ground”(45), the olive tree “whose shallow roots were like thick arteries clinging together, clasp[s] the ground firmly” (9). Such metaphors point to the symbolic use of trees both in the Jewish National Fund’s policy of bringing over pines from Europe and North America as part of a Zionist landscaping project, and the Palestinian national movement who have turned the olive tree into an emblem of their cause. If it “is not *any* symbolism, but *national* symbolism that makes you into a land pornographer,” as Shehadeh commented after citing Stone, then “the identification of the land with your people and through that with yourself” (TW 86-7) that constitutes such an ideological discourse is also apparent in the nature writing of *Palestinian Walks*.

Shehadeh is thus not writing an untroubled anti-national landscape as some ecocritical readings such as Robert Spencer’s avow (43); his similes and imagery partially reflect, rather than circumscribe, the “tented field in which rival narratives vie for possession of the land” (Spencer 40). Referring to a personified landscape, where even a stone has “a mouth open in a wail of horror” (PW xix), this narrated landscape, though presented through a discourse of nature or historical writing, is still haunted by a national consciousness and the symbolic land of an ethnic community. The hills are eventually also “butchered” and “massacred” (PW 108) by the highways built for the settlements which are “strangling” (PW 161) the hills and villages, echoing the sort of language of ethnic possession that Shehadeh overtly criticizes.

Through this personification of the landscape, the ghostly presence of a subtly national or ethnic reading of territory, the vampirical land that demands a violent sacrifice, begins to haunt Shehadeh’s narrative, the landscape itself becoming a signifier of a Palestinian past – butchered, massacred, clasping, clinging – assuming metaphorically the place of the Palestinian community. His terminology takes on increasingly violent undertones as Shehadeh describes the Israeli ‘separation wall’ which:

stretched in a jagged course that was determined not only by Israeli military considerations but also by the special interests of settlers and land mafia lords, slicing through the hills, destroying their natural shape, gulping large swathes of Palestinian land [...] The 'settlement blocs' Israel planned to annex, which thrust like daggers into the Palestinian land, were now sheathed by the wall. (186)

There is a register of almost sexualized violence, 'slicing', 'thrusting' even 'gulping', which is reminiscent of Frantz Fanon's discourse of violent national anti-colonial resistance in *The Wretched of the Earth*. The settlements like 'daggers' echo Fanon's "searing bullets and bloodstained knives" (28), which are a call for violence as an inevitable and necessary part of decolonization. Shehadeh's descriptions of the settlers, with their exclusive rubbish collection systems and highways, and their settlements whose "yellow lights [... create] an illuminated noose" (186), are offset by his depiction of the Palestinian villages whose poor water resources and dirt tracks are cut off from the wider infrastructure, so much so that they are even subjected to the sewage outlets from settlements. This dialectic between the 'haves' and 'have-nots,' echoes Fanon's juxtaposition of "the settler's town [which] is a strongly built town, [...] a brightly-lit town" (30) with the "native town [which] is a crowding village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire" (30). As this revolutionary discourse suggests, there is a clear frustration and suppressed anger in the text that gives way to a violent rhetoric of action: Shehadeh's reflections on the "legal chicanery" of the occupying government's land usurpation and settlement policy leads him to conclude that it "can only lead to violence and bloodshed [...] A bloody struggle was inevitable" (PW 85). He is therefore not quite the post-nationalist writer, as this haunting of the 'past authenticity' of the episodic form suggests: a nationalist discourse, overtly discarded in the documentary desire to disassemble, increasingly evokes a revolutionary rhetoric in the text.

*Palestinian Walks* thus demonstrates the difficulty of striving for the 'future possibility' (of Said's 'scene') without falling back on discourses of authenticity. His human rights narrative here becomes undeniably political as witnessing must, in some sense, mourn more than a landscape. If the bordered or placed discourse is a necessity in Ghosh's cosmopolitan literary

politics, then the national form may still retain its position as a political necessity in certain partition areas, as Shehadeh's writing comes to demonstrate. This doubling of aesthetic and professional purposes creates a rupture in his narrative and representation, causing Shehadeh to shift away from his legal activism as the book appears to end on a note of a formal and political failure. Shehadeh fears that both his narrative mapping and legal activism have been futile: the fragmented walks fail to keep up with the rapidly changing reality on the ground and neither fully map an alternative cartography, nor salvage the existing nature and legal system from disappearing, thus cementing for Shehadeh the final rupture of legal human rights documentation. The stop-starting 'scenes' or multiple miniature narratives, give way at last to a retreat from his more public roles, turning "from activism to writing" (PW 172). Shehadeh doesn't, however, give up on human rights altogether, only a specific kind of activism that becomes too mired in political discourse. He concludes with Stone that he can sense in his own narrative the onset of the kind of national consciousness whose symptom is the 'land pornography' that he dislikes: "I have begun to think of our hills as 'virginal', 'molested' by the Israeli bulldozers" (TW 88), and "I feel deep, deep resentment against this invasion of my innermost imagery and consciousness" (TW 88). He opts therefore to turn to more literary intellectual pursuits as he draws inspiration from the long tradition of monastic orders and hermits in the region, "keeping their distance from the world" (PW 154). This withdrawal becomes the final dissociation from the collective akin to Said's in his memoir *Out of Place*, where he equates, ambiguously, his search for freedom and "for the self" with "that rupture" from family, Egypt and Palestine, kinship and home (294). It is a similar shedding of his professional political involvement which frees Shehadeh to position himself as closer to Said who sums up the intellectual's role in his Reith lectures as "Never solidarity over criticism" (24).

## ii. 'Let us not speak such words here again'

Shehadeh's second travel text, *A Rift in Time*, which follows in the footsteps of his great-great-uncle Najib who was a pro-Ottoman writer and journalist forced to flee from the Ottoman authorities for critiquing their policies in the First World War, seeks to construct a different literary space to *Palestinian Walks*. The book opens with a passage aligning Shehadeh's fate to Najib's – waiting for "the knock on the door" (2), the arrest by the authorities (in Shehadeh's case Palestinian) – that sets up the national society as an enclosing and confining presence. Unable to flee from it, like Najib, he chooses to write himself free of it. The text is replete with references to literature and language as capable of performing political changes in their own right. "Let us refrain from such terms such as 'Muslim' and 'non-Muslim', Greek and Armenian" (97), an Ottoman parliamentary member is cited in *A Rift in Time* as commenting, "Let us not speak such words here again" (RT 97). *A Rift in Time* similarly tries to distance itself from the documentary (and legal) politics of *Palestinian Walks*, changing the terms of the discourse on the landscape and community. Published three years after his first travel text it sees Shehadeh's night-time hobby become a full time pursuit, finally ending his ambivalent position as both legal actor and writer critic. Harnessing the potentiality of what Said in *Representations of the Intellectual* terms "amateurism" – "activity fuelled by care and affection rather than profit" (61) – Shehadeh brings his writing centre stage in a narrative that attempts to dissociate from the political present of the region altogether. This book is therefore, in a sense, the birth of Shehadeh's voice as a literary intellectual: where *Palestinian Walks* echoes Fanon, *A Rift in Time* appears to reflect Said's stance on the role of the intellectual in society. Having undergone the traumatic rupture (or collapsing of collective and individual narratives) in *Palestinian Walks* that pushed him away from the binds of kinship and community – which Said saw as fundamental to intellectual development – Shehadeh now channels the sense of rupture from community in his more recent work as something more positive, a "momentary rift in time, a respite from the terrible confines of the dismal present"

(RT 232). The rift here, as a substitute for rupture, points both to the geological phenomenon that unites the region in his alternative territory, and the critical stance of drifting away from national historiography and the collective story.

As a more consciously literary work, *A Rift in Time* places Shehadeh's journey in a lineage of his chosen political and literary predecessors: his great-great-uncle Najib, who documented his flight from the authorities in a novel (titled *Mufleh al Ghassani*), and T.E. Lawrence, the British agent renowned for fomenting an Arab nationalist movement against the Ottoman rulers and who wrote both travel texts and a political memoir (*Seven Pillars of Wisdom*). These two literary models come to stand, respectively, for the integrity of the intellectual who, like Said's definition, evades any allegiance to the nation or the tribe, and the manipulative colonizer who not only uses methods of oppression and control but encourages a virulent form of nationalism. While Shehadeh is drawn to the literary tropes of the political agitator Lawrence, who wrote about the landscape more movingly than "my unseeing great-great-uncle" (10) who he critiques for his lack of lyricism and descriptive panache, in the end it is Najib with whom he identifies. Najib shares his calling as both a writer (Najib is the publisher of and a journalist at the newspaper *Al-Karmil*) and an outspoken critic of the Zionist movement's land policy. Similarly to Shehadeh, he also placed his hope in the constitutional change of the Ottoman government that would have created "one Ottoman nation out of many Ottoman subjects, including Muslims, who could be Turks, Arabs, Albanians, Bosnians and others, Christians, who could be Armenians, Greeks, Arabs and others, and Jews, who could be of various nationalities" (7), and faced the disappointment of its failure. Both Shehadeh and his great-great-uncle fought the temptation to emigrate when their hopes for political change in the region were dashed.

The layered narratives (and journeys) at work in the text allow for a more creative perception of the land, forming a book that has freed itself from the responsibilities of

documentation in order to seek solace in the possibilities of art. Channelling the moments of hope from *Palestinian Walks* – the conclusion that a “mutual love of the land” (PW 203) can bring together its disparate inhabitants, and the realization that man-made constructs can be diminished if “looked at in a particular way” (“viewed from the perspective of the land” they become temporary and immaterial (PW 170)) – this journey is as creative, piecing together a geography from the Ottoman period, as it is physical, and seeks to “imaginatively recreate the region” as it was in Ottoman times, undivided (RT 48-9). Prefaced with two important citations, a reference to his mother’s story-telling abilities and Brian Eno’s quote that “Human beings are capable of a unique trick, creating realities by first imagining them [...] And what is possible in the art becomes thinkable in real life,” *A Rift in Time* is more suggestive of Timothy Brennan’s “cultural fictions” (“National” 63) that shape imaginary communities (in this case a post-national rather than national one) than a socio-political document.

Shehadeh thus uses past narratives and the geological phenomenon of the rift to write a utopia of a borderless landscape which perpetually renews itself as a natural wonder, eliding ethnic fixing. Travelling through sites of sectarian massacres in Lebanon, Shehadeh advises the reader in a statement that reflects the text’s own healing function after the ruptured scenes of *Palestinian Walks*:

Think of *the scene as part of a long rift* extending across continents [...] a natural wonder of our amazing planet that has survived and will continue to exist beyond the borders people and political entities impose to confine us (116, emphasis added)

This perspective of the *longue durée* emphasizes a historical as well as geographical farsightedness, a vision of the territory itself as an expanse that will, with time, heal the ruptures of the present. *A Rift in Time* is therefore demonstrative of a different kind of environmentalism, one which, while concerned about ecological suffering, chiefly employs nature as an allegory for alternative communities of belonging to the nation.

Nature in Shehadeh's account repeatedly defies boundary-making and outlives it. Appreciating the beauty of the landscape is an antidote to the conflict of the present, like acknowledging one's own insignificance in relation to the "physical expanse of the land" (RT 55). Shehadeh's *Strangers in the House* shows how the political language of partition reflected in his grandmother's neighbourly dispute is counteracted by the very natural surroundings they are fighting over, in a rhetorical move that also informs his landscape writing in *A Rift in Time*:

The only neighbour she could call from her window was her adversary in a dispute over the border between her garden and that of my aunt. In the disputed area my aunt had planted a passionflower climber, which then spread its leaves over the wire fence between the two plots. My grandmother insisted that my aunt had no right to plant this climber, and I grew up thinking the worst of passionflowers. I modified my views only when I learned much later of the outstanding medicinal value of these flowers: they are known to relieve tension and lower blood pressure. (10)

While Shehadeh is overtly demonstrating how this "battle over the two-meter area of land mirrored the other, real war with the Israelis" (SH 10), he also highlights the irony of the passionflower as both the cause of the border dispute and the cure for alleviating the mutual suffering that is its consequence. Typical narrative tropes that depict partition as a fall from a national Eden are thus rewritten to reveal how such narratives can hinder the understanding necessary for a solution to the conflict. Similarly in *A Rift in Time*, not only does the passionflower defy the boundaries imposed upon it, but likewise "the course of the river [Jordan] shifts in a single day" (57), turning what was on the Israeli side into Jordanian property and vice versa. Nature itself harbours, as in *The Hungry Tide*, a much more flexible model for community: the variety of wild flowers that had once covered the slopes were the natural state of the region, Shehadeh points out, as opposed to the "uniformity of green" (47), and this natural cycle of "variety in colour and sound" (72), extends also to the diversity of cultures, a "mix of Bahais, Christians, Jews and Muslims" (48) that in turn comprise the natural human variety of the region, according to Shehadeh. Shehadeh does, as such, use nature as a model for a more ethical home. However, while doing so, he evades the problematically

depoliticised nature as heralded by Jonathan Bate's 'ecopoetics', and which Robert Spencer criticises, where the poetry of being in one's 'natural' locality faces the danger of becoming a kind of essentialism.<sup>57</sup>

*A Rift in Time* employs literature itself as, what Said terms in his Reith lectures, the "quasi-utopian space" of the intellectual, where reflection and research can take place without "being beholden and therefore constrained by" power and authority (61, 51). The borders, though mentioned, like cracks in the landscape, are not outlined in the kind of detail as they are in his previous work. "The river [Jordan] is no more a border than the great fault. The only borders are in people's minds, artificial creations" (RT 55), Shehadeh writes. The imagined space offered by the literary text is employed to push the boundaries of the political realities of the present through a longer, historical and geographical vision. Shehadeh opts for a historically rooted vision of the territory, which shows not just an awareness of the colonial history of the region as Spencer suggests, but that, I add, operates spatially through the wide-angle lens he applies to the landscape in his narrative.

The view of an imaginary cartography that exceeds the present reality becomes a narrative tool for counteracting the ethnic and divisive politics he comes across in the various national groups inhabiting the region, a shared geography offering a solution to politics by uniting rather than dividing. On Mount Arbel when Shehadeh encounters two Arab men who express a deep-rooted antagonism towards Christian Palestinians, he counteracts this exclusionary discourse of belonging with a different geographical perspective: "a panoramic view, a wide-angle perspective of the whole area" (45), a view across borders which renders them insignificant. Similarly, when faced with different sites of sectarian massacres in

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<sup>57</sup> Bate for example celebrates the pastoralism of the *negritude* movement, without engaging with the problems of defining identity along such lines (79-80). Spencer critiques Bate for a blindness to the "political implications of Heidegger's emphasis on roots and dwelling" that, according to Spencer, has prevented ecopolitics from shaping its ideals "in a way that is adequately distinguished from the rhetoric of belonging that characterised a certain reactionary ecological approach." (38)

Lebanon, Shehadeh “tried to keep in mind that this plain was a continuation of the Dead Sea” (192) – here again ethnic fragmentation is combated through geographical unity or continuity. The longer journey of Shehadeh’s more holistic narrative thus offers in structure the same ‘sweeping’ perspective that places the ruptures of the present, the ‘scenes’ of *Palestinian Walks*, into a larger imagined trajectory, as ‘part of a long rift’.

Shehadeh’s use of the landscape to evoke a humanitarian sensibility comes close to Spivak’s planetary consciousness, writing the world not as a limitless globe but rather a finite place struggling for survival and sustainability. His literary landscape of free citizen subjects, unbound by borders or nation states, not only tries to bear witness to an endangered planet, but also a potential universal collectivity based on a different vision of nature – not as the defining factor of humanity or the rhetorical gesture behind regressive ethnic definitions, but as the larger, all-encompassing ‘other’ to human experience, where “alterity remains underived from us” (Spivak 72). However, Shehadeh’s territory is not only rooted in a notion of “inscribing collective responsibility as right” (Spivak 102), as Spivak mentions and as Spencer suggests in his reading of *Palestinian Walks*, but is also historically linked to particular communities and states. His literary narrative allows him to explore this very tension as an unresolved element of his politics: rifts slip into ruptures, and ruptures become timeless seams, stitching the region together again. There are both the destroyed homes that bear witness to the man-made destruction in the region in Shehadeh’s landscape, and echoes of a larger, non-human suffering at stake in his narrative.

In the end, however, Shehadeh’s travelogue is a personal account of the landscape and its environmental and political threats, and it falls back on its imaginative nature to offer a solution that is more individually gratifying than necessarily politically viable. Setting out to imagine a landscape that has not been co-opted into strict ethnic nationalist categories, and resuscitating Najib’s belief that “it was possible for the three ‘Religions of the Book’ to coexist

and live freely within the Ottoman system” (RT 20), Shehadeh does not document the tragic ways in which it has been co-opted, but rather repeatedly wrests from within the ruin he sees around himself a possibility for the future from the past. His vision of the fragmentation of the land into a “mosaic of countries” of national and ethnic allegiances “with well-defined edges” (20, 31), carries with it the resonances of a unified undivided Ottoman state that preceded it, with a “unique tapestry of numerous small, ancient farming villages belonging to members of the three religions” (47), and as he views the borders of the landscape he “yearn[s] for the train that would one day travel again over this land connecting all the people living along the eastern Mediterranean”(186). Geography, therefore, in terms of landscape or territory, is no longer spatial but – as with Ghosh – becomes an issue of temporality, defined by narratives of ‘then’ and ‘now’. After the Six Day War in 1967 (when Israel occupied the Palestinian territories to the current green line) Shehadeh writes of visiting places he hadn’t seen since the start of the war (a week earlier) and states that he felt as though he was “returning to the past” (SH 51). This temporal depiction of ‘return’ – a predominant national concern often reflected in literary narratives as discussed in the introduction – not only challenges the territory driven discourse of nationalisms based on fixed visions of ‘roots’ but also suggests how ostensibly stable material realities are narrative or discursive constructs. In his own narrative, this trope allows Shehadeh to alter the traditional story of return or homecoming from a territorial demand to a temporal journey, which can be granted via the figural return to the past in memoir.

These narrative strategies are part of the book’s own intellectual project to map Shehadeh’s place as much as the spatial contours of the area. Like Said, who pushed the boundaries of texts – as he states in his memoir *Out of Place*, he would “mentally exten[d] the story presented in a book,” “pushing the limits to include myself” (33) – Shehadeh’s attempt to write himself and his surroundings into a different time and landscape suggests an employment of the literary text as a space of dissent that permits the intellectual to place

themselves simultaneously as both part of a community, stretching its boundaries to include even their own critical voices, and as critical outsiders of the real community. His focus on narrating (and pursuing) a particular vision or experience of territory, via the travel text, equates the narrative itself (“my eighth journey” in *Palestinian Walks* (xx)) with an individual quest for what Ghosh called a “choice of Histories” (AL 95), alongside the egalitarian post-national landscape he seeks to map.

Like Shehadeh’s conventional memoir, *Strangers in the House*, which is a political coming-of-age story, *A Rift in Time* thus performs an autobiographic function of mapping the self as part of the “disciplined bodies” of post-Enlightenment bourgeois culture (Sidonie Smith 3). It moves away from his father’s faith in a political initiative towards a two-state solution, and thus demonstrates the development of not just his own person (which in his conventional memoir remains tied to his father’s legacy) but his own voice. While *Strangers in the House* outlines a “sense of place [that] was not mine” (2), *A Rift in Time* is a distinctly literary exercise which seeks to map a sense of place that *is* his – constantly ‘out of place’ like Said, with the larger national story – via re-imagining or resisting what has become “my place in this ancient land after the fragmentation of our territory by borders, roadblocks, zoning, the building of Jewish settlements and the creation of a new geography that has left me utterly confined” (RT 49). His long-term geological perspective is consciously different to his father’s view of the settlements and changes to the land. “‘Once these communities come to be established,’ he said, ‘it will be impossible to remove them’”; opposed to Shehadeh’s concept of their transience, his father argued vehemently for political intervention “[b]efore there is no land left to speak of” (SH 172). We can see some of this sense of urgency to act that his father espoused in the documentary mode of *Palestinian Walks*, but in *A Rift in Time* Shehadeh’s search for a different understanding of territory through a narrative mapping and physical tracing of the historical journeys of his preferred predecessors (Najib and Lawrence), is precisely a move away from his father’s position. This later travel text, while not entirely a

*bildungsroman* (it depicts, after all, Shehadeh as a fully grown adult), thus incorporates the sense of *bildung* as a narrative of political 'subjecthood' to come to which Joseph Slaughter refers.

Slaughter claims the development narrative of the *bildungsroman* in World literature mirrors the European enlightenment narrative of a universal 'subjecthood' that dictates human rights law, in that they are both "mutually enabling fictions" (4): narratives that map a coming of age are, often, in fact, mapping the development of a particular political rights-bearing subject. The kind of landscape that Shehadeh attempts to narrate does indeed reflect his political quest for the right form of belonging, for himself as much as the community. Shehadeh pursues his own role, as a writer, activist and intellectual, within the borderless community he tries to trace via his travels. He strives to capture in his text the kind of unhampered movement that Najib and Lawrence enjoyed, both of whom idealized and romanticised the Bedouin way of life that Shehadeh summarizes as: "Let those who build houses lament their destruction" (RT 194). The text, consequently, puts forward a nomadic vision of belonging: Shehadeh prioritizes the mobility and freedom of "time spent in the wilderness" over a carefully bounded territory (190), as he strives to imagine into being a different, freer citizen subject through the act of journeying not just in time, but physically across the larger region.

The landscape he hopes to find is a multi-ethnic system reaching from "the entire stretch of the Rift Valley, from the Taurus mountains in the north all the way down to the tip of Hijaz, modern-day Saudi Arabia" (RT 35). Once brought to life it is meant to provide a different political sense of belonging in the same way that the *bildungsroman*, according to Slaughter, narrates "the social outsider who acquires agency to convert the picaro's unbounded physical mobility into social mobility" while "posit[ing] the cultivation of democratic humanitarian sensibility as the culmination of modern subjectivation" (42). While

his journey may, to a certain extent, liberate Shehadeh (if only temporarily, as we will see), his unifying vision harbours its own problematic precisely because of its own exclusivity. Shehadeh is, after all, a literary traveller, who is also ill at ease with his own privilege. His mobility is exceptional, not nominal, and he balks at the possibility of being faced with the obvious question about his own liberty to travel from other Palestinians he meets along the way (39).

One such example provides a foil for Shehadeh's own, more privileged journey. Abu Ahmed, Shehadeh's Palestinian taxi driver in Jordan, is also a traveller who by virtue of his profession has been through much of the Middle East and Europe: "At my age movement is good. It's important to keep on moving" (137), the septuagenarian tells Shehadeh. In his own stoical way Abu Ahmed resists not only borders but the confines of political ideologies. He greets each passing police officer or soldier as he passes, flagrantly breaching his officially sanctioned route, with "*Marhaba hukoumeh*' ('Hello government!')(120-1). Such simple gestures of defiance (Shehadeh reflects how the disgruntled officers are powerless to object: "what could they say: 'We're not the *hukoumeh*?'"(121)) show up the elisions in Shehadeh's own journey, which are, in some sense at least sanctioned by the official channels.

There is, as such, also a pressure building in this narrative as the impasse between its literary aims and the 'reality' of Shehadeh's actual journey begins to clash at the various borders and checkpoints. Looking towards Palestine from Lebanon towards the end of the book, Shehadeh in fact questions the possibility of imagining a greater landscape through fictional tropes:

from there it is but a short distance to the Galilee [...] and then home to Ramallah in another two hours. During Najib's time none of these borders existed. He travelled with an entirely different sense of a landscape than the one which has since become fixed in my mind. I found I had to make an effort to distinguish between what is physically possible and what is practically impossible. The political fragmentation has made these lands unbridgeable. (193)

The utopian space of literature – as a fluid map where boundaries can be extended to reflect an intellectual position that is not national – gives way to the pressures of Shehadeh’s personal experience. The alliteration of what is ‘physically possible and practically impossible’ is suggestive of the balance at play in Shehadeh’s texts where the natural and the political are inseparable. Despite his best efforts to hold the two in tension in *A Rift in Time*, the ‘real’ material constraints, like in *Palestinian Walks*, disrupt in his literature the utopian vision of an egalitarian, post-nationalist community to come.

This post (or pre-) national cartography developed in Shehadeh’s text overlays the existent Zionist settler and Palestinian national cartographies, contributing to yet another layering of mutually exclusive maps. It looks not towards a two-state solution but a territorial unity: as he looks out from Mount Arbel, Shehadeh states, “I knew that this land ought never to be divided. Those living on the Golan Heights look down from their villages at the lake and those living around the lake look up at the Golan Heights and each should be able to visit the other” (37). While harking back to a more promising time in the past – in this case the Ottoman era, which regime Shehadeh admits might have needed “reforming” but which he upholds as an example of a “multi-ethnic system that never attempted to colonise the land” (RT 21) – Shehadeh’s vision has its parallels in less politically-idyllic contemporary movements, such as the call for an *Eretz Israel* or a pre-mandate territorially unified Palestine that would not recognize a Jewish state.<sup>58</sup>

In writing such an alternative cartographic discourse to challenge that of not only Zionism and a regressive Palestinian nationalism, but any ethnically fuelled national identities in the region, the political divisions and the very metaphors he uses to challenge them begin to create rifts in his own narrative map, pushing in on the imaginary borderless landscape.

Following a passage about the building of a casino and the corruption of politicians on both

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<sup>58</sup> Movements for ‘Eretz Israel’ consider the entire historical Palestine, and some Jordanian territories, as part of the ‘true’ historical and religious land of Israel.

sides, who are able to cooperate when mutual financial benefit is at stake, he observes the geological phenomenon of the rift valley in a less unifying light:

The crust of the earth is subject to so many tensions and stresses that sometimes it breaks. A fault then develops. [...] Distinctive landforms are associated with faulting: where a succession of tension faults occurs, a series of troughs or rift valleys may result. (51)

The tensions, which have caused a series of faults or cracks, reflect not so much a landscape of universal rights as a universal competition for rights in favour of economic greed. Similarly, Shehadeh's trip to Lebanon reinforces the link between the landscape and the entrenchment of ethnic allegiances:

we drove through a landscape criss-crossed by deep ravines and forbidding cliffs often hundreds of metres high. The difficulty in penetrating inwards from the coastal plain must have rendered these areas the perfect refuge for persecuted religious minorities. This was why different groups survived here with a measure of autonomy during Ottoman times. (RT 191-2)

Ethnic splits are suddenly part of the landscape, this time hospitable to dispute rather than an antidote to difference.

It is this return journey, for Shehadeh as with Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, which begins to destabilize the universalist vision he has constructed. As the narrative falls into Ghosh's linearity in real time, returning both metaphorically from the fantasy historical landscape Shehadeh has narrated, and physically from the final journey of his trip, Shehadeh becomes aware of not just the geographical rifts and divisions as actually impinging boundaries in the landscape, but of the force of the political borders that slow down his progress. Israel's "racism towards me as an Arab," Shehadeh concludes, does not "attribute an equal status to me as a fellow human" (RT 221). This observation, finally, is the lasting problem of this humanist territory: that even a human rights discourse demands some kind of division. After all, to identify humanity, as Judith Butler so succinctly points out in *Bodies that Matter*, is always, simultaneously, to recognize that something falls on the other side of the categorical boundary (8). Roberto Esposito in the recent collection *Theory After Theory*, argues precisely

this point through the philosophical category of the 'person'. He suggests that, while meant to challenge the impersonal biological ethics of biopolitics, the 'person' inevitably becomes constructed through a distinction between "the rational, moral and spiritual" and "the animal" (212), pitching the former over the latter as the body becomes "the property of the person who inhabits it and in no way coincides with it" (211).

The attempt to write his own development as a rights-bearing subject through Najib's journeys across the landscape, and by extension a unified geographic expanse of universal citizenship, thus becomes eventually hampered by a prevailing sense of the inevitability of borderlines in some form; and this realization awakens in Shehadeh an allegiance to community. Najib is forced to hand himself in because of the governmental pressure placed on the community who will be punished for harbouring him, while in Shehadeh's own narrative the Palestinian community with its sacrifice and suffering comes to haunt his vision of a post-national geography. As Shehadeh observes, Najib "died before he could witness the utter loss of the country and the degradation of its original inhabitants into ghosts" (47). Shehadeh eventually concludes by imagining how his great-great-uncle would have seen the landscape: "The first thing to strike him would be the silence. [...] A gentle wind produced a soft susurrous sigh. But this was all. There was no other sound, not human, animal or machine" (RT 72).

The unified landscape, of one continuous region-wide territory, is thus also haunted by Samira Kawash's vision of Fanon's 'natives' as uncanny vampires. In an intentionally sinister-sounding chapter, "The Silence of the Land," echoing the horror film of a similar title, Shehadeh describes walking through the plateau of Galilee, fruitlessly looking for the villages that Najib had sought shelter in, and only noticing towards the end of the day some almond trees which, as cultivated trees, mapped out a lost landscape of settlement: "the only reminders of the life that had once flourished here, peaceful presences above the grassy land" (RT 83). The vanished cartography represented by the almond trees marks an ethnoscape of

communal history and sacrifice, a silent image of absence: “With the possible location of the Arab villages, the old features of this cemetery of a land began to emerge, illuminated by the white blossoms of the almond trees, marked by the petals that slowly glided down to the ground around them in utter, hushed silence” (RT 83). The trees provide another symbol of roots and histories (like the olive tree in *Palestinian Walks*), shaping a nationalist topography in the text. Like Fanon’s Algeria, “the ‘empty’ landscape perceived by the colonizers” or Shehadeh’s post-national vision of territory is thus “shadowed by an uncanny double, a landscape traversed by the ‘non-existent’ colonized” (Kawash 253).

This ‘cemetery’ points to some of the impossibilities and problems of a universal human rights discourse and cosmopolitan vision of belonging in such a conflicted region. The landscape, which to Shehadeh “feels more like a ghost land” (RT 76), suggests the Palestinian’s inability to gain rights as humans without gaining rights as citizens. On closer inspection, the terms of Shehadeh’s description in *A Rift in Time* echo those in *Strangers in the House* depicting his father’s death that he equates with the passing of “a vital society that could provide for the needs of its citizens and allow for a life of dignity and self-assertion” (SH 196). The passers-by on the street at the scene of his father’s death remained “enshrined in the thick fog” beyond recognition, and these fellow townsmen shift from being “a few people on the street” to something other worldly, “slid[ing] furtively in and out of sight, their bodies emitting an orange-lit vapour,” until Shehadeh concludes, “they appeared hardly human” (SH 195). The blow to the national resolution that the death of Shehadeh’s father represented, quite literally renders the Palestinian people as shadows, hardly human. Lacking a state, they lack humanity. Shehadeh’s spectral imagery thus suggests how human rights are intrinsically tied to national rights, demonstrating what Hannah Arendt observes, in her tract on *The Perplexities of the Rights of Man*, that human rights are least recognized in those who lose their political status (41). As such, Shehadeh’s text suggests, like many critics after Arendt have

done, that human rights are not the rights of individuals as humans but in fact the rights of citizens of recognized nation-states.

The human rights narrative, and landscape of universal rights rather than national belonging that Shehadeh develops, thus continues to bear the spectres of nationhood as a system of categorization it arose from, inherently tied to a “Westphalian (or Herderian) worldview that divides social and literary space into nation-states and national languages” (Slaughter and McCellen 13). The imaginary landscape of non-territorial citizenship is haunted by the need to recognize humanity via citizenship. As a cartography of death, the landscape in *A Rift in Time* is not calling for a blood sacrifice from its subjects, like the vampirical land of *Palestinian Walks*, but reminding, silently, that the people have already bled for it, and consequently, that subjecthood can only be recognized by such an acknowledgement of blood – not as a marker of ethnicity or belonging *per se*, but as a part of the notion of ‘humanity’ that in practice paradoxically rests on such a premise of political community.

Shehadeh’s environmental ethic, which seeks to place humans in the context of a larger, unified entity that supersedes nations and communities, is, therefore, finally left behind as his narrative becomes more focused on the need to map the position of the human, above that of the landscape, in any future territory. His text does not, as such, reach the kind of reconciliation between “the human as right-bearing subject and the figure of the human glimpsed through the critique of the subject” (5) that Dipesh Chakrabarty sees taking place in other environmentalist discourses, such as the science of anthropogenic global warming.<sup>59</sup> What Chakrabarty terms the ‘human-human’ (as individual agent) and the ‘non-human’ (of human species as a geophysical force) do not exist simultaneously on an equal footing in Shehadeh’s ethical territory. Shehadeh privileges figuring the rights-bearing subject over the

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<sup>59</sup> Chakrabarty argues in his recent article “Postcolonial Studies and the Challenge of Climate Change” that the scientific discourse of climate change has “doubled the figure of the human.” Humans act on the environment individually but are also, as a species, the cause of climate change. As a geophysical force, the human species is thus in turn figured as a “nonhuman, nonliving agency” (14).

environment, and does so even if it demands a recourse to forms of belonging (such as the nation) that are deemed problematic both politically and ecologically. Without his father, Shehadeh is still haunted by the death of the collective promise of the nation in *A Rift in Time*, which drives Shehadeh to feel “that the pursuit of *individual justice* for my father had to be abandoned and in its place was the hope for a more *collective pursuit of justice*” (227 emphasis added).

If, as Eagleton suggests, Said’s aim was justice rather than identity, then Shehadeh’s pursuit of the position of a non-political, post-national critic who strives for universal human rights indicates that the two might be impossible to dissociate. There is an unshakeable sense that if the violent *Intifada* was, by Shehadeh’s description “the revolt of sons against their fathers” (SH 228), then Shehadeh’s journey away from his father paradoxically leads him back to the kind of political engagement that he stood for. This is perhaps not so far from Edward Said’s position in the end, as he states in his Amnesty lecture in 1992 that “we need to acknowledge frankly that individual freedoms and rights are set irrevocably in a national context” (199). It is, however, not a complete surrender to a nationalist revolutionary vision either, but is testimony to the notion that it is “at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows” (199), as Fanon reminds us in *The Wretched of the Earth*. The role of the post-partition intellectual in areas of on-going conflict has to balance borderless aims with highly territorialized strategies.

In the textual and physical journeys of *Palestinian Walks* and *A Rift in Time*, Palestinian human rights activist Raja Shehadeh thus moves between being a political writer and a literary one, struggling for the space, both in literature and the state, to narrate an alternative community in the face of a dominant national narrative. Through his narrative maps of the West Bank and the wider Jordan Rift Valley, a curtailed and partitioned landscape develops into a multi-layered land, without ever shaking off its representative double, the symbolic

mythologized landscape that Shehadeh seeks to dismantle. As such, his texts circle around a tension or rupture, where the border itself haunts the borderless landscape he seeks to imagine, suggesting not only that some form of limits or a bounded community (like Ghosh's) may be necessary as places to speak from for a post-nationalist community, but that, as Vilashini Cooppan argues in *Worlds Within*, in the era of globalization we are not "entirely beyond nations and national identifications," which keep returning in different spectral forms (70).

The vampirism in Shehadeh's works or the spectral presence of nation forms and narratives in universal calls for post-national units and rights, is thus potentially indicative of not only the necessity of some form of community, place or boundary in any bid to universality, as Fanon and Said indeed suggest, but also of the particular function of a World literature in which Shehadeh, as an English-writing Palestinian, partakes. Thus while these hauntings are not merely a 'return of the repressed', as ethnic nationalist movements in partition societies are not 'primordial' (as Cleary points out) but a part of modernity, they are inextricably tied in antithesis to its universalist aims, playing a part in resisting the pitfalls of the unequal application of universal discourses of rights.<sup>60</sup> They are a trait of what Cooppan terms the vampirism of World literature, where "alternatively seduced by and terrified by the imperative to think the whole [...] world" (32), each text's "historical situation is subject to uncanny regression and return" ("Ghosts" 32). World literature is haunted by a myriad of borrowings, alterations and interactions between texts across time, as Cooppan points out ("Ghosts" 21), and which we will see in the case of popular contemporary Pakistani English romances. The 'living death' of Fanon's national consciousness in Shehadeh's human rights community to come suggests that the 'life-in-death' ("Ghosts" 21) of the author-critic who

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<sup>60</sup> Cleary argues that the resurgence of ethnic identities in partition states in particular stems from partition as an "ethnic nationalist" concept in its own right. As a political policy it operates on the "ethnic nationalist premise that nation-states should be ethnically homogeneous" (21).

straddles the divide between the two, is a symptom of contemporary World Literature as moving between both a national and international consciousness.

### 3

#### Violent Intimacies: Love across Literary Fields in the Pakistani Romance

Within post-partition literature there is an emerging generation of writers finding their own voices in a global market who, like Shehadeh, are concerned with developing the “nation and global [as] tandem ideas” (Cooppan *Worlds* 4). Twenty-first century Pakistani authors Uzma Aslam Khan and Kamila Shamsie, who write in English and whose works are being translated into, among others, Norwegian, French, German, Spanish and Italian, engage with the national legacy of partition in ways that reflect the wider audience they write for: they use romance narratives to explore not only the possibilities of bringing disparate communities together, but also the terms of cross-cultural exchange in an uneven global modernity. Hailed as “marking the emergence of a new generation of Pakistani novelists” (as Tariq Ali comments on the dust jacket of Khan’s *Trespassing*) and as two of the promising writers for the twenty-first century, Aslam Khan and Shamsie are exemplary of a popular post-partition literature that is consciously reconfiguring the legacy of borders in partition societies, as well as the borders of an international literary culture.<sup>61</sup> That is to say, like the other writers in this study, they are rethinking the role of their own novels in the nexus between a more political postcolonial literature and the growing field of World fiction, whereby ‘world’ is defined by the size of the Anglophone market (and its potential for translation) and the form of articulating some kind of “universality” as Robert Young suggests.<sup>62</sup> My claim is therefore not only that their works are overtly cartographic – thematically and allegorically – through their romance plots and tropes, but that in the process of reflecting on the limits of the national community and culture, they

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<sup>61</sup> Shamsie was listed as one of the Orange twenty-one Writers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

<sup>62</sup> I refer here to Robert Young’s distinction between the two in his essay “World Literature and Postcolonialism” where he argues: “Whereas at some level world literature must always be claimed as universal for it to merit its place at the world literary table, postcolonial literature [...] insofar as it involves resistance, will always in some sense be partial, locked into a particular problematic of power” (217).

map out the routes for popular fiction, in particular, in constructing alternative national and literary communities.

Popular fiction travels, as Ann Steiner points out in “World Literature and the Book Market,” and Uzma Aslam Khan and Kamila Shamsie are employing their own widely disseminated fiction as a model for the more open community and heterogeneous culture they envision for post-partition Pakistan.<sup>63</sup> To do so, they are turning to the widely-read (and critically overlooked) partition genre of the romance. The romance narrative offers not only a trope for reimagining the community – “many of the most popular and generically recurrent narratives about the conflict adopt the form of romance that straddles the political divide” (110), Joe Cleary points out in the case of Northern Ireland – but also, a form for considering how an English Pakistani literature can merge with a World literary field. In the case of the former, Aslam Khan and Shamsie have already diversified the existing cultural responses to partition states, giving voice to stories and histories from a variety of social actors on different sides of the multiple political and social divides. Ananya Kabir argues in her article on Aslam Khan that she serves as an example for why partition studies should be extended beyond India to examine how “cultural actors with divergent national affiliations respond to a common heritage” (175), and Caroline Herbert similarly proposes that Shamsie engages with the silenced histories in the nation-building project following the 1947 and 1971 partitions in new and important ways (159-60).<sup>64</sup> In terms of the arrival of English Pakistani literature on an international market, however, their global success is still challenging them to find new and better ways of representing the Pakistani community at home and abroad. Thus while the romance has typically been employed allegorically to consolidate national and ethnic identities

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<sup>63</sup> Uzma Aslam Khan’s novel *Trespassing* was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writer’s Prize in 2003, *The Geometry of God* won Bronze in the Independent Publisher Book Award in 2010 and Kamila Shamsie’s *Burnt Shadows* was shortlisted for the Orange Prize. Shamsie has also been awarded the Patras Bokhari award, twice, for *Kartography* and *Broken Verses*.

<sup>64</sup> Pakistan, of course, received independence during the Partition of India in 1947. It experienced a second divide when Bangladesh seceded in a bloody war in 1971.

through uniting symbolic families (as Doris Sommer has highlighted in Latin American foundational fictions), Aslam Khan and Shamsie employ the trope to reflect on borders in “displaced or sublimated modalities” (Cleary 107). In *Trespassing* (2003) and *The Geometry of God* (2010), *Kartography* (2002) and *Burnt Shadows* (2009), Aslam Khan and Shamsie respectively map affairs, first loves and marriages on small and epic scales to consider the meaning of belonging in communities struggling to come to terms with sectarian riots, terror and even nuclear warfare. If the territorial borders in themselves are not a concern – as in Shehadeh’s writing – then the boundaries between sectarian communities, classes and genders (and I would add, literary markets or fields) certainly are.<sup>65</sup>

Fellow Pakistani author, Mohammed Hanif, demonstrates in his recent novel, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, how the romance, since Aslam Khan’s and Shamsie’s earlier fiction, has come to be used in the emerging field of International English Pakistani writing.<sup>66</sup> In Hanif’s novel, the tongue-tied Muslim bodybuilder and police tout, Teddy, fails to impress Sister Alice Bhatti, a Christian nurse at the Sacred Heart Hospital, with a declaration of love delivered at gunpoint (“The love I feel for you is not the love I feel for any other human being” (68) Teddy pontificates). Humiliated by his rejection, he rushes out of the hospital and “raises his arm in the air, and without thinking, without targeting anything, fires his Mauser” (70). As a result, the city stops moving for three days as violent sectarian riots erupt (the fired bullet, having pierced the shoulder of a truck driver, sets off a spiral of events starting with the driver

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<sup>65</sup> Both writers, for example, are concerned with the after effects of the Hudood Ordinances which signified the implementation of Shari’a law in Pakistan in 1979, whereby women in particular had their legal rights curbed. Termed after the Urdu and Arabic for ‘borders’, the ordinances came to signify less visible but equally powerful boundaries within the nation.

<sup>66</sup> English Pakistani fiction, while not new, is relatively recent as a canon. Kamila Shamsie notes in her article “Another Side of the Story” that it was only after literary critic, and her mother, Muneeza Shamsie’s anthology of English Pakistani literature (*A Dragonfly in the Sun*) came out that a clear English-language Pakistani literary lineage could be spotted. Shamsie cites, among others, Aamer Hussain who claimed that “When I read *A Dragonfly in the Sun* I felt I had been given a home. For the first time I could look at a collection of writing and say, yes, that’s where I belong.” English Pakistani literature’s place in the World literary market has only been cemented in the past decade, as will be discussed in the second half of this chapter.

mauling a rickshaw and five school children). The disproportionate outcome of Teddy's failed attempt at wooing Alice ties not only the failure of love to the instability of social and ethnic cohesion, but also (in)articulacy with violence.

Hanif's romance thus reflects the opposing trajectories of ethnic identities in the world today, as theorized by globalization theorist Arjun Appadurari, which trouble post-partition authors such as Kamila Shamsie and Uzma Aslam Khan. If the mobilization of sectarian violence across the city reflects an outward circulation of internal identities ("representing the projection of bodily states and experiences onto larger canvases of action and representation" (149)) in an 'ethnic explosion', then it is the romance itself that demonstrates the opposite movement – an 'implosion' or "inscription upon bodily habit of disciplines of self-control and practices of group disciplines" (148). To write narratives of healing through the cross-border romance (that Cleary theorized in the case of Northern Ireland) is also to participate in a form of violent discourse: reconfiguring the body, yet again, as representative of a new (post)national community. The speech act comes hand in hand with a gun, as Teddy demonstrates: his insecurities in expressing himself are relieved through his violent prop as he "realises that he has already delivered his opening line by pulling out a gun. Now he can start anywhere" (67). Both necessary and potentially violent, the conflict romance, as Hanif's novel suggests, demonstrates a self-reflexive engagement with the cultural articulation of community.

Although Hanif was writing his romance in the wake of Shamsie's and Aslam Khan's successful Karachi love stories, Teddy's uneasy and convoluted declaration of love is exemplary of the terms under which international Pakistani writers such as Aslam Khan and Shamsie figure a literary space of dissent. They channel the romance narrative's reliance on intimacy as a yearning for contact with the strange(r) or foreign(er) to not only posit alternative communities, but to reflect on a literary practice that strives to embrace both

heterogeneity at home and universality abroad. They both want to write alternative national communities *and* be read as universal – the desire they feel to articulate their own community is thus *not* the same desire they feel for becoming part of a world literary field, though it is through the latter that the former is expressed, as in Teddy’s phrasing. Thus while writers such as Ghosh and Shehadeh are concerned with disassembling a discourse of ethnic kinship in nationalist literary texts, clearing up after an ‘explosion’ of bodily signifiers that come to over determine ideas of territory and nation, Aslam Khan and Shamsie (as we will also see in the case of Israeli writer David Grossman) are rethinking the opposite movement of the paradigm: implosion. Through a focus on the signifier itself (the body) and its inscription – (ethnic identities and their construction) – they shape a literary discourse that explores its own limitations and possibilities in generating narratives of equal coexistence in an unequal world cultural space.

In the contemporary English-language literary field, the world is not only the ultimate limit of possible readers but also what determines cultural production. Jan Baetens suggests that World literature today is coming to be defined by a conscious attempt to ‘produce’ or ‘invent’ “*global hypes*” (337). If Baetens to a certain extent overstates the role of the literary industry in our understanding of the field, he nonetheless touches upon the important point that not only critics (as Djelal Kadir formulated) and the publishers, but writers themselves are involved in the active *worlding* of texts.<sup>67</sup> Aslam Khan and Shamsie are trying to use popular forms like the romance to forge new models for the local community abroad: to resist, like Shehadeh, through the act of travel. Thus while Shehadeh sought out his own path as a critic, and Ghosh a form for the placed cosmopolitan novel, Aslam Khan and Shamsie are not concerned with situating their texts, or their own mobility, as much as mapping the meeting of

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<sup>67</sup> Kadir argued about the field of criticism in “To world, to Globalize” that “the term ‘world’ is no longer merely a nominal noun or an expansive adjective” (6) it is also the action of giving literature a “particular historical density” (2). This density is figured more in terms of a deep temporal experience of cross-cultural and international exchange, rather than as the political context of texts.

Pakistani literature with a larger, more international literary field. However, texts are read differently as they travel, and their assimilation into such a World literary market not only liberates them but also submits them to new boundaries; consequently, Shamsie and Aslam Khan, like the ill-fated lovers of their texts, in turn approach and withdraw from such a cross-cultural embrace. Despite their similar trajectories, their respective encounters with a larger international literary field begets very different World texts: while Shamsie's novels reach outwards to expanding audiences and even broader, borderless literary spaces, Aslam Khan's increasingly return, like Ghosh's and Shehadeh's works, to a local and delineated place.

### i. The Trajectory of Lovers

Aslam Khan's and Shamsie's earlier romance novels plot very similar stories and have largely been received by critics and reviewers in similar terms.<sup>68</sup> They are both set in Karachi during the 1980s riots that were sparked by the accidental death of a Muhajir school girl under the wheels of a Pathan bus driver, and depict the more and less doomed love affairs of young protagonists whose romances are overshadowed by the sins of their fathers. While Raheen and Karim in Shamsie's *Kartography* are kept apart by the history of their parents' partner swapping (and ethnic betrayals) during the Bangladesh war of 1971, however, Dia's and Daanish's secret romance in *Trespassing* unravels as it becomes apparent that Dia is the product of her mother's and Daanish's father's love affair, rendering the two central lovers half siblings. There is therefore a formulaic, genealogical problematic to these novels that distils "the nation and the family" and "ideal history and domestic romance" (Sommer 84) in a traditional allegorical gesture. Parents whose failure to consolidate (despite consummating) their love produce a history of rupture and division that the young lovers have to (or,

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<sup>68</sup> For example, several readers comment on the novels' capacity to convey their location to a wider audience. Fellow Pakistani writer, Aamer Hussain, argues that *Trespassing* succeeds in locating Pakistan "on the map of world politics," and Edith White suggests that Kamila Shamsie manages to turn "what began as a spot on the atlas" into an "enchanted place" in her review of *Kartography*.

alternatively, cannot) overcome.<sup>69</sup> Nevertheless, behind such overt romance tropes lie more nuanced and self-reflexive explorations of how community can be constructed in a 'world literary space'. Aslam Khan's and Shamsie's texts replicate the trajectory of the lovers they depict. From a yearning for cross-cultural exchange they move towards an intimacy with a World literature that is both violent and empowering.

*Trespassing*, as its name suggests, traces the many invisible lines that cut across society – social standing, gendered laws, ethnic factions – that weave into the two main storylines of heterosexual incest and homosexual love. The eponymous trespassers are not only the lovers themselves and the innocent school girl who died crossing the road, but are also Dia's father, whose upper-class mobility comes at a cost as he is tragically killed by Sindhi separatists in a random attack on the road from his family farm, and the foreign trawlers, mining the Karachi seas on an industrial scale and putting the local fishermen out of business. Most importantly, Dia and Daanish, who break the ultimate taboo of incest, have their own foil in the 'trespasser' Salaamat, the son of the local fishing family that works on Dia's family farm. Salaamat complicates all neatly bounded categories of belonging as an 'ajnabi' (foreigner) in a city full of 'ajnabis' (coming from the 'native' ethnic group of the region he nonetheless remains a rural immigrant in the city populated by partition migrants), and he strives both for the unreachable Dia and consummates a homosexual relationship with fellow separatist fighter, Fatah.<sup>70</sup> Lines and limits are thus dangerously present everywhere in Aslam Khan's novel, but they are also constantly in the process of being redrawn. While the expanding corporate fishing industry and the Sindhi separatist movement are constructing new, highly negative, borders in their place, Salaamat as a different kind of boundary-breaker

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<sup>69</sup> Shamsie and Aslam Khan, however, attempt to avoid replicating an allegorical discourse that equates the male fighter or female home-maker as the respective protectors and repositories of national identity, as has been typical in the partition romances and which has come to be adopted by many contemporary writers.

<sup>70</sup> Although their relationship is somewhat contextualized by Aslam Khan as a feature of situational homosexuality, it is also perhaps the rawest form of love in the novel: Fatah risks his life and his allegiance to the camp to help Salaamat escape.

explores more positive forms of trespassing across the lines of empathy and allegiance. If these lines appear primarily to be political, the romantic problematic in the novel nevertheless interweaves these many different boundaries between inside and outside, movement and stagnation, to explore how representations of Pakistani culture can be restricted by a 'world literary space' as well as by sectarian movements at home.

Published a year earlier by a writer moving between Karachi and London, *Kartography* also considers the possibilities of narrating the community to a world audience but from a more positive perspective. The romantic tension hinges not on the nature of the boundary between the inside and the outside (which is crossed with ease) but on the process of boundary-making. Karim and Raheen are kept apart by their disagreement over the possibility of maps to bring order to the place, or to "define a city as a single territorial unit, [to] give a sense of connectedness" (141, 244) as Karim believes on the one hand, and on the other hand Raheen's insistence on seeing maps as "geographical truths in the language of poetry," a medium for "hear[ing] the heartbeat of a place" (180, 181). Raheen's desire to include fictional or sentimental visions in how a place is defined (i.e mapped) is counteracted by Karim's reminder that such fictions come at a cost: a wilful blindness to the political and territorial realities of place. We have here in the lovers' quarrel the dilemma that popular Pakistani writers such as Aslam Khan and Shamsie have to face: the novel, while able to recreate a place or community through a romantic vision, can also distort.

What is therefore keeping the lovers in both stories apart is not ethnic, class or social difference, but maps *per se*. As such, it is not only the prevalent definitions of community in Pakistan, but also the romance as an allegorical mode that is being called into question. Although *Kartography* opens with an image where maps lie literally in the hands of the writer to be manipulated for better ends – "The globe spins. Mountain ranges skin my fingers; there is static above the Arabian Sea" (1) – the globe, as the story unfolds, also "spins off its axis"



themselves and their way back to each other, Raheen anticipates their union in a cartographic fantasy:

I dipped my thumb in ink and ran it over his palm: heart line, fate line, Mound of Venus. *Boat Basin*, I said. I unbuttoned his cuff and rolled up his sleeve. With the tine of a fork I traced his vein, from wrist up to elbow. *Mai Kolachi*, I said. He held the tip of my ring finger against his elbow joint, moving the fingertip back and forth along the groove; *The Beach Luxury Hotel Road*, he said [...] He ran his inked palm over skin, under cloth, in between teeth, leaving imprints of his destiny all over my body, and I returned the tattoo, his heart line passing from palm to cheek to abdomen to hip to crisscrossed paths to routes unmapped. Our sweat smelled of unwritten words. (340)

The repeated references to 'ink', 'written words' and 'imprinting' reveals how Shamsie configures the bodyscape that Raheen and Karim construct as indices of the novel itself. The 'tattooing' or inscribing of spatial awareness onto the body, the mingling of bodily lines with urban gridlines, holds the promise of unifying the city (and via that the larger national society) as well as the lovers through creating an intimacy with place. This sort of mapping is, if not liberating, then at the very least a form that allows otherwise excluded elements of society to participate in its construction (if those elements are, as we will see, of a more privileged class). However, if there is a movement towards some form of mapped union in Shamsie's text, it is yet to come into fruition. Like Raheen, Shamsie only anticipates the novel's ability to forge a union between lovers (or ethnic groups) and literary fields; *Kartography*, like the lovers in the text, is still in transit, in the process of *worlding* itself to its audience.

If *Kartography* maintains the map's capacity to provide alternative more open communities (through the lovers' embrace), emphasizing not only the ability of the romance as a kind of cartographic genre (plotting a union between different bodies into one body politic), but also of the international writer to romantically narrate an imagined community to a wider audience, then Aslam Khan rejects such a solution. While Raheen's and Karim's multiplication of parents (Raheen's father Zafar was engaged to Karim's mother Maheen, and vice versa with Ali and Yasmin) provides a potentially fertile multi-ethnic genealogy to their relationship, Dia's and Daanish's incestuous relationship reflects the polarization of ethnic

identities in the city where Sindhis, Pathans and Punjabis are factionalizing.<sup>72</sup> Their romance is emblematic of the pernicious vision of purity that makes the nation family revert to inbreeding and incest.

The problem for Aslam Khan is not that she fails to conceive of states where the healing cross-border romance can be consummated, but rather that the familial politics of the genre conjure a particular kind of ethnic discourse of community that reflects the often essentialising tendencies of the literary market. If Dia's and Daanish's liaison is doomed from the start, Salaamat's relationship with fellow fighter Fatah does open up the possibility of alternative forms of love that could otherwise be seen as illicit in the Pakistani community – Aslam Khan depicts Salaamat's sexual intimacy with Fatah as a near religious act of worship in an image that implies submission to one's fellow citizens instead of national idealism: "He bent down as though, at twenty, to finally give thanks" (363). However, Salaamat's affection for Fatah is driven by a kind of predetermined linear plotting of his body, as he repeatedly refers to his 'rectangular' shape ("I bet even your navel's a rectangle," Salaamat whispered, helping Fatah undress" (363)). Their intimacy therefore reflects the cartographic reading of bodies (through an ethnic nationalist discourse) that the Sindhi separatist group, via Fatah, represent. Drawing Pakistan is "easy," Fatah taunts:

[']an arm extending from China into the Arabian Sea, with the thumb and little finger sticking out sideways like that [...] Sindh is the thumb. Notice none of the countries that affect us most have any shape to speak of. Afghanistan is a shapeless glob. What is Russia? Amreeka? Big like Anjuman but with none of her curves. A bump here, a finger there [...] So about this thumb. We are what we are because we've lived on it for thousands of years. Once it had pride. Now it has a cuff around it. It's been bent and beaten and the blood's been shut off. It dangles impotently. To stand erect, it has to break free.' Salaamat knew by blood, Fatah meant the Indus. He'd spoken many times of the dams in the Punjab that were choking off the supply. (358-9)

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<sup>72</sup> Zafar's rejection of Maheen on the grounds of her Bengali origin (wouldn't want to "dilut[e] her Bengali bloodline" (232)) during the Bangladesh war represents the fracturing of the state through sectarian allegiance that Raheen's and Karim's eventual embracing has to overcome in order to provide a future antidote for.

Fatah's maps become 'fingers, 'thumbs', bodyscapes, in a geobodily discourse in which the anthropomorphized shape of Pakistan and Sindh lend them credence in the face of what appears as identity-less external powers such as America or Afghanistan. Although Fatah's highly sexualized landscape breaks with the traditional feminization of the nation (where the woman in the heterosexual romance is often "synonymous with the land" as Sommer points out (85)), in employing a homocentric discourse (of 'impotence' and male pride), Fatah's description perpetuates the cult of masculinity that fuels the vision of community in militant groups. As such, in Aslam Khan's passage, the lovers' embrace stands in for the "unbearable intimacy" of what Jacqueline Rose terms the "deadly embrace" of sectarian violence ("Deadly" 21). These symbolic maps made flesh continue a self-perpetuating cycle of meaning-making through violence, consolidating bodyscapes rather than helping the nation move past ethnic rifts, as Salaamat reflects: "[t]he first thing the Bullets did when they captured someone was cut off his thumbs and the last, dispose of the body in the river" (360). Thus, while the fighters' romance could open up possibilities for other kinds of love, due to Fatah's politics, this relationship, like Dia's and Daanish's, is doomed in the text to be violent for the community it aspires to represent. The inscription of maps onto bodies and bodies into maps through the literary potential of what Sumathi Ramaswamy terms "a national longing for cartographic form" (151), is therefore an inherently violent process for writing/imagining the community in Aslam Khan's novel.

Aslam Khan therefore abandons the romance as a trope that relies on the very discourse it tries to challenge, both in its representation of the community, and in its circulation in the market. The failure of the romance in *Trespassing* is the failure of successfully merging the inside and the outside of the ethnic communities in the city, and the failure of Pakistani writing from 'outside' of the nation to account for a nuanced reality. The incest plotline, if anything, reflects the writer's own "anxieties of privilege and how they find expression in a minority national language" (107), as Paul Sharrad observes about Anglophone

Indian writing. Dia's and Daanish's romance, marred by being a reiteration of their parents' affair, suggests a failure on behalf of their parents to marry tradition with change, or to combine outside models and influences with Pakistani culture and society, which Dia's and Daanish's union cannot repair. Daanish's father, the Doctor, desires a life of activism and change, yet on the condition that his wife and culture stay the same.<sup>73</sup> This dichotomy replicates itself in the younger generation who do not heal the contradiction but repeat it: Daanish's desire for travel is conditional on keeping Dia as a stationary anchor. *Trespassing*, as such, suggests not merely the difficulty of overcoming past ethnic rifts but that Pakistan is still struggling to resolve a cultural and political conflict between openness and exclusivity, to find a middle ground between the often destructive external influences of the U.S.A and Afghanistan, and a more introverted cultural policy that risks sliding into the fixed identities of sectarian groupings.

Aslam Khan is clearly taking a standpoint, via the romance plot in her novel, against certain forms of literary expression in the popular fiction market, which, as Lisa Lau points out, at times 're-orientalize' their subjects. Shamsie and Aslam Khan, like internationally successful Pakistani authors such as Mohammed Hanif, are writing in what Madhurse Chatterjee terms "the shadow of the gun" – both the gun of the sectarian and state violence that has raged in their home country, and a literary gun, the pressure to write political stories of ethnic communities for a wider market. Successful Anglophone Pakistani writers are expected to engage with the fraught political conditions of their place of origin, and to specifically explore "the ramifications of terrorism and violence in society" (Chatterjee), as Muneeza Shamsie argues and Uzma Aslam Khan bemoans.<sup>74</sup> Hanif points out that "the Muslim world [...]"

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<sup>73</sup> Dia's mother concludes "Like so many political liberals of the time, he turned out privately orthodox. As if a thin membrane snagged his beliefs each time he stepped inside his home" (428) and the Doctor's wife in the end embraces her position as the bearer of tradition, praying that her son "Like her, [...] should not be the changing type." (64)

<sup>74</sup> Undeniably, much of the recently celebrated Pakistani fiction delivers coming-of-age stories that reflect their turbulent cultural (or political) contexts, be it the perils of cultural and political

witnesses more violence and bloodshed” than other areas of the world (Sidhu), and British-Pakistani Nadeem Aslam suggests that this socio-political condition informs a literary culture where “writers [...] are actually trying to explain this mess” (Bhatia). Such representations of community, however, while aiding the circulation of their texts – Graham Huggan has argued that the global literary market capitalizes on the “widespread circulation of ideas about cultural otherness” (28) – can perpetuate rigid and stereotypical identities and thereby effect a hardening of the metaphorical boundaries of identity and community. Novels can therefore hold on to borders at home, while they seek to cross cultural borders abroad.

Aslam Khan, who has moved back to Pakistan at a time when many writers are leaving to achieve greater artistic freedom, is highly critical of Pakistani writers who do not live in the country and follow, what she terms, “the Orientalist tradition, using trite icons – jasmine flowers, spices, saris, bangles – to evoke an exotic ‘East’ that is best smelled from afar” (Ahmed Hussain). Her novel thus demonstrates how romantic narratives of the nation (both in terms of the genre, and an idealistic or exoticising tone) orientalise local cultures for an international literary market. If the romance in the novel is an allegory of national narratives, then the incestuous central romance in *Trespassing*, and Salaamat’s and Fatah’s intimate cartographies, show the friction that texts experience in trespassing across the boundaries between national and world literary fields: narrow ethnic allegiances or essentialist cultural/identity markers cling to texts, as they do with people, when they travel.

If Shamsie’s and Aslam Khan’s novels are romance narratives about the act of writing national allegories, they are also texts that map their own desire to world themselves. They put forward not only alternative forms of belonging but alternative literary models of expression for generating such communities via their own texts. David Damrosch argues that

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identification and misidentification in Mohsin Hamid’s and H.M. Naqvi’s post 9/11 novels (*The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *Home Boy*, respectively) or the transformations of adolescence reflected in regime change (as seen in Mohammed Hanif’s *The Case of Exploding Mangoes* and Ali Sethi’s *The Wish Maker*).

world literature is a “mode of circulation and of reading” (5) and *Kartography* and *Trespassing* both attempt to provide models for the kind of reading that would bring their texts to a wider audience and thereby enable more open literary communities to be imagined.

Raheen, the female protagonist in *Kartography*, for example, develops from being wilfully ignorant of others’ suffering to recognizing the heterogeneous classes and ethnic groups of the city as part of her and vice versa, through a reading experience that turns out to be distinctly international. While Raheen’s initial scrape with violence as a teenager joyriding with her friend Zia resulted in bruises that were not from the bullets that lodged themselves in her car door but in fact her own “fingers digging into my flesh, reassuring myself of its wholeness” (89), her self-absorption changes to a psychosomatic empathy with the city’s violence after she begins reading the newspaper. When she reads about the explosion at a familiar teashop in Karadar, she sees “between one word and the next, images of bullets and bodies, the wounded weeping for the dead, crushed and broken sugar cane kicked aside by fleeing feet; balloons burst around me and the ground outside the white-tiled hotel rushed up to meet me. Gravel bit into my skin” (324). Here it is Raheen herself who is mapped by the city she reads about, paying forward the cartography of a more open community that Shamsie attempts to depict.

Moreover, Raheen’s reading makes possible an awareness of not only other citizens, but other cultures and communities. If at the time of visiting the teashop in question, Raheen had wondered at the shipping schedules used as place mats and their lists of foreign ports, “what it meant to be part of a port city, [...] to have these strange and foreign syllables intrinsically involved in the commerce of the place, to look at the man two tables from you and wonder if, for all his lack of external signs of affluence, he knew the word for ‘ocean’ in thirty different languages” (261); now she comes to understand such an international identity. She imagines the man in the blast whispering “Ocean, oceano, samundar, mohit, moa shoagor,

umi, bahari, valtameri..." (324) in an incantation of language that demonstrates the ability of reading to not only forge Anderson's imagined national communities (the connection between Raheen and the fisherman in this case), but an international awareness.<sup>75</sup>

Thus if the romance in Shamsie's text appears to operate as a national allegory that is distinctly rooted in genealogy, in mingling or extending bloodlines, with the "sexual embrace" becoming emblematic of the "political embrace" (Cleary 114) and thereby reflecting the market demand for essentialised cultural difference, then *Kartography* proposes that it is not ultimately the writer but the reader who *worlds* a text. Historical depth and regional context is added via Raheen's expanded linguistic awareness. Moreover, the community becomes figured not as a closed entity of strict members or citizens, but defined by its participation in a larger regional and global movement of trade and people: as Raheen begins to read the news she also starts to decipher a history of transnational movement and cultural exchange in the everyday objects around her (such as the aforementioned shipping schedules). Shamsie thus emphasizes the ability of international fiction, by virtue of its trans-nationalism, to challenge strictly-defined communities at home. Permission to love in *Kartography* is intrinsically tied up with what Yasmin, the mother of the narrator, deems the ability "to look the country straight in the eye" (280). The *worlding* of the text occurs not through challenging perspectives on the community, but through making "a distant place feel intimate," rendering "the unfamiliar into familiarity" ("On Leaving"), as Shamsie aims in her fiction. By capturing Karachi, even as an emigrant, feeling the "texture" of the city ("On Leaving"), her romance brings places closer to the alienated elements of the community (the emigrant, Karim and the elite, Raheen) and to a wider audience.

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<sup>75</sup> In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson argues that print languages laid the bases for national consciousness as readers "gradually became aware of the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their language-field, and at the same time that *only those* hundreds of thousands, or millions, so belonged" (44).

It is, as such, the specific relationship between the writer and their international audience, in Shamsie's text, that allows for a more productive, alternative community to be imagined, or even made viable. Her novel strives to envision a futuristic map, and by that a text, that could bridge the class and ethnic divides that *Kartography* touches upon. She reveals, in her article "Author, Author," that she draws on Google's interactive maps for literary material to imagine other, distant places, and thus write a larger, post-national cosmopolitan community into being. The map that Karim and Raheen plan to construct by merging multiple media reflects such an ideal literary venture: "Click, you see streets that exist seasonally, like your lunar street. Click, you see which sections are under curfew. Click, you hear a poem. Click, you see a painting. Choice of languages in which you can read the thing. Sound files in all kinds of dialects. Strong graphics for people who are illiterate" (337). As a cultural medium that is both variegated and accessible, such technologically driven maps (or novels, if we want to pursue our allegorical argument) form an essential part of a future world culture as envisioned by Shamsie. International in form as well as content, the truly worldly cultural artefact would become a leveller of social and cultural injustice by virtue of the geographical breadth of its readership.

However, while her novel moves to embrace a wider international audience, it fails to carry a more open Pakistani community with it. *Kartography's* proposed interactive map is only available to a few (by virtue of existing in the elite medium of the internet), and following the publication of the novel (and a string of other romances such as *Salt and Saffron* and *Broken Verses*), Shamsie has been received as a writer of elite chick lit, referred to by her metropolitan reviewers as both a "multi-culti Nancy Mitford," and a Pakistani Candace Bushnell.<sup>76</sup> In addition, if the community that the lovers ultimately represent within the text is expanded by their union, it is only within strict boundaries. Even though Shamsie's text

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<sup>76</sup>See the *Time Out* "Books Special" review of *Kartography*, and Hagestadt's and Tonkin's for *The Independent*, respectively.

registers class-differences, the less-privileged characters (such as the car-jacker who saves Raheen and her friends when their car breaks down in a poor neighbourhood, and the beggar girl and fisherman in the cafe they visit) exist only on the peripheries of the narrative as reference points for the protagonists' development rather than as independent actors in their own right. The flesh and blood reader may therefore become intimate with Shamsie's subject matter, but ultimately, due to the limited scope of her novel, such an intimacy doesn't forge a wider understanding of Pakistan or its community.

While Shamsie envisions an international text written in transit and received by a wider audience in an intimate relationship of literary circulation, Aslam Khan is clearly more concerned with the terms of production – a truly worldly text (in content and circulation) has to write its communities with care. For Uzma Aslam Khan, a heterogeneous literary field must operate through what Ananya Kabir terms an “organic revival of the region's indigenous arts and crafts” (“Deep” 182). However, this craft is not based on “an ethics of natural fibre and dye” (182), as Kabir suggests, but on an admittedly constructed, even commercial, art form, which by virtue of its popularity can be open to appropriation in more democratic ways. While Dia's family silk farm has largely been read as a “metaphor for the novel as a whole” (Diski), the silk threads that provide one of the dominant tropes in *Trespassing* reveal not only a deep history of regional and international trade (Dia muses, in the beginning of the novel, over the Chinese Empress who first discovered silk and proceeded to weave a garment for her husband) but also indicate the selectiveness of such histories. The luxurious discourse of romance that the silk threads represent hide a multitude of (sectarian) sins. The Empress' gesture of love obscures the human cost of the future silk industry – “If she'd known that a thousand years later, several dozen Persians would pay with their lives for trying to smuggle silkworms out of China, would she have made that robe?” Dia wonders (11).

If Aslam Khan sees herself as the “caterpillar [...] connecting threads” when she writes, awaiting the “metamorphosis” of her novel (*Us Salam “No Trespasser”*), she nonetheless restrains the desire to weave a romance, like the *Empress’*, that would silence the cost of such national narratives: Dia reflects, “the British would chop off the nimble thumbs [of the Bengali and Benarsi weavers] that made a *resham* so fine it could slip through an ear-hole” (12). So while the silk worms of the novel weave the lovers together, bringing Dia and Daanish closer through a shared interest in the cocoons, it does not, ultimately, do so at the expense of the sectarian realities of the novel. The lovers are eventually torn apart, as the violent costs of such utopian histories – the sacrificial thumbs of the silk industry and the Sindhi separatist group that we have seen – prevents such neat narrative or political resolutions for the conflict. In the end, Dia decides to write a love story for her parents where she not only imagines a genealogy for herself that isn’t true, but one that links her to the land, her fictionalized mother stating, “‘It’ll help me feel that I’m at one end of a cord that leads back thousands of years. The cord is here’ she said, pointing to her navel” (442). Thus while Dia turns to the romance narrative to repair her family history and heal her broken heart, it is clear that such fantasies, although they may give comfort to their authors, overlook the entire substance of Aslam Khan’s novel that militates against such a wishful projection.

Consequently, while Dia and her silk threads provide the “web of images in which [Aslam Khan] weaves her many stories” (Aamer Hussain), the preferred model for the writer in *Trespassing* is not Dia but *Salaamat*. Through the foregrounding of the lower class driver, Aslam Khan models a text that occupies neglected subject positions in the community at home and thereby brings its readers to do so from abroad. If Aslam Khan, unlike *Shamsie*, is critical of the romance as a cartographic form of inscription that is not only inherently violent but enables the text to travel at the expense of restrictive representations of the community, she presents in its stead a reading and writing process that involves “leav[ing] my own skin” (Ahmede Hussain) in a movement that is not so much geographical as psychological. Aslam

Khan informs Us Salaam (in “No Trespasser”) and Ahmede Hussain, respectively, that she uses her literature to focus “exclusively” on the internal workings of the writing process, knowing her characters “intimately” in order to shape an aesthetic that is defined by the disembodied experience of inhabiting other lives. Such a form of literary intimacy aims to bridge the perceived gap between ethnic groups, classes and genders, rather than map them through an allegorical romance.

In Aslam Khan’s text borders are crossed internally – rather than physically, since the only kind of intimacy that could enable a sense of community without constructing new boundaries is a form of empathy activated by reading (or ‘looking’). Already in the prologue to the novel, when Salaamat watches a turtle give birth on the beach, we glimpse a vision of such intimacy in Aslam Khan’s text that reflects her own artistic aims. “Her eggs are smooth and oval, like a naked woman’s shoulders,” Aslam Khan writes of the turtle, “[t]he boy caresses his cheek, wanting really to caress the eggs, wanting really to caress the shoulders” (2). The repeated displacement of the object in these tender lines suggests how intimacy with the landscape leads to a sense of self, and through that a desire for intimacy with others. Beaten for attempting to protect the turtle eggs and dumped in the sea for dead, Salaamat’s left ear continues to “transmi[t] the sound like a cowry pressed to a normal ear and slowly withdrawn [...] the echo of a fading sea” (121). His appreciation for the turtle thus left him not only open to his surroundings (and thereby beaten) but a vessel for the landscape to reverberate within, rather than on, which “[a]t rare moments, when aroused by fury or desire,” rises “to an ominous roll of a drum, as if the ear cavity had filled with water again” (121).<sup>77</sup> The rising and falling internal echoes of the sea, in turn, also cause him to become open to other people. As we will see, they enable him to suffer with both the landscape and his fellow man – even his

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<sup>77</sup> Salaamat’s chosen immersion in the raw elements of nature become a restorative process both for his senses – “The sand beneath his toes, the scent of the river” (258) awaken him from his status as a “bullet” in the separatist group – and his vision of the nation – “he grew unconvinced that the answer to all his troubles was a separate state. If anything, this land the others wanted to split was showing him how to glue back his splintered pieces” (358).

ethnic 'enemy' – in a similar way to Raheen. However, he does so not by ascribing meaning to other bodies in a romantic cartography, but by trying to envision the world through their eyes. In contrast to Raheen's reading of the newspaper that allows her to imagine such bodies from a distance and subsequently inscribe her own cartographies (on her lover in the text; and allegorically through her union with her lover), Salaamat's capacity to read the body in pain as an object of such cartographic inscription leads him away from the communal mappings of the separatist group.

Salaamat, in fact, models a more democratic form of art through his autobiographic inscription at the bus workshop. The 'body' of the bus, which he paints with his most hidden secrets and desires, is an inversion of Salaamat's own life: "a huge turtle on the front fender ('That's not a turtle!' the others laughed. 'It's a giant ant!')" and "a steel dhow with two triangular sails for the metal frame of the rood ('And that's a giant moth!')" are duly combined with carefully plotted vistas from the silk farm, "the lush foliage of mulberries on which had assembled moths, which he gave more pigment than real silk moths" (242), and finally with a portrait of Dia. The painted bus is therefore indicative of a craft that accepts both its own failure to replicate exactly (the colours are more vivid, the images exaggerated), and acknowledges the necessity of allowing misinterpretation. Moreover, Salaamat's bus challenges others to envision alternative forms of community by not only "parad[ing] the hidden life of a native in the city of ajnabis" (243) but by opening itself up to be inhabited, literally, by its audience.<sup>78</sup> It is thus an invitation for the reader to 'look, but with love' (as the bus that Salaamat tries to emulate commands) and to inhabit a different perspective (from

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<sup>78</sup> Interestingly, Shamsie reflects on this form of narrative as a potentially productive model for her texts, as she comments on the photographer Amean J's work on the Karachi bus 'Shehzadi' (Princess). "Its extravagantly decorated interior [...] looked like a place of dreams" ("On Leaving"), Shamsie notes, "I saw unfamiliar worlds starting to feel familiar" that pushes her towards a more international scope in *Burnt Shadows*.

within the nation in Pakistan or from abroad).<sup>79</sup> As such, it comes to represent an art form which worldliness depends on its capacity to enable a more creative reading practice, which, Derek Attridge argues in his study *The Singularity of Literature*, comprises hospitality to the text, of being open to having “one’s purposes reshaped” (80) and of resisting “the mind’s tendency to assimilate the other to the same” (80). As a product that travels, the bus forms a visual narrative that comes to circulate, rather than circumscribe the city, and thereby assumes the position of popular fiction that can slip past the boundaries of not only literary markets but the closely guarded borders of imagined communities.

As a model for forging better communities (both at home, and through cultural understanding abroad) Salaamat’s artistic creation in the end renders it possible for him to also ‘look with love’ on his alleged ethnic enemy in the torture scene. “[I]f his bus had eyes,” Salaamat reflects when meeting the tortured man’s gaze, “it would have looked out at the world like that. It would look out of a ring-of-fire and keep looking til the eyes had burned. But before that, it would look at him” (368). The disembodied visual narrative of himself, which the bus represents, renders Salaamat capable of inverting his own gaze to picture the man’s, looking out at him, as a subject of his own narrative and life story, and not merely as the object of others’ violent inscriptions. As Salaamat is faced with the group’s torture methods, the piercing gaze of the man about to be electrocuted forces him to relive his own beating in waves of not violence but compassion: “He was swimming away. He tasted salt and then he felt a shell. The captive was in his arms. *Ride, ride*, Salaamat said to him” (369). Similarly, Aslam Khan’s own novel forces the reader to look not the country in the eye (as Raheen’s mother implores in *Kartography*) but other people, and thereby recognize their humanity:

what would his last thought have been? [Salaamat wonders] He couldn’t know, but he could see it. It would look like Handsome’s favorite dish: brain [...] Little slimy noodles

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<sup>79</sup> If sectarian militant groups are what a reader might expect from a Pakistani text, then a homosexual love story certainly is not. Likewise, Aslam Khan’s portrayal of the independent and strong-willed Dia challenges the predominant Western stereotypes of Muslim women.

in a wet pulp. That was what sat in the writhing man's skull. The button was a benign black circle, soft to the touch. And each time it went down, those little slimy noodles flared out, out, out, a sea anemone yawning. Slow, graceful undulations. Soft, powdery hues. Out, out, out, only there was nowhere to go so they started moving down, and around, and soon there were knots, and the knots were angry because there was no space, and then they just shot off. One by one, each noodle burst out into nothingness, [...] they each saw now what would happen to them, and even when it didn't happen, it did. So off they went. Panic in the sea. Mayhem in the seat. (377-8)

Salaamat's experiences in the sea fuse with the dying man's at the hands of the Sindhi separatist fighters, 'panic in the sea' is equated with 'the mayhem in the seat', and the waves of pain move between Salaamat and the tortured body, breaking the boundaries of consciousness. This brutal dwelling on the anonymous body in pain through the evocative image of the 'powdery hues' of a 'sea anemone yawning', ensures that the reader is spared neither the gruesome vision of the dehumanizing force of violence, nor the feeling of embodying its subject position via Salaamat's growing empathy. Hence while *Kartography* forges an intimacy through distant reading, Aslam Khan's own aesthetic project seems to rest on her capacity to make her reader 'intimate' with different ethnic and class subjects, as she becomes herself via the act of writing. She states in an interview, "the character I revised the least was Salaamat, the Sindhi fisherman's son [...] I knew him intimately, right from the start" (Hussain). Salaamat's capacity to embody the thoughts of the tortured man replicates her own authorial dispossession in attempting to fully inhabit Salaamat. Her writing, in the passage of the man's torture, flares outward like the noodles, the graceful undulations of the man's thoughts, to pulsate through the metaphoric prism of the sea into Salaamat's understanding, achieving her desire to pass in waves, as a writer, across the boundaries of consciousness between the multiple characters that inhabit her text.

Aamer Hussain suggests that "the novel is as packed with characters as a Karachi bus," and Aslam Khan clearly privileges Salaamat's bus art over the prescriptive communities implicit in Dia's romance narrative. She employs her novel's international audience to challenge and resist the conceptualizations of community at home, precisely by trying to draw

attention to the silenced narratives of its less privileged characters in an aesthetic project that is in its range of voices far more ambitious than Shamsie's. Anu's weaving during Daanish's childhood (once again the threads of love that try to tie a broken family together), results in misreading rather than self-expression as her son fails to register his mother's dedicated attempt to stake her claim in a parental battle, seeing instead "sea urchins, fan coral, jellyfish, and sea snakes. Names his father had taught him. Names his father would never share with her" (65). His mother's subtle attempts at communicating her love and misery are therefore unnoticed by the inattentive Daanish, who is equally blind to Salaamat's presence. Daanish dismisses Salaamat as deaf and remains oblivious to the silence their illicit romance demands of the lower class driver, who is increasingly "sick of being a witness, sick of being dragged into worlds that were not his" (233). Aslam Khan herself, of course, is concerned precisely with circulating those silenced voices, both Anu's and Salaamat's reflections, alongside Dia's and Daanish's love story, in a novel that flits between different first person narratives in the bid to reflect a more inclusive imagined community. For a text to truly pose an alternative form of community, *Trespassing* therefore proposes, it has to travel internally between characters as much as externally to new audiences.

Like the romances they depict, Aslam Khan's and Shamsie's novels thus reflect their own positions as literary works in transit, moving towards a wider audience, uncertain of the terms of their embrace by an international literary field. They both aim for and fear the double-edged "literary tourism" (Shah) that defines successful popular fiction; that is to say, a form of tourism that allows their readers in, yet risks portraying their contexts in restrictive and essentialist terms. Although writing to a wider world literary field from the inside/outside of the state can be marred by such pitfalls as much as by possibilities, the yearning for cross-border cultural contact that these texts embody (and allegorize via the romance) is nonetheless conceived as achievable via their popular form. Aslam Khan and Shamsie both place their hopes in the accessible (and formulaic) romance plots to allow their texts to travel

and to resist other more restrictive visions of community. In these earlier works, the spaces of dissent the writers envision to challenge closely bound sectarian identities hinge on this openness in form and circulation – a model that is increasingly challenged as their works enter the circuits they place such faith in.

As they gain a wider audience in an international market intimacy becomes less about cartographic inscription, whether reading or writing, but about Damrosch's other definition of World literature, circulation: the terms of cultural exchange in an uneven literary field that dictate the kind of literary communities their works can come to represent. While Aslam Khan is concerned with the inside/outside paradigm in *Trespassing*, her focus on intimacy as a way of getting closer to the national diversity in the Pakistani community comes to reflect not only her difficulty as an English-language writer, partaking in a World literary market she is critical of, but also her desire to shape a national Pakistani literature. The cartographic dispute that is the central tenet of *Kartography*, in turn, continues to trouble Shamsie's literary project in her later work, as she struggles to shake off a concern with just how (and with what consequences) stories interlace with maps. If the Google map of Afghanistan has developed from a "blurry map" during her initial research for *Burnt Shadows*, to an interactive site linking to the kind of YouTube clips Raheen's and Karim's fictional project alludes to (with clips "tattooed across the skin of Afghanistan" that depict American soldiers firing on the Taliban and Canadian politicians visiting troops etc.) then such a changed cartography reveals to Shamsie how, despite the desire to bring together poetic and scientific maps, as seen in *Kartography*, "we're still using maps to inscribe our stories on the world" in violent rather than productive ways ("Author, Author").

## ii. A Conditional Embrace

The publication of *Kartography* and *Trespassing* placed Shamsie and Aslam Khan among a wave of writers marking the arrival of English Pakistani fiction in a world market.<sup>80</sup> This generation of young Pakistani authors, or the “Pak Pack” as Shamsie calls them, have been crowned as “*Midnight’s Children’s* grandchildren,” dethroning Indian literature (which has long reigned over popular World fiction) in an oedipal manoeuvre.<sup>81</sup> To reach such success, the “Pak Pack” have delivered ‘conflict stories’ and national narratives to a market hungry for what Shamsie jokingly terms “bombs and mullahs” (“Another”).<sup>82</sup> Even Aslam Khan’s and Shamsie’s Pakistani romances have had their own successors in not only Mohammed Hanif’s novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (as mentioned earlier) but also Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and British Pakistani writer Nadeem Aslam’s *Maps for Lost Lovers*. However, as suggested by Hamid’s heavily-allegorized relationship between Changez and (Am)Erica (a model for the cursed love affair between East and West) and Aslam’s series of tragic love stories (riven by cultural, class, or ethnic differences), such narratives have reinforced rather than broken the metaphorical borders of communities. Despite, or perhaps due to, travelling in international markets they have resorted to strict ethnic imaginaries.

If the risks of such cultural and national (mis)representation in a market-driven World literary field was already clear to Shamsie and feared by Aslam Khan in their previous romance novels, the success of midnight’s Pakistani grandchildren has also drawn attention to a different boundary, this time between Pakistani writers themselves.<sup>83</sup> Not all English Pakistani

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<sup>80</sup> Of course Shamsie had already published *In the City by the Sea* and *Salt and Saffron* to some acclaim. However, it was only with the publication of this third novel (reviewed in all the larger UK broadsheets) that she reached the audiences that she has grown accustomed to today.

<sup>81</sup> Shamsie’s playful term for the emerging generation of Pakistani writers achieving international acclaim is cited in Bina Shah’s article. John Freeman terms these writers after Rushdie’s novel, while Huma Qureshi for *The Times* cites Adrienne Loftus Parkins (Director of the Asia House Festival of Asian Literature in London) who states: “In the nineties almost all mainstream South Asian writers were Indian, now you can say they’re all Pakistani.”

<sup>82</sup> See Shah, Qureshi and the *Tehelka* review “Here is the Subcontinent’s Literary Future.”

<sup>83</sup> Contemporary English Pakistani novels have not only been received as “suspended between diverse cultures” and hailed for reconciling “geographies, histories, nations, races and genders” via their unique

authors are reaching the audiences that Aslam Khan and Shamsie are, and the success of the few (the “top five”) has come at the expense of the many other voices, particularly of a less political or non-Anglophone literature, that hail from the same region.<sup>84</sup> As a result, Aslam Khan and Shamsie are forced to reconsider their own privileged position and their concerns shift accordingly from an engagement with the production and reception of their literature to the dynamic of the literary field they partake in.

They are now more apprehensive of how their texts are marketed, and under what terms they circulate, in a field that increasingly relies on cultural stereotypes and tokenism to represent entire nations or communities.<sup>85</sup> To challenge the universalizing tendency of such a metropolitan-centred World literary field, Aslam Khan retreats to a stronger postcolonial position. She shies away from all labels that try to lump difference together, rejecting even the heading “South Asian fiction” as “too vague a category” for a writer that identifies with the specificity of the local to the extent that “I can’t even relate to the category of ‘Asian’ or ‘non-Asian’ since I live in Asia” (Ahmed Hussain). Shamsie, however, is embracing her role in producing World literature, and theorizes the onset of a ‘Global writing’ canon that she sees dealing with international questions (rather than national concerns) under the rubrics of “war on terror Fiction,” “Fiction of totalitarianism,” “Migrant Fiction” and “The Novel of Many Nations/Nationalities” (“International Writing” 109-110).

The romance plot is still present in these novels, and with it a continued desire for more open communities centred on cultural exchange, but it has been significantly modified. *Burnt Shadows* depicts the intertwined histories of two families, the German colonial wife Ilse Weiss’, and her one time Muslim Indian employee, Sajjad’s. In between these two families,

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transnational perspective (G K Khan 54), but are also, increasingly, being held accountable for “re-orientalizing” (or over-ethnicizing) a vision of ‘home’ (Lau).

<sup>84</sup> Both Shamsie (“Another”) and Shah point to the fact that a literary trend can only become an established field through investment in and nurturing of new talent.

<sup>85</sup> Bina Shah cites one of Shamsie’s more cynical statements on the ‘Pak Pack’: “If five people constitute a wave, that just shows what a drought there was before.”

representing the 'West' (Germany/England/America) and 'East' (Japan/ India/Pakistan) respectively, flits Hiroko, the cosmopolitan Japanese protagonist who assimilates into all cultures and politically affiliates with none. Having witnessed the bombing of Nagasaki, the partition of India and 9/11 in turn, Hiroko espouses a politics of non-judgement and cultural sensitivity. Shamsie writes "she had no interest in belonging to anything as contradictorily insubstantial and damaging as a nation" (204). She is at once a citizen and victim of the world, and her linguistic abilities help her to tie together a larger – human, rather than national – family. As Hiroko meets Konrad via her services as a translator, and Sajjad in her Urdu-classes in India, her respective romances unite 'East' and 'West' (her first lover is German Konrad) as well as religions (she marries Muslim Sajjad) in their desire for intercultural contact. As such, the novel is a correction of Shamsie's earlier aesthetic vision which relied on more closely bound national allegories, and reflects an awareness of her own categorization as an 'ethnic' or minority writer. Shamsie, as stated earlier, would prefer to be read as engaging with broader, global questions and her novel reflects this in its scope. However, while the different marriages and friendships between the two families extend and crumble in turn, the potential central romance (between Ilse's granddaughter Kim and Hiroko's son Raza), which could both unite them and solve the raging conflict between their respective worlds in Shamsie's version of 'the war on terror', fails to materialize when Kim betrays Raza in the run up to their meeting. Shamsie's novel, while more wary of a World literature's capacity to bring about better communities, attempts to combat the borders within the international literary field through striving for a wider sphere of circulation (and readers) than the metropolitan Anglophone circuit.

While Shamsie responds to the unequal movements within an Anglophone World literature by extending her romance problematic beyond the interactions between Pakistan and the English-speaking world, Aslam Khan reduces hers to a particular group within the nation. *The Geometry of God* pits the two sisters, Amal and Mehwish, against each other as

practiced and thought intelligence, “earthy Aristotle and dreamy Plato”(4). Their lovers – Amal’s fiancé Omar, and Noman, who is in love with Mehwish – come, in turn, to stand for passion and pragmatism (“A child who blows with a small wind and bats for both sides. A Zia baby” (98), as Aslam Khan puts it). Thus the two sisters’ respective relationships map the “*marriage between faith and reason*” (114) that one critic of Noman’s father’s Islamic party considers as necessary: “There must be a *synthesis* of thought. Without Aristotle, no Ibn Sina. Without Ibn Sina, no Galileo. Why would you draw a partition between them?” (114). Hence the romances in the novel have a more traditional allegorical role than in *Trespassing*, but with less of a subversive potential (the characters are all from similar class and ethnic backgrounds and even Noman’s controversial affiliation with the Islamic party is only a front to please his father). While they offer a way of fusing the different historical and cultural layers of the community (which provides one of the dominant tropes in this novel about the practice of geology and palaeontology in Pakistan), they also strengthen the national culture. As such, Aslam Khan falls back on the romance plot to reintroduce some form of a boundary, from which to resist the less democratic movements within a World literary field that is, as Moretti argues, “one but unequal” (“Conjectures”).

Shamsie’s and Aslam Khan’s previous attempts to write the ideal nation community and/or a form that could cross geographical as well as communal borders, has therefore given way to exploring cultural exchange in a less idealistic and more nuanced sense. If their depictions of love, marriage and intimacy indicate a faith in the movement of lovers to create a more flexible community in the nation (Aslam Khan), and as part of a larger world (Shamsie), then the novels nonetheless reflect very differently on the movement of their texts in enabling such communities to come into being. Even though Hiroko constructs stories of being haunted by “the anatomy text, its illustrations following her everywhere – bodies without skin, bodies with organs on display” that could explain to the next generation the dehumanizing force of war (177); her failure to tell these stories to her son Raza leads him to being lured into the

close-knit communities and networks of the Afghan *mujahedeen*.<sup>86</sup> Sectarian communities are bolstered, Shamsie's text suggests, when narratives of viable alternatives are not circulated. On the other hand, in *The Geometry of God*, the Islamic party's threats against the palaeontologist Zahoor are literalized through an all too liberal (and brutal) dissemination of messages on corpses:

In the muzzle of his unloaded gun, a single ominous line scratched in blue ink on a scrap of paper: *Jaise ap ko pata hai*. As you know [...] the skull is smashed and the note rests across his eyes: *Jaise ap ne dekha hai*. As you've seen [...] Within a week, Nana's lawyer's guard is also dead. In the same handwriting in the same blue ink, a roll of paper dug into his ear: *Jaise ap ne suna hai*. As you've heard. (324-25)

If Shamsie continues to place some faith in the movement of a World literary field to counteract the excesses of racist and sectarian discourses (how a history that is not studied can come to repeat itself is a central theme in the novel), Aslam Khan, in turn, envisions the problem of sectarian identities as an excess of certain forms of writing. The circulation of literature in Aslam Khan's novel is steeped in this kind of overt (and epistemic) violence that sustains certain communities over others, while *Burnt Shadows* maintains that a World text can offer a solution to violent identity discourses by crossing the borders and barriers of the literary market as well as those of the nation state. If their earlier novels placed a very similar faith in the ability of World fiction to *world* its local community in a productive way, their circulation in the same market has led to very different literary politics taking shape in their respective works.

Shamsie, in fact, presents *Burnt Shadows* as precisely the kind of transferable story that she sees as a dissenting World text. The novel wears its cultural context lightly, as Young and Damrosch describe world literature (211, 129) enabling its transmission into wider literary fields (including those of non-metropolitan cultures). Japanese culture during the Second World War is compared to a German obsession with 'blood and honour,' while the cult of

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<sup>86</sup> The *mujahedeen* were the Islamic resistance fighters in Afghanistan who were funded (and armed) by America to oppose the Soviet invasion in the 1970s-80s.

sacrifice in Pakistani terrorism is equated with the tradition of hara-kiri (69). Likewise, the opening passage of the novel showcases a narrative that strives to consciously resonate with other conflicts and their victims:

Later, the one who survives will remember that day as grey but on the morning of 9 August itself both the man from Berlin, Konrad Weiss, and the school teacher, Hiroko Tanaka, step out of their houses and notice the perfect blueness of the sky, into which white smoke blooms from the chimneys of the munitions factories. (5)

The use of '9 August' echoes 'September 11' as does the reference to the blue sky (Shamsie repeatedly criticises the American 'war on terror' rhetoric that claims the attacks came 'out of the blue' in her fiction and non-fiction alike) and the ominous chimneys of the munitions factories point to the more famous chimneys of Auschwitz.<sup>87</sup> The interweaving of historical horrors creates a text that tries to refer constantly outwards to other cultures and spaces as much as to the specificity of the story in question. Telling such layered stories (of different cultures/places – that all come to signify each other), is part of Shamsie's vision of the 'truth' that fiction can deliver in the face of repressive cultural regimes: in a typically cosmopolitan literary gesture she explains "it's true, two of my South African friends have assured me, that my Karachi-centric novel, *Kartography*, is actually about Johannesburg" ("More Honest Than Facts"). While Shamsie's earlier vision of authorship was dictated by the distinction between those writers "who write about places with which they are intimately acquainted, and those who don't" ("On Leaving"), writing now gives her "the previously unknown pleasure" of envisioning "countries I had never visited" ("On Leaving") and thus expanding her imagined community and readership.

Shamsie is therefore working towards a cosmopolitan literature that she envisions as not only singularly capable of challenging global, rather than merely local, conflicts and

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<sup>87</sup> In her short story "9/11 Stories: Our Dead, Your Dead," Shamsie writes of a Pakistani journalist who refuses to observe the ten year anniversary of 9/11 in his magazine: "for a Pakistani magazine to do that would be simply to buy into the American story of the attacks: that they came from 'out of the blue'; as if Osama hadn't been on the FBI's Most Wanted list since 1988; as if the whole disgraceful nonsense around propping up jihadis against the Soviets in Afghanistan, and then leaving Afghanistan to descend into a swamp of civil war and Pakistani interference hadn't got anything to do with anything".

legacies of violence, but also, as we will see, able to move beyond the constraints inherent in the linguistic biases of a World literary field. The birds on Hiroko's back (grafted by the nuclear bomb fusing her kimono pattern onto her skin) point not only to the dangers of a nuclear arms race (between India and Pakistan, in particular, which continues throughout the novel) but also to her German lover Konrad's studies of a pre-war cosmopolitan Japan: Konrad's notes are considered so incendiary that his notebooks have to be hidden in the trees of his garden, like "purple-winged birds in the moonlight" (9). Hiroko's birds (and the implied concept of migration) are thus reminders of not only how violence travels but how the kind of literary mapping that Konrad sought to achieve can circulate to create better forms of belonging. If the world in *Burnt Shadows* is less welcoming of literary attempts to heal the community than in *Kartography* – the "purple-backed bookcreatures with broken spines [...] immolate themselves rather than exist in a world in which everything written in them is shown to be fantasy" (177) – then Shamsie's novel takes on the task of writing the book of a cosmopolitan world and "its liaisons and intermarriages" (12) that Konrad fails to produce. She strives to create a text that can move beyond the Anglophone literary world both in its scope (the novel spans four continents) and audience.

Such a literature, in order to be truly transnational, and not pander to the hierarchies of the current World literary field, would have to cross linguistic boundaries as well as national ones. As Shamsie demonstrates in her reference to the vehicle painting culture of Karachi (in a similar passage to Aslam Khan's bus painting workshop in *Trespassing*) looking 'with love' across cultural borders now hinges on an ability to look through the prism of multiple languages:

They were stopped at a traffic light, behind a rickshaw that had a pair of sultry eyes painted on it, beneath which was emblazoned, in Urdu, LOOK – BUT WITH LOVE. Raza's mind found itself instantly translating the words into Japanese, German, English, Pashto – a reflexive response to any piece of writing he glimpsed as he drove through the city's streets. (146)

If Raza is the ultimate cosmopolite, at home in multiple languages, then a text that could truly *world* communities by its circulation, Shamsie envisions, would have to emulate such a movement between non-metropolitan and metropolitan languages. Translation between 'peripheral' (as well as metropolitan) cultures would allow the text not only to resonate across a wider number of cultures, but to circulate beyond the confines of an Anglophone literary field. Shamsie therefore invites her text to be claimed as a 'universal' World novel, not just by a metropolitan readership, but by the local cultures that are excluded by the implicit borders of an Anglo-centric market. In Shamsie's vision, translation ultimately provides a more democratic model for the world and the World literary field. The translated text builds a new kind of "architecture out of sentences" ("Perils") that involves not only the writer but the receiving culture in the production of meaning. While on the one hand, the target literature expands its boundaries to include the text and accordingly Shamsie describes her feelings on having her book welcomed into another language as those of being a "stranger" who "received from them the privilege of hospitality" ("Perils"), on the other hand the writer is forced to give up their control over the novel, which is opened up by translation to new meanings and interpretations. As Shamsie points out, there may, in fact, "reside" in other languages "better versions of [her] novels" ("Perils").

Shamsie is not altogether unaware, however, of the problems of a humanist cosmopolitanism and how it can be manipulated to serve less idyllic political ends. If the polylingual Raza stands for a capacity to idealistically communicate across cultures, which is passed on from his mother Hiroko, he also uses his linguistic capacity to deceive (Abdullah the Afghan immigrant boy thinks Raza is a Hazara Afghan fighter and enters the training camps under his encouragement) and to manipulate (working for an American corporate military organization, Raza is hired to fight in Afghanistan precisely because of his ability to blend into the local population). As such, he is also emblematic of a different kind of cosmopolitan pragmatism and professional mobility. Representing the birth of a more politically savvy 'East'

(tackling global politics, like the World literary market, on its own terms), he has his own foil in Ilse Weiss' granddaughter (Harry Burton's daughter) Kim who, while different from the liberal 'civilizing mission' of the preceding generations, is representative of a brutally capitalist 'West'. Shamsie writes: "James Burton watched with dismay the collapse of Empire; Harry Burton was working for the collapse of Communism; and Kim Burton only wanted to know how to build, one edifice at a time, the construction process being all that mattered, not whether the outcome was mosque or art gallery or prison"(174). The point is further emphasized in her wry description of Kim dressing up as 'World Peace' as a child: the glued maps and symbols that adorn Kim's costume ironically undermine her message as "she missed the third prong of the peace sign so instead she was, as Harry pointed out, World Mercedes-Benz" (253). That these two characters (Kim and Raza) never meet or successfully consummate a romance demonstrates Shamsie's curbed enthusiasm for the novel's capacity to bring all future communities into being, even in what she conceives as a truly cosmopolitan literary space.

Nonetheless, if mapping a cosmopolitan literature (and culture) has its pitfalls, Shamsie warns that real cultural regression lies in not translating at all: "the translated sentence that fails to relay some nuance or music of the original, is tinged with loss; the translated sentence that doesn't understand the nuance or music to begin with is negligent; the untranslated sentence is a terrible deprivation" ("Perils"). She therefore upholds the idea of exchange across language barriers as the 'romantic' gaze across cultures that could not only enable more inclusive transnational communities to be envisioned, but could also challenge the restrictive hierarches of an Anglophone market that pits local and metropolitan producers against each other. This positive emphasis on the ability of translation to bring into contact different cultures as a kind of global across-the-divide romance in the international literary field, however, overlooks the predominant directions of such flows. Overwhelmingly, texts that strive for such linguistically-enabled cross-cultural intimacy move *from* peripheral regions

*into* globally dominant languages – an imbalance that shapes Aslam Khan’s Pakistani-centric view of a World literature of dissent.

Using a similar analogy to Shamsie’s, Aslam Khan reaches a different conclusion on the terms by which literature can *world* communities. She insists on an understanding of the World novel as a “sculpture or building” shaped from “many different angles” or perspectives (Us Salam “Collective”) that has to defy the homogenizing forces of an elite driven market. This literary architecture is defined by understanding the different ways of seeing that even Raza’s ‘looking with love’ glazes over in its privileging, once more, of a cosmopolitanism that is only accessible to the mobile elite. As Aslam Khan states, “who’s looking at what happens, who isn’t, and what are the differences in their way of seeing” are the necessary building blocks through which a more inclusive literature and community can be conceived (Us Salam “Collective”). Raza’s loving look may be based on carrying meaning across cultures through translation; however this type of gaze erases the less multilingual views of communities who, in turn, do not receive translations from global languages into their local cultures and who are not, as such, being given the chance to ‘see’ other angles, as Aslam Khan puts it, or indeed to be ‘seen’ themselves. Instead, Aslam Khan’s novel comes to suggest that cultural influences should move inwards towards the local as well as outwards to the international. “It’s time to switch places” she implores. American authors (rather than Pakistani writers) should aim for an outside community, “confessing” to the world, so “peace and quiet can at last be felt in rooms of our own” in Pakistan (“Women and Fiction”). The international literary field is hampering a local literary culture, Aslam Khan argues, and writers in Pakistan should be free to develop their own style, without the demands of the ever dominant English-language market that she fears places pressure on writers “to edit their work in a manner that [...] squeezes the narrative into a familiar western mould” (Us Salam “Collective”). Here again, as also seen in Ghosh’s work, is a fear of the universalism that can be ushered in under the cosmopolitan literary politics that is being called on to combat sectarian identities. Moreover, Aslam Khan

seems to suggest that if texts that travel want to resist all bordered forms of belonging, they also have to resist some of the conditions under which they move between literary fields.

Shamsie, however, is not oblivious to these concerns, and is also conscious of the power dynamics inherent in the use of language in her novel. When Kim betrays the illegal immigrant Abdullah/Raza to the American police under the assumption that he is a terrorist, it is a betrayal described as the “silence of intimates who find themselves strangers,” once again “[t]he dark birds were between them, their burnt feathers everywhere” (362).<sup>88</sup> If intimacy or productive cross-cultural community is enabled by the circulation of texts and languages, then such passages of estrangement serve as a reminder of the kind of ethnic inscription that words can contain – how languages and the ideas they carry can perpetuate stereotypes and cause an entrenchment of ethnic allegiances (the birds after all signify the very real costs of bodyscapes). At the end of the novel, however, Kim, if not the reader, is converted and brought back into the cosmopolitan fold: she realizes the error of her ways and picks up the phone to the police. Shamsie’s novel, if more cautious, thus still maintains a faith in the aesthetic process of a truly transnational literature to create the kind of cosmopolitan communities she sees as counteracting ethnically/nationally fuelled violence. In addition, *Burnt Shadows* remains relatively unaware of the pitfalls of the kind of literary translation at play in Shamsie’s own text. Her belief in the text’s ability to translate perpetually (she tells Claire Chambers in an interview of her own ability to write locations into being that are true to realities she has never witnessed) suggests a faith in the healing capacity of translation as intimacy (the contact zone between cultures that can be productive rather than violent) that

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<sup>88</sup> Unbeknownst to Kim, Abdullah and Raza have switched places, and so she betrays not the Afghan stranger but a long standing family friend.

doesn't leave room for the untranslatable that Amitav Ghosh, and also Aslam Khan, place such importance on.<sup>89</sup>

There is, therefore, a different post-partition aesthetic taking shape in both Shamsie's and Aslam Khan's novels, which appears to polarize national versus international aesthetic practices. Whereas the romance in *Trespassing* and *Kartography* served as an exploration of the construction of boundaries between the post-partition state and its outside, the Pakistani novel and the wider Anglophone literary field, partition in *Burnt Shadows* and *The Geometry of God* comes to stand more directly for Shamsie's and Aslam Khan's concerns with the conditions under which they partake in such a global literary community and via that the international literary market place. They are clearly aware of the privilege of their own circulation across boundaries in a literary field where the border between Pakistani writers in Pakistan and Pakistani writers who have an international audience "stands as strongly as a border between nations," as fellow author Bina Shah reflects. If they occupied a liminal space before, straddling the postcolonial need to heal the national community with a desire to write alternative communities that are more open to the outside, they have left that threshold behind in their more recent novels, using their popular fiction to pit their allegiance to either side of the local/global divide.

Partition in Shamsie's later work doesn't figure as representative of different visions of the nation state, or even as a concern between India and Pakistan, but rather as emblematic of the betrayals and conflicts between 'East' and 'West' on a global scale. Sajjad, for example, cannot return to India because James Burton mistakenly advises him to wait out the violence in Turkey, thus causing him to rescind his Indian citizenship. The stress is not on ethnic violence or identification but on the fate of nations in the hands of larger political global

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<sup>89</sup> Shamsie explains "In order to write about the fishmarket, for example, I did a bit of research, wrote a draft and only then did I go there. [...] it was great because I realized that the research had been good enough" (211-212).

forces. Partition plays out on this global stage, if not as a 'clash of civilizations' then as a competition between imperial powers – the 'civilizing mission' of the waning British Empire succeeded by the globalization of American capitalism – and the erstwhile colonial states struggling under their spheres of influence. Shamsie's literature is thus engaging with the issues of writing against borders, or ethnically defined communities, in a larger more general international context where she identifies, as we have seen, with the coming of a 'World Literature' or 'Global literature' category, if a modified one at that, that translates cultures unknown and known to ever expanding audiences of non-metropolitan as well as metropolitan readers.

Aslam Khan's text, on the other hand, views partition as the problem of defining a local Pakistani culture. As an English-language writer she is acutely aware of imagining her country "in a tongue that is hated. And coveted" ("Fiction and War 2"): writing an imagined community in English is inherently problematic (rather than liberating) due to the privileged, international status of the language. While she struggles with the contradictions of occupying this position as a writer, let alone as a female author living in Pakistan, she protests furiously against the construction of the 'national borders' between writers that the World literary market has exacerbated (according to Shah). "Accusing writers of belonging to the 'other' side and not being 'one of us'," Aslam Khan complains, "is another aborted attempt at stipulating a single identity to Pakistan [...] How many more partitions do we need?" ("Fiction and War 2"). Instead, she stresses the importance of cultural "*synthesis of thought*," to repeat what one of the objectors to the Islamic party in her novel exclaims (114), a synthesis that according to Aslam Khan has to be rooted in the local culture *and* a local literary production. The romance in her novel stands for, among other things, a mingling of local registers and tongues: "My religious vocabulary's Urdu-Arabic, social vocabulary Urdu-English, but sexual vocabulary only English" (317), Amal reflects. Intimacy here too is about translation and cultural exchange, but the direction is entirely different. Aslam Khan's text suggests it should flow inwards to mould a

culture that is open to the outside but not determined in an outside literary space. As such, Aslam Khan's and Shamsie's more recent works draw into sharp relief their positions as writers writing, respectively, from within a Pakistani cultural identity and for an international community.

Although Aslam Khan's fiction, like Shamsie's, has remained highly popular and has thereby succeeded in crossing into many non-Anglophone literary markets, her later work is less concerned with how literature can be internationalized and more with how a local literature can *world* its own culture: challenging restrictive forms of belonging and encouraging cultural exchange from within. Thus if Shamsie employs the potential across-the-divide romance (as contact between cultures) to depict a world straddling the benefits and pitfalls of increased mobility, and with that cultural translation, then Aslam Khan works towards an understanding of Pakistani cultural history that depends on the romance as joining together different visions of the local culture (as religiously or scientifically defined). If this literary trope appears to favour a discourse of authenticity or originality, its reliance on palaeontology, archaeology and indigenous crafts for its imagery shifts the community model away from the biological to the intellectually cultivated and constructed. In *The Geometry of God*, Aslam Khan aims to dig into the deep layers of history to carve out a "multireligious and multicultural skeleton" ("Fiction and War 1") through a novel of palaeontologists who are constantly in search of not originals but fossilised copies ("that is a *real* whale, and we are *real* Pakistanis!" Amal's grandfather Zahoor exclaims, pointing at the reconstructed prehistoric animal (6)). As Amal grows up to realize that "Geology is sex" (312), the romance also becomes a kind of geological, rather than genealogical, exercise, constructing what Ananya Kabir has termed a 'deep topography' in the novel. The different cultural identities represented by the lovers (religious, scientific, rational, sensual), like the layers of earth in Aslam Khan's landscape, allow Pakistanis to choose their own identities, as Zahoor comments: "Pray five

times a day and be a real Pakistani! Speak Urdu and be a real Pakistani, or English and half as Pakistani! Well, here's my answer. Study whales and be Pakistani!"(6).

Aslam Khan's novel is therefore simultaneously trying to counteract the divisions within the local culture in its mapping of the Pakistani community, and attempting to resist the homogenizing impetus of a 'world literary space' in its model for the local literary field. It stresses both the heterogeneous history of the region and the untranslatability or irreproducibility of the singularity of ossified or accreted cultural artefacts at the same time. If her solution for a more open local culture or community rests on a kind of layering that reflects the fossils that her protagonists dig for (grounded but not rooted, such a culture defies the idea of authenticity in favour of multiplicity), to heal the partitions of the literary field (without homogenization) she proposes a structure that is both open to movement and stationary: the gateway. The novel itself is built around five such 'gateways' – to 'the world', 'the man', 'the word', 'the love' and 'the afterlife' – which are emblematic of both the different horizons of belonging, and the channels through which the world enters the local and mingles with the culturally specific. These structures, while stressing openness are also implicitly part of a wall (if a porous one at that), and thereby reintroduce a boundary to Aslam Khan's vision of a more democratic cultural exchange between Pakistan and the world.

Hailing from a postcolonial culture that was "forcibly internationalized" (Young 221), and is still caught in an unequal relationship with the western literary markets, Aslam Khan sees such a border as necessary for preserving the heterogeneity of both the community and the local literary field. Thus while she is urging for the portals between the fortified nation and other cultural fields to remain open, she does so on very specific terms, as the parallel imagery to the gateways – the circulation of money – in her novel suggests:

[Noman's father] asked why [in Lahore] there were five gates to the south, four to the north, three to the east, but only one to the west, Taksali Gate, now completely demolished and unrestorable. To prevent access to the coins once minted there?

[...]Then we played more number games, guessing how many coins the taksal must have produced or reproduced. And he taught me the two meanings of the phrase *taksali zubaan*. Chaste language and metaphoric language. Then the war started. Almost overnight, metaphors were abolished. God was stamped out in endless repetition, on a mint of chastened tongues. (120-21)

Although *The Geometry of God* clearly rejects the 'chaste language' that the Islamic movement advocates and that lacks the flexibility and malleability of metaphoric content (or a creative literature), her vision of a more flexible community does depend on a local minting of its own. If the gateways maintain an exchange between the inside and the outside of the community, it is the coins, or a locally-produced commercial literature, that could enact this exchange across cultural thresholds. Her novel therefore not only places its faith in a popular literature (that 'travel's as Ann Steiner reminds us) in order to keep the channels for exchange across the borders of states and communities open, but stipulates that such a literature would have to be locally produced and circulated. The nostalgia for the *taksal* in the passage not only implies a link between a more open community (where meanings are not 'stamped out') and a local literature, but that such a link between transnationalism and local production could improve the conditions of the community (at least its economy) and thereby introduce new terms on which the country engages with its outside.

As such, *The Geometry of God* comes to suggest that a popular text that would truly open its local culture to heterogeneity and change, and resist restrictively imagined communities ('stamped out' on a 'mint of chastened tongues'), must be rooted in Pakistan – where publishing houses are increasingly reluctant to produce texts for a minority-language audience, forcing writers to turn to India, England or America instead where they are faced with the pressures of an essentialising and homogenizing literary market. In some ways, then, a popular literature that could imagine more open forms of community both at home and abroad, demands a more restricted model of literary exchange: Aslam Khan warns that if a greater acceptance of linguistic variety in the local literary culture doesn't occur, "the number of English language Pakistani writers writing from outside this country can only increase,"

perpetuating a cycle of cultural repression as the reactionary anti-English voices will find more fodder. “Pakistanis who write about a contemporary Pakistan they have not been a part of will indeed write from an aesthetic and emotional place 'over there'. They will not have seen it for themselves,” she adds (“Fiction and War 2”). A World literature that she sees as rooted in the Diaspora, while mobile and transnational, does not enable more open communities to be conceived in Pakistan. There is, therefore, a reticence in Aslam Khan’s *worlding* of her text. This ambivalence manifests itself through the “ghost language of both nation and genre” (7) that Vilashini Cooppan argues defines a World literary field in *Worlds Within*. While Aslam Khan still resists restrictively forged identities, there is a kind of ‘haunting of form’ here, as her novel both rejects and evokes the bordered community at once.

Ultimately, if the central concern of the novel is not only to unite the scientific and religious definitions of culture and community at home (as the title suggests), but the divisions within the Pakistani and World literatures as well, then the novel achieves both through bringing positives and negatives together in a fossil textuality. Amal’s search to define the ‘original whale’ that the palaeontologists are trying to reconstruct (which echoes Aslam Khan’s definition of the national culture as a ‘multicultural skeleton’), and her attempt to define her own role as wife, elicit the same responses. As she approaches her neighbours and friends with her questions, “[t]hey answer in Urdu, and for the first time, I hear overlapping sounds in English” (10):

She must be *surily*. Not gruff, melodious.  
She must have *silica*. Not a mineral, tact.  
She must have *naiky*. Not nudity, purity [etc.] (322)

While in this leaping word play between languages the Urdu conjures the English, and the English lives in intimate proximity to the Urdu, such proximity does not necessitate a full embrace or complete translation. The neat balance of the hemistiches, which pits the languages against each other as the positive and negative sides of the same fossil, hinge on a

boundary – a full stop or caesura – even if it is only visible as their meanings cross over. *The Geometry of God*, as such, presents the idea of a more worldly text that is both open to its reader and can open up its local community, as dependent on such a locally constructed boundary. This time, the borderline does not separate cultures but provides the locus where a cross-cultural intimacy takes place. Aslam Khan's embrace with a World literary field rests on the recognition of such a line – the World text that can productively reach towards its outside, must also be on the inside, locally produced, and sensitive to its community. If Teddy's declaration of love for Alice hinges on an understanding of a greater, more universal love, in Mohammed Hanif's romance at the beginning of this chapter ("The love I feel for you is not the love I feel for any other human being" (68)), then Aslam Khan proposes, by extension, that it is through such a focus on the community itself and a locally-produced heterogeneity, that a wider more Worldly literature can come into being.

Uzma Aslam Khan and Kamila Shamsie are therefore exemplary of a younger generation of post-partition writers, trying to map new routes of dissent through the international spaces of a World literary field. The vacillations in their romances that both reach for and withdraw from an embrace with the World literature that they desire to partake in, could be read as reflective of the writers' own troubled position as women writing in a male-dominated space both at home and abroad. Undoubtedly, Aslam Khan and Shamsie, having grown up "in the harsh world of a misogynist government in the 1980s Pakistan – where women's freedom was severely threatened" ("Literary Line"), are not entirely comfortable with the nation as the locus of identity. In a country where for the female writer to "walk her own streets is to trespass" (Aslam Khan "Women and Fiction"), to write has meant to forge their places in alternative literary lineages to the national canon.<sup>90</sup> Nonetheless, as Aslam

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<sup>90</sup> Shamsie's international success reflects her debt to Rushdie, Ishiguro and other Anglophone world writers, while Aslam Khan has stressed more local literary forebears, Amrita Pritam and Qurratul Ain Hyder who inspire her to write for a local, as much as international, audience. See Shamsie's interview with Claire Chambers and Aslam Khan's article "Women and Fiction".

Khan comments, – “‘I’ve been addressed by the ‘white gaze’ – the Western gaze – all my life” (Rogers), as non-metropolitan women they are not entirely comfortable in the transnational communities of ‘cosmopolitan’ intellectuals either.

Hence they turn their gaze upon their own literary practice: their romance novels look again and again at not only the borders of their local culture, but their own roles in mediating the cultural exchange that they see as necessary across them. Like Aslam Khan’s protagonist, Amal, who sees her search for identity reflected in the fossil she excavates, they conclude: “The longer I look at the rock, the more I can almost see *it*, except I don’t know what *it* should be” (3). However Aslam Khan and Shamsie imagine their roles to be, it is not as the “silent submissive” Pakistani women so often represented by international texts as “liberated by the west” (Aslam Khan “Women and Fiction”), but rather as worldly women who, if not part of a World literature (or at least not always comfortably so), nonetheless create their own pathways between the local and the ‘world literary space’.

That international cultural space, as both Aslam Khan and Shamsie are increasingly aware, has not turned out to be the redemptive space their earlier fiction had hoped. Casanova’s “republic of letters,” while international, is neither democratic nor free of borders of its own. Novels travel there not only at the cost of the communities they try to represent (mapping more restrictive or essentialist identities to meet market demands), but they gain entry at the expense of other works by non-Anglophone writers. The ‘world literary space’ that Aslam Khan and Shamsie initially aspire to become part of is therefore a deeply differentiated space, where different groups of writers from the margins find themselves still checked at the border for the kind of “visa from the international publishing world” that Bina Shah envies. Nonetheless, if World literature has proven itself to be a problematic force in reshaping local communities and identities in Aslam Khan’s and Shamsie’s fiction, they still retain some hope in the *worlding* of texts as forging alternative forms of belonging. Such a *worlding* is

increasingly configured as a practice that hinges on inviting readers in – whether that is the non-metropolitan reader who Shamsie strives to reach through translation, or the metropolitan reader, whose prejudice Aslam Khan wants to challenge by more nuanced representations of Pakistan. Both Shamsie and Aslam Khan invite their readers to ‘look’ and read their novels as ways into reimagine the Pakistani community, but they tell them to do so ‘with love’. The open-ended political and literary communities they envision hinge on that qualifying ‘but’: popular fiction can enable more democratic, heterogeneous and flexible communities through their wide readership, but only if such literature resists being assimilated by the literary field, as Aslam Khan stresses, and thereby claimed at the expense of the community it comes from.

As Elleke Boehmer suggests, since “the globalized margins have not yet been allowed to arrive at the global system’s centre,” writers and intellectuals clearly cannot fully dismantle the nation as a “viable space for political self-expression” (“Beside the West” 175). However, though Boehmer is making this argument with specifically female postcolonial writers in mind, it is clear from the works of the other writers in this thesis that it is also a concern faced by post-partition writers in general. While Shamsie comes to stand for the appeal of a cosmopolitan aesthetic that strives to look beyond an Anglophone and Eurocentric World literature towards other, broader literary fields that could unite non-metropolitan communities and readers, Aslam Khan represents a turn towards indigenous cultures of heterogeneity to enforce some form of boundary, however flexible, to control the terms on which the local culture mingles with an outside literary space. Aslam Khan and Shamsie therefore represent the two faces of the type of aesthetic dilemma that Shehadeh’s and Ghosh’s texts also testify to, between imagining a post-nationalist community, and doing so without letting go of the intransigently local, the latter of which we also begin to see in David Grossman’s conflicted relationship to what Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi summarized as the “near-synonymity between the ‘transnational’ and the ‘translational’” (12).

## 4

### Embodying the Political: David Grossman and the Limits of Translation

David Grossman describes how the individual human “laid bare, stripped of any national, religious, tribal, or social garments” can understand “the crime he has committed, that he continues to commit, outside the silence, against others and against himself” (*Death* viii), in a formulation that defines his own literary project as a post-partition writer. As a contemporary Israeli author who has personally lived through decades of war, military campaigns and terrorist reprisals, Grossman is committed to preserving individual ‘bare’ humanity in the face of what he considers the continued politicisation of ‘bare life’ in the society that he lives in.<sup>91</sup> If the border has become internalized within Israel as a state of mind that determines not only the inside and outside of the community, but what is recognized as a viable livable life, then literature plays a unique part in bridging such borders. Grossman is both attempting to strip away the socially-constructed layers of identity that provide the coordinates around which the conflict turns *and* considering what the translated novel can do to breach such fortified borders (individual and national) to forge a more ethical community. As such he is, like Uzma Aslam Khan and Kamila Shamsie, concerned with a literary space both within the text and without.

Moreover, in this endeavour to dismantle and to bridge, Grossman continues the “rebellion” against the “temptation to entrench myself” (*Writing* 36), or to erect barriers, that all the writers in this study are engaged in. The border thus figures in Grossman’s work as the conflicted space between the human and society, “the void that slowly emerges between the individual and the violent, chaotic state,” the brief moment or split-second interval “between

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<sup>91</sup> Agamben argues in *Homo Sacer* that the inclusion of natural life into mechanisms and calculations of state power has made it possible to distinguish between politically sanctioned life and ‘bare life’.

the blow and the pain,” that he refers to in his fiction and non-fiction alike.<sup>92</sup> The alternative form of belonging, or “the third” more human option, that Grossman proposes can challenge such borders, is a humanism that connects individuals through cross-cultural exchange. This aesthetic investment in a humanist translation, however, is not based in a universalist cosmopolitanism. In a cultural context where texts are universalized (and thereby depoliticised), Grossman’s oeuvre comes to channel the political in particular in order to assert a different, more open form of belonging. His shifting definition of humanism can thus be read to reflect Grossman’s troubled relationship to the national Hebrew corpus he is part of, and the World literary culture that he seeks to contribute to.

Although written in a local (Israeli) and minority language, Grossman’s texts are nonetheless truly transnational in their circulation: they have consistently been translated into not only English, but over twenty other languages.<sup>93</sup> Consequently, Grossman partakes in the same Anglophone market as Ghosh, Shehadeh, Shamsie and Aslam Khan, and his work circulates in many of the same non-metropolitan, non-English literary spheres as the contemporary Pakistani fiction of the previous chapter. Celebrated as one of contemporary Hebrew literature’s greats (as a recipient of the Sapir Prize (2001), the Bialik Prize (2004) and the Emet Prize (2007) to name but a few of his Israeli awards) he himself identifies as part of Casanova’s ‘world republic of letters’, involved with authors “in Damascus or Tehran, in Kigali or Dublin” in a joint venture of “weaving this shapeless web, which nonetheless has immense power, the power to change a world and create a world” (*Writing* 62). Grossman therefore engages with literature as both a way of exploring an identity separate from the impersonal apparatus of the state or collective – as Shehadeh also does – and as a means for forging an international community via translation between cultures and languages. The two are intrinsically linked for Grossman, as finding what he terms “my place in the world” (*Writing* 30)

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<sup>92</sup> See: *Writing in the Dark* (60) and *The Book of Internal Grammar* (300) for the citations given here and *Death as a Way of Life* (vii) for a similar reference.

<sup>93</sup> See Grossman’s profile on *The Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature Website*.

becomes contingent on writing as a form of displacement: “I want it to actually betray me” he writes about his own creative work, “to destabilize and dissolve all the comfortable defenses of my life. It must deconstruct me, my relations with my [family], with my country, with the society I live in, with my language” (*Death* 136-7). Writing therefore becomes a way of removing the self from the constraints of the body, of leaving one’s own skin, as Grossman mentions in *Writing in the Dark*, in order to reach a transnational community.

David Grossman, like many other frequently translated Israeli writers, straddles two political boundaries. First, the “boundary, tangible, visible, violently contested between Israel and Palestine” (*States of Fantasy* 22), that literary critic Jacqueline Rose ascribes to Amos Oz. The second boundary, for Grossman, as for Oz, is “far less obvious but none the less carrying its own historical baggage,” that Rose terms the border “between Israel/Palestine and English literary culture” (*States* 22). In Grossman’s case, this second boundary is the mainly, though not exclusively, Anglophone World literature market in which he is receiving increasing recognition.<sup>94</sup> However, unlike Rose, I take the political boundary (which she refers to primarily) to be not the physical border (which neither Oz nor Grossman cross that often in person or in their literature), but rather what I term after Priya Kumar the trauma or ‘past-in-presentness’ of partition, haunting Grossman like the other writers of this thesis through the violent discourse of exclusive ethnic communities.<sup>95</sup> These cultural pulls of the local and the universal – placement and displacement – shape the conflicted forms of belonging in Grossman’s oeuvre, which has had an ambivalent relationship to its political context. Belonging to a younger generation of writers, writing after Oz, Grossman is also conscious of how the border has come to affect literary development in Israel.

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<sup>94</sup> His most recent novel *To the End of the Land*, for example, was reviewed in all the large UK dailies (*The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *The Times*).

<sup>95</sup> Kumar qtd. in Jassal and Ben-Ari (29), for my use of the term see the introduction (29)

There lies a challenge to the long-standing cultural engagement with the border as a necessary fortification behind Grossman's insistence on dislocation as that which enables the reconfiguration of community. In other words, Grossman suggests, in a heavily fortified state it is "transLation" that makes the idea of the "transNation" possible (to borrow Emily Apter's terminology).<sup>96</sup> The trauma of living in a partition state has often manifested itself in Israeli literature via the concept of 'siege': both the military state of being beleaguered (a condition that Israel, surrounded by hostile states with a constant enemy across its border, has become accustomed to) and the defensive and paranoid mentality which has permeated Israeli culture as a consequence. As a significant historical context of the post-1973 generation of Israeli writers, siege has been highlighted by Anglophone and Hebrew-language critics of Modern Hebrew literature alike.<sup>97</sup> The Yom Kippur War created a new feeling of "vulnerability" (Mintz 62) and as Israeli society expressed a sense of abandonment by the outside world, the political climate gradually shifted from socialism to a more hostile Likud rightwing politics.<sup>98</sup> Menachem Begin's frequent public references to the Holocaust and a victimized Judaism have become standard examples of a rhetoric that created a sense of defensive paranoia in the community at large.<sup>99</sup> Today, a siege culture continues as a political sentiment if not as a military reality, as the erection of the West Bank wall (begun in 2000) testifies. Although the continued rocket fire from Gaza and the suicide attacks from the Palestinian territories are, undoubtedly, very real threats, Israel's regional military dominance makes an attack by a

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<sup>96</sup> In her introduction to *The Translation Zone* (2006) Apter describes her conceptualization of the titular zone as "neither the property of a single nation, nor an amorphous condition associated with post-nationalism, but rather a zone of critical engagement that connects the 'l' and the 'n' of transLation and transNation." (5)

<sup>97</sup> Many critics pin-point this war as the turning point in Modern Hebrew literature. After 1973, the social realism used by the writers of the Palmach generation (the Palmach was a branch of 'Independence fighters' during the British mandate in the 1930s and 40s) began to give way to the writings of a younger generation who were more influenced by global trends in minority discourse, feminist literature and postmodern experimentation. See Gershon Shaked, *Modern Hebrew Fiction* (207-218), and Alan L. Mintz, *Translating Israel* (55-68).

<sup>98</sup> The 1973 war started with an attack by Egyptian and Syrian led forces to reclaim the Sinai Peninsula and Golan Heights (annexed by Israel in the 1967 War) during the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur. Before this outbreak of violence there was a slow build-up of arms and troops along the border.

<sup>99</sup> See Avi Shleim, *Israel and Palestine*: 240 and Michael Keren, *The Pen and the Sword* (93).

neighbouring Arab state highly unlikely. Accordingly, their policy of entrenching checkpoints, fences and borders is symptomatic of the continued cultural fixation with the border as a necessary condition for peaceful coexistence, rather than a reflection of the 'facts on the ground'.<sup>100</sup>

Therefore siege has been read by some critics as not just the context of Israeli writing, but also its condition. In addition to Robert Alter's interpretation of the Israeli national siege in literature as representative of a global human condition under modernity in *Defenses of the Imagination* (214), Yudkin's contemporary study to Alter's, *Escape into Siege* (1974), lists a "siege consciousness" as one of the defining elements of the then new Israeli writing (115).<sup>101</sup> More recently, Yael S. Feldman's work on gender in Israeli women's fiction argues that the "long inner conflict [...] in which the national agenda has only recently been overcome [...] by gender considerations" (19) is the tension of writing "androgyny under siege" (113) that women writers have to grapple with when trying to formulate a female subject in a state almost permanently transfixed by war. Siege has thus become a standard critical reading of the Israeli political condition. This academic discourse both entrenches a cultural belief in the border as necessary and natural (through a repeated reference to being militarily beleaguered) and also, paradoxically, universalizes the particular context of the Israeli state.

This kind of critical engagement with the political via the psychological (as a 'siege consciousness' or condition) has formed part of a process of depoliticizing dissent as Rachel Feldhay Brenner points out in her seminal study *Inextricably Bonded*. Brenner argues that politically contentious novels are shorn of their critical edge by a reading practice that insists on their role as representative of a universal state of mind (10). The negative experience of borders (or siege) in the increasingly critical, post-1960s Israeli writing has thus been

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<sup>100</sup> This phrase has become politically loaded in the Israeli Palestinian context where it is frequently used to defend the annexation of land where settlements have already been built.

<sup>101</sup> This reading was largely informed by the novels of A.B. Yehoshua and Amos Oz, the latter of whom Alter argues writes about the "Israeli nightmare of life in a garrison state" (221).

interpreted as a move away from Israeli national narratives. Rather than signifying an engagement with the reality of living in a highly-militarized conflict zone, such literary depictions have been received as representative of the universal experience of humanity as beleaguered by modernity. Ruth Essex, for example, describes the dominant theme as “every man and his grasping for identity” (9) in the literature of the post-Zionist age. Alan L. Mintz, also, highlights the shift from an identity defined by a national narrative to a multiplicity of stories of the individual (2) which Risa Domb, in turn, terms a shift in “the vision from the collective to the individual”(3). In addition, Robert Alter, in his 1977 survey of the new Israeli writing of the time, considers their shared characteristic to be a look “beyond the historical situation to transhistorical questions about human nature, value, existence itself” (214).

As part of the generation of writers coming out of the Yom Kippur ‘siege’ culture, David Grossman has had his works appraised in a similar critical fashion. Both of his early novels, *The Smile of the Lamb* which depicts the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and the celebrated holocaust story *See Under: Love*, have been hailed, despite their overt political settings and content, as trans-historical studies of narrative and suffering.<sup>102</sup> Grossman, however, is not trying to turn the political condition of writing in Israel into the universal condition of life in the second half of the twentieth century, as Alter tries to argue (*Defenses* 216), and thereby evading the political context of his time as Brenner warns. He is rather increasingly concerned with connecting a belief in humanist translation as “critical

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<sup>102</sup> Published in Hebrew in 1983, *The Smile of the Lamb* was only published in English translation in 1990 after *See Under: Love* (from 1976) came out in English in 1989. The order of these publications testifies both to Grossman’s growing popularity and potentially to the international appetite at the time for stories of the holocaust, rather than those of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Both novels were nonetheless received as commenting on universal concerns. Yair Mazor writes in his review of the first English translation of *The Smile of the Lamb* that “as in other great works of literature, the pain and the suffering dismiss their original ‘molecular structure,’ divorce themselves from their initial ‘genetic information’” (762) in a piece that reflects on suffering as artistic beauty. Likewise, a year earlier, Gila Ramras-Rauch reviews the English translation of *See Under: Love* as “a narrative about the art of narrative and about the role of the narrator in the novel” (189). Of course with *See Under: Love* most critics comment on the novel’s engagement with the holocaust, but few contextualize this within the shifts in the Israeli engagement with such a history. The holocaust (and its association with what was perceived as a ‘weak’ Diasporic culture) was not publically discussed until Menachem Begin and the Likud Party rose to prominence in the late 1970s – as Grossman’s text also demonstrates.

secularism” (as one of Apter’s twenty theses on translation reads) with the specific geopolitical conditions of an Israeli society under siege.<sup>103</sup> Grossman is known for delivering political critique in his journalistic articles and commentaries and as such often acts, in conjunction with fellow left-leaning Israeli writers A.B. Yehoshua and Amos Oz, as “the anguished conscience of Israel”(Tornapolsky), both condoning and condemning military actions and political manoeuvres. So much so that he has even written the lyrics to a popular rap song in Israel (The "Shirat Ha'Sticker" or "The Sticker Song"), which consists of hundreds of phrases from political bumper stickers.<sup>104</sup> It is my contention here that considering Grossman’s post-1990s novels, it is clear that he is an increasingly political writer, attuned to the specifics of his national context and that, paradoxically, it is this move towards the political, away from the translational transnation, that enables a vision for a less restrictive community to take shape in his work.

#### **i. The Torturous Grammar of World Literature**

In an interview with Jonathan Shainin, Grossman talks of his sense of isolation as a child and explains how he modelled the socially-awkward and lonely Aron in *The Book of Intimate Grammar* on himself and Aron’s “all-Israeli” friend Gideon on Grossman’s own friend from when he was 16. After the book came out, the friend in question called him to say “I liked it and, of course, I found myself. I am Aron.” The anecdote is poignant in itself – “If I had heard him say that when I was sixteen, my entire life would have been different” Grossman adds – but it is also revealing of the faith that Grossman has in the ability of literature to forge such identifications, even in cases where they don’t exist outside of the text. Writing as a form of displacement is a profoundly humanist gesture according to Grossman, forcing the reader (like the writer) to see the world through another’s eyes. He reflects in his essay “The Desire to be Gisella” that “we humans [...] are not only efficiently protected and fortified against our

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<sup>103</sup> See Emily Apter’s *The Translation Zone* (xi).

<sup>104</sup> See Samuel G. Freedman’s article for *The New York Times*.

enemies, but in some ways also protected – meaning, we protect ourselves – *from any Other*” (31), the ‘Other’ for Grossman is thus the enemy, other people, and finally ourselves as the barriers we erect are part of “the efforts we make [...] to resist being tempted by all the varied ‘others’ within each of us” (34).<sup>105</sup> Thus the borders that besiege him or the Israeli community are not just external, state-defined boundaries, but intrinsic to the individual and the community. That is to say, borders reflect an innate fear of the heterogeneity possible within not only the individual but the nation. It is this vision of a kind of humanism that depends on the discarding of all barriers between individuals (and original and target culture) that shapes Grossman’s literary politics from very early on in his career.

Grossman’s fictionalized portrait of the ‘artist as a young man’ in *The Book of Intimate Grammar* puts forward a model for literature that demands that it separates itself from the nation and the erection of barriers that such belonging entails, in order to reach a transnational community. The main character, Aron, who revels in word games and stories as his peers become increasingly interested in the opposite sex, refuses to grow up and become part of an adult society that he sees as conformist: “certain things [...] vanish in the course of growing up,” Aron argues, “it’s hard to say what, there’s a quality that makes all adults seem similar, not in looks so much, or even in personality, it’s this thing they have in common that makes them belong, that makes them law-abiding citizens” (36-7). Struggling to find a place in the community that permits a truly individual and non-nationalized identity, Aron thus seeks recourse not only to the “Houdini act[s]” (98) of his childhood, but also to his own body. He “would practice escaping out of something [in fact anything, as the novel progresses] with a lock” (98) and the chests and cupboards he chooses to trap himself in become emblematic of not only the womb – Aron’s attempt to return to childhood – but a self-imposed artistic exile.

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<sup>105</sup> From *Writing in the Dark*.

Aron's isolation is hence a result of both a personal hell of physiological difference, "the chrysalis phase of my disaster, Aroning into a cocoon" (108), and a political withdrawal: from adulthood, the nation space, and from becoming homogenized as a 'citizen'. This artistic withdrawal from the national narrative (and the collective voice) is defined by a purifying process of 'cleaning' language of its context in order to appropriate it in a procedure that reflects Grossman's own artistic practice. Aron's aesthetic awakening lies in removing the pressures of political or ideological content from speech. He begins to hoard words in a process of "stripping [them] gently", "whispering [them] backward" and "hid[ing] [them] inside him, in the intimate new center" until they are "purified" (294), in an act that resembles the meticulous labour of linguistic translation. Sexuality and authorship merge as Aron's adolescent identity is forged through his intimate relationship to language: "certain words, if you know how to pronounce them in a special way, not from the outside but as though you were calling their names, right away they turn to you, they show you their pink penitralia, they purr to you and they're yours" (225) Aron concludes. Grossman, similarly, describes his own writing in his collection of essays *Writing in the Dark*, as an escape from the collective language or voice or "nationalized idiom" (22), where language is something pure, authentic and intimate all at once: "I write, and I feel that the correct and accurate use of words acts like a medicine. It purifies the air I breathe, removes the pollutants, and frustrates the schemes of language defrauders and language rapists" (65) Grossman comments. As with Shehadeh, writing therefore becomes for both Aron and Grossman a way of defining individuality, the 'intimate' or 'internal' grammar that depends on a construction of language that is painfully wrought, internalized and removed from its social context and normative use.<sup>106</sup> This personalized language, however, is also a means of preserving "the individual Aron beneath the generalities" (37), the human in the face of fortified society.

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<sup>106</sup> The Hebrew word ("Haprimi") in the title of the novel is variously defined as either 'intimate' or 'internal' in translation. The published English-language version of the novel suggests 'intimate', though Hebrew-language critics often prefer to translate the Hebrew title as 'internal'. See, for example, Rachel Feldhay Brenner's article "Unsealing the Letters".

The suggestion in Grossman's text is thus not only that the artistic endeavour in a conflict area is a process of individual translation of the world to the self, "words had come to be utterly inward, whispering a grammar so intimate and tortuous they could never break forth into the light" (244) (as much as, or perhaps even more than, vice versa), but that literature has to separate itself from the political ideologies and discourse surrounding it in a similar withdrawal from the world. The intellectual interior must be separated from its body, in order to recover the human from within the 'armour' of the state as Grossman writes:

I fear that after decades of spending most of our energies, our thoughts and attention and inventiveness, our blood and our life and our financial means, on protecting our external borders, fortifying and safeguarding them more and more – after all this, we may be very close to becoming like a suit of armor that no longer contains a knight, no longer contains a *human*. (*Writing* 48)<sup>107</sup>

Grossman's internal grammar is pitted against the external, physical reality that is 'polluted' with nationalist ideology in a dialectic that comes to inform his literary humanism. Aron's narrative repeatedly distinguishes between the body as the carrier of social and political difference, and the 'universal' intellectual interior in a traditional humanist manoeuvre. Magical sleights of hand give way to heavy-handed military analogies as Aron's desperate hope for a magical metamorphosis gives way to punitive self-harming, "Mutiny, mutiny, groaned Aron, slapping his knee and forcing himself to watch with open eyes" (179). This assertion of individual agency renders Aron's body a subject of his own subjectivity, a definition of personhood that Roberto Esposito argues has become characteristic of traditional humanism: "personal identity continues to reside in the mind, in the memory, in a simple subjective autorepresentation, and its qualitative difference from the body in which it is installed," Esposito argues, and the subject, in turn, is "destined to subject the part of himself

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<sup>107</sup> Naturally, working in translation, the specific terms of the analogies in Grossman's writing owe something to the creative input of his translators. However, the unusual nature of some of Grossman's metaphors, and their recurrence in texts by different translators (*The Book of Intimate Grammar* is translated by Betsy Rosenberg, *Be My Knife* by Vered Almog and Maya Gurantz, *Death as a Way of Life: Dispatches from Jerusalem* by Haim Watzman, and *To the End of the Land* and *Writing in the Dark* by Jessica Cohen) suggest a certain specificity in Grossman's language which may be glimpsed even in translation. The use of the term 'armour' is one such example.

not endowed with rational characteristics” (210). When applying this dichotomy of the human and his/her armour, the mind and the body, to the text and its context, what emerges is the kind of humanism that Said espouses in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* that is both “cosmopolitan and text-and-language-bound” (11). If Aron’s internal grammar is where the ‘human’, separate from its ‘national, religious, tribal, or social garments’, resides then it is also where literature should be located: the text should be removed from its political surroundings, “extraterritorial, and unhoused” (11) as Said suggests.

Undoubtedly, then, Grossman’s depiction of (Israeli) literature in *The Book of Intimate Grammar* is a depoliticized one: the experience of siege is, if not a ubiquitous human condition, then a universal artistic predicament, whether the writer is in ‘Damascus or Tehran, in Kigali or Dublin’ to repeat Grossman. As a model for the text this kind of literary humanism proposes the shedding of all outside contexts, the defeat of the body which demands conformity, citizenship and political affiliation, in order to liberate an art that can move across all borders as part of a universal human culture. Grossman himself stated about the political disengagement in some of his earlier works that he perceived there to be a need to turn inward in order to “inquire into the greater questions of human existence” and one’s “own private little existence” undisturbed by ‘the situation’ (*Writing* 46). This move ‘inwards’, away from the political, is also a move outwards, towards the universal in terms of philosophical content and expanding literary markets. As Grossman’s texts have been hailed for exploring interpersonal bonds, they have also been more easily advertised or disseminated as non-contentious or non-politically controversial texts, opening them up to larger American as well as European audiences, many of whom are, of course, an extension of the national audience in the Diaspora. Outside of the political turmoil of Grossman’s national context, his texts are read as operating on a “domestic scale,” interrogating “the limits of intimacy separating mother and son, or husband and wife, or between lovers” as Tim Adams points out in his review of Grossman’s work for *The Observer*. This ‘domestic’ content – in this case signifying a universal

theme – renders Grossman’s texts part of what David Damrosch describes as a World literature: they are works that are “present in a literary system beyond that of [their] original culture” (4) where they “*manifes[t]* differently” (6).

Aron’s retreat from the political and physical – his surroundings and his body – is not only a humanist form of translation, but also a linguistic one. ‘Aron-eeng’ (37) becomes possible via the English present continuous tense, which holds for Aron the ‘the secrets of time’.<sup>108</sup> In Betsy Rosenberg’s evocative translation of the novel we are told:

[Aron] reveled in ‘I em jum-peeng...’ Jumping far, far out in space, halfway to infinity, and soon he was utterly absorbed and utterly alone; jum-peeng; it was like being in a glass bubble, and someone watching from the outside might think Aron ees only jum-peeng, but inside the bubble, there was so much happening, every second lasted an hour, and the secrets of time were revealed to him [...] and inside you feel private, intimate, and the people watching you, pressing their faces against the bubble, wonder what’s going on (36-7).

While the international audience, like the people in Aron’s imagination, are indeed pressing up against Aron’s or Grossman’s textual ‘bubbles’, it is the Anglicisation of his ‘internal grammar’ that allows him to present himself as outside of the national narrative or teleology – the state, as Gyan Pandey argues via Hegel, that “creates history, the subject matter and the prose of history” (2). Instead of growing into a citizen subject (the purpose of the *bildungsroman* as Joseph Slaughter suggests in his work) he slows down time to a constant English present continuous that reflects the movement of a global literary cultural field where nations are not in the course of becoming or being carried across (as in Bhabha’s nation/narration paradigm) but frozen in the process of dissolution into the transnational. Texts carry their culture of origin only in so far as it signifies a certain local (and marketable) ‘difference’ that can be universally understood. Rosenberg’s translation, for example, appears to emphasize a distinct Hebrew accent – ‘ees...jumpeeng’. If critics have “praise[d] Grossman [in *The Book of Intimate Grammar*] for having successfully captured the macaronics of the Yiddish, Polish and Hebrew

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<sup>108</sup> It is worth pointing out here, in Aron’s words, that Hebrew does not have “that *eeng* tense” (36).

colloquialisms” of the 1960s immigrant culture in Israel (as Brenner summarizes in “Unsealing the Letters”) such nuances are lost in the English version of the novel. Aron, and his interest in English grammar, reaches his English-language audience twice translated. If his particular fondness for the present-continuous tense sets him apart from his peers and separates him from their community and the ‘national reality’ defined by the world outside the body he perceives himself as trapped in, then in translation such singularity becomes universalized. In other words, in a reverse movement of the plot, Aron’s withdrawal from community into a personal, ‘internal grammar’ results, in the translated novel, in a turn towards the universal.

The problem here, of course, is that if Aron offers a model for the artist, then his artistic singularity is lost as the only individual trait of his internal grammar/language is his Hebrew accent – precisely the identity markers that Aron wants to deny. Translation, in this case, clearly has the opposite effect to the intended artistic process. Moreover, the direction of translation within the text, by Aron himself, is entirely internal. Aron is wary of any kind of breach of his own borders or any channels of deceptively easy communication: when calling out to catch up with his friends, he fears that “Even these simple words [...might ring] like a bad translation, an unfaithful rendering of himself” (245). Thus if Aron can be read as the artist who is in some sense writing (‘Aron-eeng’) to the world and not only the nation (local and Diasporic) he has to find a way to also dislocate himself into another (and not just out of himself) if he wants to offer a model of literature that could envision a viable alternative community. Aron’s separation from his body subsequently shifts from being an escape, a refusal to grow into an adolescent and a citizen, to at last an act of self-imprisonment, preventing him from being part of his teenage friends’ lives and experiences. An artistic withdrawal, while a powerful act of protest, fails to provide the kind of model that could offer anything in place of the oppressively conformist community.

In *The Book of Intimate Grammar*, Grossman's artistic paradigm comes up against its own limitations as Aron's 'internal' language fails to not only reconcile him with the society he lives in but also to connect him to any other person, leaving him isolated potentially beyond repair (his final Houdini trick in the refrigerator could be read as a suicide). Grossman, as such, reflects in one of his essays following the writing of the book, that Aron's predicament left him feeling that he "had to believe that it is possible [...] that a person can dwell inside the body and soul and language of another. And to discover that one can find a partner to share the deepest and most silent anxieties, and keys to unlock the most despicable self-laid traps" (*Writing* 27). This belief drove him to explore alternative visions of a 'grammar' that is not only internal but intimate and shared, as we come to see in *Be My Knife* and *To the End of the Land*. In these later texts, intimacy (as in the contemporary Pakistani romance) provides a framework for conceiving of a model whereby meaning can carry across ethnic or communal boundaries in order to forge more open-ended communities of flexible belonging. If *The Book of Intimate Grammar* left Grossman certain that some form of translation between individuals was necessary for literature to forge better communities, then it also presents the question whether for an alternative humanist community to be enabled by the text, the human needs to be conceptualized as separate from its body (the text be able to shed its context) as we will see in the entirely verbal communion in *Be My Knife*; or whether the body, as a literary context, is a necessary element of any possible political community to come.

The body in *The Book of Intimate Grammar* is, after all, also a site of possibility. Ruler and ruled, the body both dominates Aron's life as a site of potential renewal and magical change, and remains a subject to Aron's self-torments. It holds the key to belonging to the wider community – the Houdini-like possibility of being one with the society of children:

all through the disaster there had been a comforting aura about him, a corridor of hope, the secret wish of a tunnel from which he would emerge a new and different being, and maybe somewhere, amid the darkness and confusion, a miracle would

occur, an invisible hand would reach out and switch the suitcase, and wave a wand and change the secret orders, so that when Aron reached the light he would meet the new him out there; [...] and now he whacked and thwacked, and lucidly, with helpless grief, began to realize [...] that there would be no vindication for his abhorrent body, it would emerge from the tunnel with Aron [...] and inwardly he still hoped to fuse again, to unite unto death, in a oneness of flesh (280-81).

In this characteristically long sentence Grossman describes Aron's mounting tension and despair at being trapped in his own body, through the building of clauses in a language that struggles to find the release of punctuation.<sup>109</sup> Even in his wish to punish the highly militarized body he perceives as having betrayed him, there is an underlying desire to bridge the gap between his individual isolation and the community, his internal grammar and his body, 'to fuse again' or 'unite' in a 'oneness of flesh'. There is, as such, a suggestion here that try as Aron might to separate himself from his physical embodiment – biological, social or political – in the end his 'abhorrent body' will 'emerge from the tunnel with Aron' never fully discarded.

Alongside that body in the text comes the political context (the armour), which is also lurking in the background of Grossman's ostensibly non-political novel. While critics often relegate the Six Day War (1967) to mere backdrop in *The Book of Intimate Grammar*, the depiction of the build up of fear and defences in the mounting crisis is not merely historical trivia; it is an accurate reflection of Aron's predicament on a larger, national scale.<sup>110</sup> As Aron climbs into the rusty old refrigerator in the climactic final scene of the novel, with his hand on the Houdini tools, refrigerator door still open, the absent classmates that used to form his audience are replaced by the imagined community of the nation. Aron's capacity to escape, or not, from this final trap is equated with the military conflict about to break out: "he felt the whole nation waiting for the first shot, the great jump-off. Who would win and who would lose? How many would die?" (341). Aron's final reflections force the reader to draw parallels

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<sup>109</sup> Even in translation the lengths of the sentences portraying Aron's internal torments are so extreme that it must be an intentional effect of the original novel. One such sentence runs on for more than a page (279-80).

<sup>110</sup> For an example of such a non-political reading of the text, see Gershon Shaked, *Modern Hebrew Fiction* (232).

between his internal conflict and the nation's. Just as Aron struggles to free himself from his physical fortress, Israeli culture was attempting to denationalize itself in the face of a society that was arming itself militarily and ideologically.<sup>111</sup> The political specificity of Grossman's novel is therefore not just context. Rather than enabling the reader to read the universal through the specific, as Brenner argues so many critics do, by emphasizing the body (/politic) at precisely the moment that Aron's separation from it and reality (the last suicidal withdrawal) is at its most acute, it points to the possibility of a reversal of such a reading – of reading the political via the universal.

Grossman's subsequent two texts explore the possibility of forging an alternative community through the destruction of/reconciliation with the body in what are two variations of almost the same story. *Be My Knife* and *To the End of the Land* both depict the complex relationships between men and women who suffer loss and longing and explore the potential of intimacy to "bring about *tikkun* – 'repair' – in the deepest, kabbalistic sense of the word" (*Writing* 63). In *Be My Knife* the depressed bookseller Yair and the mother of a diseased child, Miriam, at odds with society and jaded by their lives, conduct their relationship entirely verbally through a correspondence which touches upon their respective childhoods, insecurities and lives. In *To the End of the Land*, similarly, the worried mother of a soldier, Ora, and her depressed friend and one-time lover, Avram, likewise go over the stories of their joint adolescent experiences and their son's, Ofer's, as they hike across the land. The novels share multiple plot devices and larger themes – loss of innocence, for example, is portrayed through a turn to vegetarianism which is depicted as an ethical rejection of humanity's ability to kill for its own pleasure/use (seen first with Aron in *The Book of Intimate Grammar*, then in Yair's son in *Be My Knife* and Ofer in *To the End of the Land*). Central to both novels are love triangles (Yair is repeatedly unfaithful to his wife and Miriam runs off with her best friend's, Anna's,

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<sup>111</sup> Grossman described the "the crudeness that characterize[d] the uniform, slogan-ridden discourse" of the media leading up to 'the six day war' as a "military style" (*Writing* 21).

husband; Ora has relationships with both the best friends Ilan and Avram) and loss (both Ora's and Miriam's best female friends have died). In addition, they depict friendships broken by the ravages of war in a similar terms: Yair abandons his friend Shai when seeing him wounded in the hospital and Ilan drifts apart from Avram after he fails to fully recover from being tortured during the Yom Kippur War. *To the End of the Land* thus appears as a rewriting of many of the concerns developed in *Be My Knife* with the addition of the lived experience of the Israeli nation state, what Grossman terms an "echo of reality" in the epilogue of *To the End of the Land*. In this most recent novel, the cumbersome suffering and hopeful longings of its protagonists are reflected in the sometime alienating, sometime idyllic landscape, and the besieged individual's capacity for intimacy is thus held up to scrutiny in light of the Israeli political context.

## ii. A Private Humanist Language

*Be My Knife*, however, develops Grossman's conceptualization of the non-political humanist text, put forth in *The Book of Internal Grammar*, as a model for a translational and transnational community. Translation across one's own physical constraints or location to "overcome strangeness itself, the mighty ingrained principle of foreignness" (BMK 8), true to the spirit of Aron's artistic predicament, can only be conceived through a shedding of all materiality – the biological, physical or political context of the speakers. Yair's repeated use of metaphors of physical violence to denote closeness, "strip[ping]" off the "epidermis" (50), the removal of skin, the baring of bones, indicate how intimacy necessitates violence against the fortress that is the body: the socially- and politically-constructed layers that contain, protect and delimit the person inside must be removed in order to reach an internal self made up of language, letters, words.<sup>112</sup> Purification or a shedding of political context (which we also saw

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<sup>112</sup> "He wants right at this minute to take off his clothes, strip off his epidermis, everything, and stand before you bare, right down to the white kernel of his soul" (5), Yair writes in one of his repeated calls for "the nakedness of peeled skin" (37).

in *The Book of Intimate Grammar*) is therefore a prerequisite for forging a new language. “I made a small, painful bargain with her” Yair writes about his correspondence with Miriam to Miriam, in third person:

I have to give up one word in my mother tongue for every new word she teaches me. She wants to tell me a story, you see. The new words are so I will understand it. (156)

As Yair’s words suggest, translation from one individual to the other in *Be My Knife* is essential for understanding a “story of complete self-abandonment and entry into another person” (156), echoing Grossman’s own artistic endeavour to achieve true intimacy through a “self-abandonment” to the character, the enemy, “the Other’s core” (*Writing* 37).

In defining a truly humanist community as one without the gendered or social markers that determine what counts as what Judith Butler has termed “a valued and valuable body in the world” (*Bodies* 22), Grossman perpetuates the vision of a humanism where the subject can only express its personhood by objectifying itself in the manner that Esposito described. In other words, by separating Yair’s and Miriam’s internal lives from their “woman [or man] costume” (BMK 109), Grossman defines humanity as a division between the rational and spiritual internal life of the subject and the material (animal) body that is subjected to it. Free of such markers, in the end Yair and Miriam, in fact, succeed in creating a language that defies the boundaries of physical context or even personhood:

Listen forget about it, the whole thing, I made a terrible mistake by calling her, thrusting her into my own foulness, so shut up, don’t say another word; yes, as a matter of fact, I do believe he must be broken, once and for all, otherwise he will never learn

I don’t think you need to break somebody to

Yes, you do, you have to you have to. (283)

In this private language it is impossible to separate the voices except through the plot and pronouns, Yair’s comment to Miriam ‘listen forget about it, the whole thing’ is immediately succeeded by his thoughts ‘I made a terrible mistake by calling her’. The seamless flow

between internal and external dialogue serves as both the consummation of their love affair and the final narrative climax of the novel.

For the text, this humanist literary project suggests a shedding of all contexts in order to partake in a wider community of readers who are forced to enter what Grossman terms the 'Other' via the process of reading (as also seen in Aslam Khan's and Shamsie's fiction). A literature that truly travels, that is inhabitable by readers, thereby enables the perception of a shared humanity, "because when we know the Other from within him – even if that Other is our enemy," Grossman writes, "we can never again be completely indifferent to him – we are then committed to him" (*Writing* 52). This closeness to 'others', to truly understand them, is made possible not only by shedding one's own physical context, becoming displaced by the text one reads, but also through the free circulation of literature. Depicting two troubled individuals who fall in love through their correspondence, the novel rests, like the romance in Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows*, on a vision of intimacy or proximity made possible by the movement of texts rather than people. Unlike Aron's one-directional translation of language inwards (and representation of a literary culture that moves only outwards), the meeting and mingling of two 'internal grammar's to create a shared private language in *Be My Knife* is centred on exchange. This new language, which is wholly separate from their own physical bodies and the body politic, presents a utopian vision of literature as a kind of communication entirely devoid of the violence (epistemic and military) associated with political conflict: Yair explains how he desired to teach his son a private language, a "compassionate language," that would remain removed from the grim political realities of war or "that people kill. Or that this red, here, is blood" (9).

This novel likewise places itself, overtly, in a literary lineage of world texts – both Hebrew and international – that are modernist, diasporic and ostensibly non-nationalist. The central passage which lends the novel its title, where Yair explains to Miriam what he wants

from their correspondence, “I want to be able to say to myself, ‘I bled truth with her,’ yes, that’s what I want. Be a knife for me, and I, I swear will be a knife for you: sharp but compassionate, your word, not mine” (8) is a direct borrowing from Kafka’s declaration of love to his mistress in his letters to Milena (“love is to me that you are the knife which I turn within myself” (159)). Similarly, the novel starts with an epigram from a poem by Chezi Laskly (alternatively anglicized as Hezy Leskly), “Hebrew Lesson #5” from *The Mice and Leah*

*Goldberg*:

When the word turns into a body  
And the body opens its mouth  
And speaks the word from which  
It was created –  
I will embrace that body

As part of the novel’s paratext, the extract places Grossman’s novel not only in the company of the controversial poet’s literary philosophy, whereby the word itself becomes the only body the text recognizes, but also as part of the secularization and de-nationalization of language that Laskly as a ‘post-Zionist’ and avant-garde poet was associated with.<sup>113</sup> Grossman’s loyalty here is to language and the literary first and foremost, above any allegiance to the community or the nation and the deployment of these intertexts serve as a distancing mechanism from more political readings of his works. He states in his interview with Shanin that the tendency to read Israeli literature through the prism of the conflict is “really a sign of misunderstanding – not of Israel, but of literature.”

Grossman’s reference to Laskly, like Kafka, is thus part of an attempt to shake off the national context. Identifying with both a Jewish writer from the Diaspora and a contemporary, secular Hebrew poet, places his own text in the lineage of an alternative “foundation of

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<sup>113</sup> Aloma Halter in her article “In the Language of the Sock” (for *The Jerusalem Post*) reviews Laskly as undermining Herzl’s nationalist statements through humour and Gershom Gorenberg (in “Past Continuous” for *The Jerusalem Report*) places Laskly among a generation of “younger writers [who] use purely spoken Hebrew” and thereby challenge the ‘high Hebrew’ that was part of the Israeli state’s nation-building process.

Hebrew language and Jewish thought" (138) as he describes his Kafka and Talmud studies in *Death as a Way of Life*. However, this engagement with a deterritorialized literary humanism – Judaism without direct Zionism (as seen in Kafka) and Hebrew without its scriptural roots in Judaism (in Laskly) – associates Grossman's text with a universalism that paradoxically supports the nation rather than challenges it.<sup>114</sup> References to modernists like Kafka have been used to "claim affinity to the European liberal tradition" (Brenner 10) and thus allow Israeli culture to distance itself from its Middle Eastern location and the political context it bears some responsibility for. The on-going court battle over the Kafka papers in contemporary Israel – whereby the Israeli state has laid claim to the papers which were bequeathed by Kafka to Max Brod, and from Brod to his secretary (and mistress) in Israel – demonstrates how such 'world' cultural artefacts are being claimed in the name of the nation. In a reversal of Shehadeh's and Fanon's position on the pragmatic value of the nation as a stepping stone towards the universal, the move towards an international consciousness in the Israeli cultural context often becomes a move towards entrenching the interests of the nation. The cultural claims to a specifically European modernist and non-national lineage, permits the state to project itself as the protector of humanist values (by virtue of housing a literature that does). Thus an ostensible distancing from politics becomes in itself a politically-laden gesture. As Brenner discusses in her monograph, the depiction of depoliticized universal subjects can become a form of "collusion with the neutralizing conformist tendencies of canonization" (87), and it is this Universalist humanism of a literature of dissent that constricts the community within its fixed borders, almost as severely as the nationalist narratives themselves.

Hence the body or body politic cannot be completely discarded, in the idealistic sense that Miriam and Yair seek to achieve through their verbal intimacy. This separation from the body or the political context, as we have seen, enables an entrenchment of the community

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<sup>114</sup> Although the exact nature of Kafka's relationship to Zionism is still debated it was clearly a troubled one. Arendt touches upon this in her essay on "The Jew as Pariah: a Hidden Tradition."

rather than offering the kind of reconfiguration of its borders that Grossman seeks via displacement. Forging an intimacy through words alone – which mingle endlessly in perfect translation from person to person – becomes, eventually, a kind of violence to the individual in the text. Yair fears that “we might both break the laws of personal possession” (204), rendering their bodies inconsequential in an intimacy so absolute that any barriers between the selves are destroyed: “you want to swallow me, you want me to disappear inside you” (203) Yair exclaims. The inability to separate their subject positions results in a loss of identity, necessitating a discourse that reinforces their physical difference in order to preserve some kind of individual boundary. If a metaphorical violence to the body facilitated a kind of non-biological, purely linguistic intimacy, where “our bodies are, after all, only a coincidence [...] a few chunks of meat” (204), then the analogy of sexual contact allows Yair to back away from their correspondence. The extended metaphor that links their correspondence to sexual intimacy, in Yair’s final letters evokes their physical difference and thereby permits him to pull away from Miriam, “This is where our broadcast ends, and our little hallucinations” (205), Yair comments. The body, like the specific locality of place in Ghosh’s and Aslam Khan’s work, may thus become necessary to preserve any individuality at all.

The vision of community offered by the text through the shedding of one’s armour – a more abstract intimacy that challenges, on an epistemological level, socially constructed markers of identity – is thus heavily problematized by the end of the novel. We have no concept of an ‘outside’ of corporeality, of daily events, or even the location of the main protagonists (except towards the end of their correspondence) who exist only in their own subjective and self-reflexive first person narratives. The plot itself unravels not through actions and events but via the temporal lag between the present time of writing and the time of the letters reading: starting with Yair’s letters the novel then moves to Miriam’s diary before a final dialogue between the two in the section titled ‘Rain’. As the novel progresses, we thus discover that Yair’s section is in fact Miriam’s collation of his letters, and that the intimacy

created by the text is always already in the past, never fully realizable. Yair reflects on Miriam's letters that he is always "inside a moment of [hers] that has passed; I am with you inside a time you are no longer inhabiting" (107) and it is the same realization by the reader that makes Yair already temporally lost to Miriam when we think they are at the height of their intimacy in the breathless present tense of their correspondence. It is also this time lag that makes their shared 'intimate grammar' – as separate from their socially constructed bodies – an impossible paradigm for the community: as a form of intimacy (or imaginary bond) it is always belated, removed from the material reality of its application.

Likewise, Yair's desire for nudity as a model for a community without the 'national, religious, tribal, or social garments' that Grossman referred to in the opening lines of this chapter, becomes less tenable when applied to Grossman's context. Linda Grant mentions in her review of the novel that written at the height of the period of post-Oslo optimism it contains scant reflection on the subsequent political turmoil in the region.<sup>115</sup> Yair describes his vision of a truly humane society in terms of a public stripping of clothes and external markers of difference:

maybe another person would join me all of a sudden – would you imagine this with me? [...] the first of them will be a woman [...] she will suddenly begin to remove her armor of delicate fabric, and they will go silent at the sight of her body, and understand something. [...] And suddenly, at once, the built-up electric tension, the exertion of hiding and covering and disguising, will discharge in a great explosion over their heads and a great storm will roll in [...] a lightning storm of naked bodies [...] And immediately, the Modesty Squads will show up, special police officers [...] with thick tarps and asbestos gloves – because catching a naked person with bare hands is repulsive (I always think, a naked person will cut through dressed people like a knife[])(38)

The optimism at the time of *Be My Knife's* writing allows Grossman to adopt the most sensitive of contemporary Israeli topics – suicide bombs – as an extended analogy for a more humane community. Here it is not human lives that are destroyed, of course, but the

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<sup>115</sup> By 'post-Oslo' I am referring to the contentious Oslo Accords (1993) which Shehadeh also discusses. The accords were initially met with enthusiasm from both sides of the conflict, until the inherent limitations to the plan (which has still not been fully implemented) became apparent.

ideological 'clothes' they have been confined within. The release is electrifying, rejuvenating and contagious all at once, but also, always already limited within its own inception. Written into this scene of protest, as Yair imagines it, are the Modesty Squads, who are immune to the electric charge emanating from the naked bodies revelling in their shared humanity.

If there is an inkling of doubt or self-restraint in Yair's vision (considering the Modesty Squad), when we read Yair's protest alongside Grossman's journalistic reflection on life in a conflict zone, published five years later, it becomes clear that intimacy, as a discarding of socially constructed identities, let alone as an 'explosion' of bodies, is no longer conceivable in the same way:

Within that whirling [noise], in the eye of the storm, there is silence. It can't be heard; it is felt, in every cell of the body [...] I often feel that words can no longer penetrate the screen of horror [...] At such moments, I very much want, instead of writing, to run through the streets screaming. (*Death* vii-ix)

The tangible buzz of Yair's excitement is gone. The optimistic instigator of change, as embodied by Yair, is replaced by a dulled and despairing observer. This passage appears to enforce the idea of a militarized barrier (or armour), the screen of horror that literature must penetrate in order to cut through the 'noise' of ideology, but at a closer look it is clear that Grossman is not only more hardened here than in Yair's idealistic perspective, but that the very terms of translation across barriers have changed. Some forms of silence can only be felt in 'every cell of the body' and cannot be achieved via writing which appears, as a consequence, secondary to the visceral experience of 'running' and 'screaming'.

Grossman's *Be My Knife* therefore suggests that it is not quite possible to shed the body entirely to form a post-nationalist vision of community. While Yair states after his correspondence with Miriam, "I gave you a creep – and you made a human out of it" (209), expressing the relief "of a suit of armor that suddenly realizes there is, still, a little knight inside after all" (95), in the end this human nonetheless must leave its armour. The resolution

of the novel sees the epistolary form break, finally, into direct representation of the characters' actions as Miriam realizes she is going to have to physically meet Yair in order to save his son from the psychological game Yair has involved him in. The body, as signifying the body politic, the local and cultural context, may be an essential part of a configuration of the human and any alternative vision of community that it could bring about. Moreover, it may be a necessary element of the text itself if it wants to preserve its ability to affect change – to displace the writer and the reader into understanding lives and subjectivities other than their own. Towards the end of the novel Miriam contemplates requesting Yair's business to find her a rare text (their specialism) by citing them a line from Yair's and her letters: "immediately, your seven cavalymen [the deliverymen employed by Yair] will leap onto their steeds, storming to the ends of the land, and begin to circle us in smaller and smaller arcs, until they finally stand with their headlights facing us, point their fingers at us, and say, 'You're the story'"(218). In the context of the widening circle of an international literature, the novel only becomes a rare text in Grossman's depiction here when it is returned to its point of origin, the specificity of the bodies it sprang from. Despite Grossman's frustration with the insistence of some audiences to read the political into stories which depict precisely a turn away from the conflict ("Is the car really an allegory for the stifling occupation?" (*Writing* 45) Grossman parodies such readers), he appears to return to such a political context. It is difficult to resist the notion that the 'you' who are 'the story' towards the end of *Be My Knife* are not universal representatives of humanity at large, but the highly specific, rooted individuals, living in a conflicted territory.

### iii. Political Gain and Loss in Translation

*To the End of the Land*, Grossman's most recent novel, thus explores the possibility of a literature that reconciles his humanist aims with the specificity of the Israeli/Palestinian context. Hailed as Grossman's only novel about 'the situation', the story about the journey of a

distraught mother (Ora) fleeing from the army “notifiers” she fears will come to inform her of her son’s death is, since *The Smile of the Lamb*, the most political of Grossman’s works.<sup>116</sup> It conveys the “sense of urgency” to “engage directly with the difficult reality I live in” that he concedes struck him at the time of his son’s military service (*Writing* 64). The novel depicts three physical journeys – the first to drop off Ora’s son Ofer to the military meeting point, the second taking a Palestinian child to a makeshift hospital for illegal residents with the Israeli Palestinian taxi driver Sami, and finally a hike with Ora’s one-time lover and friend, Avram – and, as such, follows its characters to the various metaphorical ends of the land.<sup>117</sup> These journeys both test the different limits of understanding, empathy and reconciliation that the nation rests on *and* the boundaries of the translational transnation that literature can engender.

Ora’s journeys across the land and through Ofer’s life story move towards an entirely different conceptualization of the relationship between literature and politics to that developed in Grossman’s earlier works. Grossman balances the bond between the state and its subjects, which he describes following the death of his son in 2006 as “a covenant [...that] has become, tragically, a covenant of blood” (*Writing* 121), with Ora’s distinctly literary covenant, like Scheherazade’s, to preserve her son’s life (and Avram’s) through endless narration. If these two different states – the political and the literary – are not only running parallel to each other in the novel, but the latter appears to offer a way of destabilizing the former (in line with Grossman’s earlier utopian literary visions), resurrecting the dead and reconciling the living, they are nonetheless inextricably linked. The narrative movement is replicated by a physical, cartographic one, of walking the landscape, and at the pivotal

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<sup>116</sup> The Hebrew title of the novel, *Isha Borahat MiBesora*, loosely translated as ‘A Woman flees from [bad] Tidings’ stresses the message being fled *from* rather than the country being fled *to*, as the English translation does.

<sup>117</sup> The Israeli Palestinians are those Palestinians who either stayed when most fled during the 1948/9 war, or who returned in time to receive ID cards. They are perceived as ‘fifth columnists’ by the state and have been treated as second-class citizens in Israel, an issue which David Grossman has explored in depth in his non-fiction work *Sleeping On a Wire*.

moment in their journeys when Ora and Avram regain their old intimacy and become lovers again, they also start to relocate themselves on a map. Thus although Ora's flight is a flight from the language of the state, of the "barbarians, language-rapists" (64), and its political covenant, running from the 'tidings' (both military notifiers and the state news) that bind her to the nation community, it is not, in the end, a removal from the political body of the state.

After running away from the notifiers for days, "notifications always take two, Ora thinks – one to give and one to receive – and there will be no one to receive this notice, so it will not be delivered" (94), Ora and Avram not only find out that they have been inadvertently following the 'Israel trail' all along as a stranger informs them, but begin to trace their journey back onto a national grid. Going over their walk on a map, Avram tells Ora "here's where we walked all the way up to Keren Naphthali, and then down again because you left the notebook at the Kedesh river" (356). As such, even if it is a critique of the nation state, *To the End of the Land* strives for a more pragmatic vision of community that must carry its bodies (and body politic) with it in forging a new "compassionate language" (9) to rephrase Yair in *Be My Knife*.<sup>118</sup> There is a clear move towards a critical and politicized humanism: just as Ghosh's transnational community has to involve being bound, Grossman's translational community in the end must depend on its own limitation or partisan point of view.

The novel clearly reverses the redemptive possibility of disembodied narratives as seen in the final section of *Be My Knife*, as the human voices which make intimacy possible through a 'private language' are, by the end of Ora's and Avram's journey, discarded as viable options for building an alternative community. Likewise, Avram's project to create a play based around Jean Cocteau's *La Voix Humaine* in the beginning of the novel (before his

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<sup>118</sup> The novel does offer a critique of the choices forced upon the individual by the state. The lots that Ora is asked to draw during the 1973 war to decide who (of Avram and Ilan) will be staying on the army base, coming home, or being sent on the mission (which ends in Avram's torture) is a case in point. Haunting the narrative like William Styron's *Sophie's choice* (in the 1979 novel of the same title), it serves as a reminder of what an individual must sacrifice in order to live, this time, in the nation itself, and not at the hands of the enemy (as was the case with the Nazi concentration camp which stages the choice in Styron's novel).

military service),<sup>119</sup> is aborted after it has its gruesome parallel of betrayal and loneliness in the text. Ilan tells Ora how Avram, as the sole survivor in an outpost surrounded by the oncoming Egyptian army during the Yom Kippur War, rambled feverishly on the radio, declaring his love for Ora and begging the army to come and rescue him. Ironically, although the human voice made contact and found a listener (Ilan who wanders out into the desert to find Avram, and is picked up by a different outpost), Avram cannot turn the machine on to receive. This crucial breakdown in communications seals Avram's fate: unable to hear Ilan's warnings that the Egyptians are capable of intercepting the radio transmissions, his own pleadings result in his capture – and torture – by the Egyptian army. Although, *To The End of the Land* starts in a sense where *Be My Knife* left off, the teenage Avram, Ilan and Ora, all trapped with yellow fever in a hospital during the Six Day War, meet each other (and fall in love) through voices alone; the human voice, when separated from its body, eventually fails to survive in the hands of the state. While in *Be My Knife* the merger of Yair's and Miriam's internal monologues with their dialogue creates one narrative, demonstrating, formally, the possibility of breaking out of an 'internal grammar' into someone else's, the human voice, at the end of *To the End of the Land*, carries no such redemption. Separated from its body, it replicates the division enforced by the state between discardable bodies and the individual humans inside – Ofer is only a "human crumb" (298) in the larger system, and Avram during the 1973 war is almost bombed into silence by the Israeli army to prevent his intelligence from falling into enemy hands.

The militarization of society – or the 'armour' of the community – thus not only stifles the human, as Grossman fears in his essays, but also makes such a separation between the human and their body possible by virtue of the biopolitical system of statehood which determines that which qualifies as human life. In this case the human or individual is separable

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<sup>119</sup> The reference to *La Voix Humaine* by Grossman reveals some of his possible inspiration for Yair's and Miriam's phone call at the end of *Be My Knife*.

from the body which, like Ofer, is lost “forever the moment he [is] nationalized” (68). It is the state that controls bodies, forcing all of its citizens as unwitting partners into a “slow and solemn dance,” the “choreography” of war (TETL 72, 80). Ofer is, it turns out, militarized to such an extent that Ora fears he has lost part of his humanity and frets over “saving her child from the barbarian standing opposite her” (534) (Ofer does indeed forget about an old Palestinian man who is left in a meat locker during one of their military operations in the ‘territories’). The humanist project in *To the End of the Land* therefore has to be a revised one: calling for the separation of the human from the body, in the division of a transnational humanism from politics, plays into the militarized hands of the state. The novel stresses the need to unite the human and its body, like Aron’s ‘oneness of flesh’, in order to conceive of a vision of community that could affect change rather than entrench the state. If the Israeli state apparatus is an armour that obscures humanity, that in fact relies on the separation of the individual from their body (which becomes expendable literally, even if not symbolically), Ora had hoped that Ofer would be “coming out of the Armored Corps – *and out of his armor*” (68), then the body as armour always contains an individual in *To the End of the Land*: “Thousands of moments and hours ... countless actions... mistakes... All to make one person in the world” Ora writes in her notebook, and then adds “*One person, who is so easy to destroy*” (454).<sup>120</sup>

Grossman’s literary project could therefore be seen increasingly in terms of what Tzvetan Todorov proposed as a “critical humanism” (390); whereby humanism is defined as “an instrument of analysis” that is subject to revision (390). *To the End of the Land* doesn’t separate the subject from the material context that constructs it, but rather works towards a revision of a humanist community in a biopolitical society that rests on what Esposito tentatively describes as a “power of life” rather than “over life” (217). The separation of

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<sup>120</sup> While Israel is famed for having some of the strictest military service laws in the world, the military also has a policy of bringing back every soldier – dead or alive – which has led to extremely disproportionate prisoner exchange deals with the Palestinians. In the most recent case, Gilad Shalit, who was held captive by the Hamas for five years, was released in return for 1,027 Palestinian prisoners. See: Ethan Bronner’s article “Israel Plans New Rules on Exchange of Prisoners.”

categories such as body and soul, as Esposito argues, has to be deconstructed, precisely for its compatibility with a system that separates lives from bodies. The bodies which appear in *To the End of the Land* are thus made to be vulnerable physical homes, “so easy to destroy” (454), of the ‘internal grammar’ that is the individual. Intimacy through language alone is no longer possible in this novel where each narrative and individual comes with a heavy corporeal existence. While Shai’s wounded body is marginal (and discarded) in *Be My Knife*, which, after all, centres on the mingling of minds, Avram’s tortured body and soul are central to the narrative in *To the End of the Land*. Despite his silence during much of Ora’s narrative, we are constantly made aware of his painful physical existence.<sup>121</sup>

In the beginning, Avram looks as though he was “sinking even deeper into his flesh” (120) while Ora hopes that “there was still someone inside there” (143) who will “open up and let her in” (318). However, it is not his physical state (or barrier) – “She can almost feel the shaky scaffolding of his soul, which he has worked so hard to erect, collapsing” (316) – that is hindering her from reaching Avram, it is the permanent partition between his mind and his body that Avram erected as a consequence of his torture. Avram’s suffering body, subsumed to represent the body politic (at the expense of the individual) by the military, has its opposite extreme in Avram’s youth as a suffering artist. Jilted by Ora and aware that it is Ilan’s good looks that may have attracted Ora away from him, the teenage Avram announces his decision to “divorce his body” – in a parallel to Aron – and that he would “henceforth create a total separation between body and soul” (337) before jumping out of a tree and breaking his arm. Avram’s broken arm, like Avram’s later separation from his body and previous life, is an ironic

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<sup>121</sup> In *Be My Knife* Shai, Yair’s friend, is wounded during military service and left with only one eye. After visiting Shai in the hospital, Yair notes that he can’t bear to see his friend so altered and their friendship never recovers: “he lifted the remains of his face and looked up at the ceiling – there is no language that has words to describe the expression on his face, as if, in that moment, he accepted, surrendered with some horrible intellectual integrity to the verdict we both pronounced when we were friends – that if you’re fucked up in some way, it’s probably your fault.” (136)

reminder of the painful consequences which make it impossible to not only separate the body in pain from the person, but the literary aspirations of the text from its context.

Intimacy, in *To the End of the Land*, is not possible through the kind of separation of body from mind that Aron represented and a traditional humanism would stand for: Avram and Ora drift apart, as Avram goes through life, a mere body without a soul having “let go of his life and died” after his torture (162). Avram’s return to himself (and to Ora) is depicted as him not only breaking through his body, but inhabiting it, “he felt happiness return to him in slow steps, like blood to a deadened limb” (559) Grossman writes. As the biological analogy suggests, Avram recovers from his depression by becoming present in his physical form, a willing subject inhabiting a body that can be hurt by others. As a model for the dissenting text, the plot and thematic of *To the End of the Land* thus demonstrates a return to context that similarly colours Grossman’s writing. The bubbles of Aron’s isolation and the purely abstract meeting of minds have been abandoned; this is a literary grammar that carries its body politic, as Avram does his wounded body. While Jessica Cohen’s lyrical translation that captures the “vivid colloquial register” of the text and the ring of such phrases as “‘pleasure gurgles into the corners of her eyes’ (the Hebrew verb *mefakeh* means something like ‘seeps’),” as Alter points out in his review, is undoubtedly proof of her skill as a translator; it must be added, that the Israeli context of the story is also intrinsic to the imagery of the narrative. There are a multitude of military and political metaphors in the text. Avram as a lover “is flushing through her en masse, like a whole army” (427), “Ofer belonged to the Shiite wing of vegetarianism” (274), Ora’s panic attack over her son’s military service is “a little intifada of the body” (443) and her family is an “underground cell” (453) in the conflict. Likewise, Ilan’s quick decision making “spread like lightning [...] within seconds there’s already a new reality, a fancy settlement with red rooftops and paving stones, and you cannot uproot it” (197) and Ilan and Avram became friends through “the mutual identification between two spies in enemy

land”(479) etc. These distinct images draw attention to the unmistakable political and geographical context that the novel stems from.

Grossman’s critical humanism, while unable to take recourse in a shared universal humanity (that has proven itself problematic) does, nevertheless, offer an alternative basis for community through what Judith Butler has termed an understanding of ‘precarious life’ whereby “loss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing these attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure” (*Precarious Life* 20). Ora’s concern over what else Avram may have lost of himself during his capture, “Things that did not even have names, which would only gradually become apparent to her, and to him” (340), only really becomes clear to the reader when she later relays the doctor’s cold biological analysis of Avram’s body in the ambulance, “Open fracture, dry blow, cut, edema, whipping, electrical, compression, burn, rope, infection” (343). The litany of unspeakable horrors that Avram has experienced gestures towards how much not only Avram may have lost, but Ora through him, “his old Ora has dried up and died along with what dried up and died inside him” (239), Grossman points out. Intimacy here (as represented by Ora and Avram), is conditional upon the recognition of this corporeal suffering – a model for community premised on the ability of humans to harm each other and to feel grief for each other, as Butler also outlines in her work.

The subject’s inevitable physical proximity with others that leads to the recognition that bodies are “not quite ever only [their] own” (Butler *Precarious* 26), in Grossman’s novel, ties in with Wayne Booth’s revisionist humanism that argues that the individual never quite belongs only to the self. Made up of the different lives it affects and is in turn affected by, it is not possible to demarcate “a firm boundary between any two persons” (89), Booth argues. Grossman’s vision of a humanist translation that follows these lines thus blurs the boundaries between individuals precisely through the awareness that the harm and pleasure derived from

the inescapable physical proximity of individuals, makes any real separation of the self from others illusory. Similar to Ghosh's narrator from *The Shadow Lines*, who cannot live "without the clamour of their voices inside me" (88), Grossman's novel foregrounds the individual as bound to and limited by other people: whether by her sensitivity to Avram's suffering, or her own son's precarious life, Ora is unbound by the fact that she is irrevocably tied to these other lives. This notion of being bound or limited in the kind of humanism that defies boundaries (as Booth suggests) in turn offers a vision of literature, or the text itself, as a precarious object in the World literary space.

Like Ora and Avram, who are incapable of discarding their suffering bodies in the text, the novel itself often yields to the pressure of its context. This yielding to the body politic, however, is not a literary weakness, a symptom of Grossman's own submission to nationalist rhetoric as Jacqueline Rose reads it in her review in *The Guardian*. Rather than implicating the author in an uncritical nationalism, as Rose suggests ("*To the End of the Land* emerges at a time when, by Grossman's own account, it has become harder and harder to resist the dominant narrative of his country, a narrative he has done more than most Israeli writers to expose" Rose says), it reveals a change in Grossman's belief in the redemptive humanist capacity of literature to forge post-national communities. As such, it can be read counter to the idealistic notions of the cosmopolitan text in the international literary circuit. Instead of seeing the "Israeli-Palestinian conflict [as] an analogue to the interpersonal relations in the novel – either man-woman relations or relations between one human being and another" (610), as Menakhem Perry claims of earlier Hebrew literature, it suggests that the conflict and the context may be intrinsic to those relations in shaping them. Grossman's vision of an embodied humanism can offer some kind of notion of community, but it is one that hinges on the idea of loss and limits: acknowledging being bound (to the community and the other) – if not tightly policed – is the very condition that makes it possible to be unbound (as Butler terms it) and unmoored from the tyranny of the border.

In this politically embodied text, the utopian quality of narrative seen in *Be My Knife* through Yair's and Miriam's intimacy is curbed. If Ora asks Avram to memorize the story of Ofer, "you'll remember everything, every word. And in the end, you'll see, we'll give birth to a book" (470), such a book can't make up for Ofer's physical death. Avram senses that they have been carrying Ofer's "anaesthetized" sleeping figure between them, taking him "somewhere" (574-5), but the figurative, narrative version of Ofer is only always an 'anaesthetized' version of himself, not actually there, and as Ora exclaims in horror, in order to be alive "He has to be awake the whole time. Why is he sleeping?" (575) Furthermore, even though Ofer's fate is not confirmed at the end of the novel, we are left with the reminder that Grossman's own narrative project could not save his son. As such, even if resisting a merely biographical reading of this most sensitive of Grossman's novels, which was written both during his son's military service and after his death in the 2006 Lebanon campaign, Grossman's biographical paratext does play an important part in how this text is received, as many Israeli and International critics have demonstrated. The final, ambiguous ending is followed by a postscript that ties the agony of the waiting mother (who tells the story of her son in order to put off thinking about his possible death) to Grossman's own tragic experiences when writing it. Grossman's suffering is therefore reflected back on to the narrative, and a self-reflexive dimension is added to the text. As readers, we are made aware of another dimension to loss in the text. Not only the main thematic of the novel, loss also becomes integral to the reading experience as the imaginary solutions offered by the text are not necessarily realizable in real life.

Even if *To the End of the Land* flirts with the ability of language to breach the divides that occur between Ora and what Grossman would term her class- and ethnic- 'Other', Sami the Palestinian taxi driver, it never quite manages to bring such a friendship into being. Although their conversations, as Ora reflects, show her how "he still manages to be himself within all *this*" and vice versa, in case one day the situation in Israel were reversed (55), when

Ora's ability for compassion is pushed, she falters. These small failures in communication are part of how Grossman demonstrates the limitations of the World novel in enabling a sustained conversation. While Grossman presents the "Arabesque Hebrew" that Sami uses to "undermine the long-winded indignant, greedy pretenses of both Jews and Arabs" (55) as a model that could offer some kind of possibility for community via a shared language, the novel can neither convey how Sami "skewered the leaders of both peoples on a sharp Arab saying" nor the equivalent idiom in Ora's father's Yiddish that it arouses in her memory.<sup>122</sup> These twinned sayings (and silences) point to a shared history of suffering and political conflict that could unite Jews and Palestinian Arabs in Israel, but which Grossman's novel, written in the majoritarian language of the state, cannot capture. In fact, Grossman repeatedly points to the silences within his text and his characters' narratives, highlighting for example Ora's prejudice (she contemplates when on the phone with Sami at home "This is what they're like when they're alone [...] without us" (93), and admires Sami's "innate Eastern gentleness" (136)).

When Ora pesters Sami about Yazdi's (the ill Palestinian child's) background, Sami exclaims:

'Not everything has to have a story, Ora!' [...] it seems to her that as he speaks, almost from one word to the next, he is shedding his Israeli, sabra accent, and a different sound, rough and foreign, is sneaking in. 'You people,' he hisses through the rearview mirror, 'you're always looking for a story in everything'. (100)

Grossman is ruthless in showing just what portion of blame lies with Ora as we cannot help but feel Sami's frustration that some fundamental point of understanding has broken down. Earlier in the day, Ora's light-hearted chatter does little to alleviate the tension in the car when she asks Sami to drive Ofer to the military campaign. The favour Sami demands in return (for Ora to help him take the ill child through the checkpoints) is thereby shadowed by Ora's dawning realization of the delicate boundary she crossed in asking Sami to drive to the military meeting point. As the citation above suggests, difference seeps in via the very language they

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<sup>122</sup> By evoking the title of Israeli Arab writer Anton Shammas' famous Hebrew novel, *Arabesques* (or *Arabesknot* in Hebrew) in Cohen's translation, the novel suggests that such a shared language could represent a transnationalism that is local rather than global.

appear to share as the unequal rights to narrative and history of the interlocutors is revealed: Sami retorts when Ora tells him to take her and Avram “To where the country ends”, “For me it ended a long time ago” (133). There is, of course, a story behind the ill child, just as Grossman has taken pains to give us Ora’s perspective on ‘the story’ behind Ofer’s return to the military, but Sami’s sharp retort draws attention to how narratives are deployed (including Ora’s own mindless chatter) to conceal the reality of Palestinian suffering.

As such, Grossman’s text moves closer to a pragmatic approach, no longer capable of either shedding all politics of its context, nor able to create an ideal community of humans. The novel and its potential to alter the forms of belonging hinge on the recognition of limitation (or vulnerability) and loss as concepts *within* the text and intrinsic traits *of* the text. Thematically and textually, it is the admission of loss and the recognition of vulnerability that it demands, the capacity of being “unbound” by the other, unravelled by grief (Butler *Precarious* 28), that opens up the possibility of an alternative constellation of belonging. If the human has to be reconciled with the body in order to fully resist a kind of nationhood whose inhumanity lies in its capacity to separate the two, then the hope for imagining a more inclusive community lies in the recognition that we are physically dependent on one another, as Butler argues in *Precarious Life*, through a vulnerability that makes “a tenuous ‘we’ of us all” (20). Ora must first be unbound, beside herself with the prospect of loss in order to become bound again – open to love and human contact.<sup>123</sup>

Grossman’s focus on loss as an element of the text therefore becomes a self-conscious withdrawal from World literature as something that Damrosch argues “gains in translation” (281). In shunning the universal and foregrounding its context, *To the End of the Land* suggests that literature produces a language that is not perpetually translatable, but irrevocably tied to something singularly local. This withdrawal from the universal to the local is precisely what

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<sup>123</sup> The same transition, arguably, occurs with Avram, too: only when capable of embracing his own vulnerability, as potentially subject to loss, is he able to reconnect with the world around him and Ora.

makes it a dissenting novel. The text, after all, as Brenner has shown, cannot strive for the depoliticized universal without brushing aside the material reality of the Palestinian context. Grossman's admission of a boundary or limit to what the narrative can do in terms of healing and what it can translate of its context is therefore what opens the narrative up as a model for rethinking the boundaries of the community. In other words, recognizing his own link to a singular cultural position from which he speaks (as the ethnic offers the individual in globalized modernity according to Stuart Hall) allows Grossman to resist not only the epistemic violence of a homogenizing universal culture, but to truly consider, by virtue of his and his writing's vulnerability, the position of others, equally bound and equally subject to loss.<sup>124</sup>

The text itself, in expressing its own limitation and loss – in a world literary sphere – like the narrative of loss that it portrays, consequently offers a way of displacing the strictly bordered ethnic community. Grossman writes how it is in the moment of losing himself to the unknown via writing that he is most aware of himself, his own boundaries and identity (*Writing* 37), and it is precisely in the moment of rescinding community in the text, of admitting loss (whether of an individual, as in Ora's and Grossman's cases, or of culture in translation) that some kind of vision of an alternative form of belonging becomes possible. In a metatextual moment of the novel, Ora's predicament is reflected in her son's play about Israeli exiles fleeing the country where a woman "walks along with a length of string, unraveling it behind her" (225), implying as Avram interprets, that "the land was ripped apart? Unraveled? [...] And this woman is giving the earth a string..." (225). Similar to Penelope, weaving and unweaving her tale and her country, Ora is waiting for her son to return or for the time to complete his shroud, tying her loss to her country, unravelling herself and the nation in grief.

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<sup>124</sup> As stated in the introduction (28), Stuart Hall argues that the local and the ethnic are "the necessary place or space from which people speak" (184), against the homogenizing impetus of a universal culture coming in the wake of globalization.

Ora's journey is thus to the end of the history of the country as a nation, like Sami's retort about the country ending, it is not only a test of its limits but a form of "saying goodbye to the country" (368), to the kind of community represented by the militarized state (Ofer tells her to emigrate if he dies). Ora's personal loss is tied in with a potential national loss, exile, that paradoxically binds (via the action of being unbound, unravelled) the community together: "you could imagine, for example [...] that in every town and village and kibbutz there was someone stealthily tying his own thread to hers. And that way, secretly, a tapestry was being woven all over the country" (241). Avram figures as he also learns to weave his threads into her tapestry:

Perhaps it is an umbilical cord that comes out of her and keeps going forever. He imagines more and more men, women, and children streaming out of the towns and villages, the kibbutzim and moshavim, to tie their own threads to hers. For a moment he sees a red tapestry spreading out over the expanses below him, clinging to them like a fishing net, a thin bleeding mesh that glistens in the sun. (371)

This large red tapestry is suggestive of Shehadeh's ghostland of a blood-soaked soil, as Grossman's landscape too is a country teeming with dead bodies, with state plaques jostling for room alongside private memorial signs, "There's no more room for all the dead" (425) Ora thinks. However, rather than seeing national consciousness as what brings about international consciousness, it implies that the building of an alternative community hinges on displacement and loss, on the ability to be unbound from one's family, community and country. Grief, after all, is a form "of exile," David Grossman says in an interview with Rachel Cooke, "You are being exiled from everything you know. You can take nothing for granted."

If the admission of one's ability to be undone by loss enables a recognition of one's inextricable ties to one another then Grossman's final vision of a bleeding country, unravelled by a woman's grief, suggests that perhaps this feeling of dispossession, exile and displacement, of a country coming apart at the seams, is a necessary prerequisite for imagining an alternative kind of community, more open to its 'others'. Towards the end of the

third and final journey of the novel, Ora in fact considers: “How had she not realized what Sami must be going through when he saw those injured, beaten people?” (526) This quiet realization (in a critically overlooked passage) is as much a journey to ‘the end of the land’ – its limits and boundaries – as her narrative of Ofer’s life, or indeed her geographical mapping is and it is only made possible by acknowledging her own limits as well as those of the nation’s. The act of recognizing how one is bound to others thus offers in Grossman’s text political possibilities for unbinding the strictly bordered community – and that displacement (or “self-abandonment” in entering the “Other’s core” (*Writing* 37)) in turn opens up the possibility of imagining the state and its identity anew.

Grossman’s text therefore suggests that it is only through binding that a less bordered community is possible. The text has to address its geopolitical provenance, as Ghosh’s formulation of the placed cosmopolitan novel also proposes, in order to provide a viable alternative to the stringently bordered communities. It is the homogenizing thrust of the World literature market place, and the endless translations (as means to a transnation) that it perpetuates, which has stripped literary models of this form of dissent, thus paradoxically making them uphold the strict boundaries of an Israeli imaginary that has come to depend on a vision of its own humanism, as Brenner has shown. In order to recognize or legitimize Grossman’s alternative vision of belonging, as a form of political resistance, we have to first acknowledge its political and cultural singularity: not only what is gained (Damrosch) but what is lost in Apter’s transLation/ transNation. As Patricia Storace suggests in her review of the novel, the “grandiloquence” of the title of the English translation turns the novel into an epic that appears to be “on the scale of ‘humanity,’ of ‘everyman’” (a reading that is confirmed by Alter’s review in *The New Statesman* which claims that the novel represents the universal experience of being a parent (1)). Its original Hebrew title, ‘A Woman Running/Fleeing from Bad Tidings’, however, “announces another novel altogether, a realist novel of contemporary life, the story of a particular person at a particular moment” (Storace). It is this reinstatement

of the particular, the political embodiment of the text, its narration of belonging and unbelonging, that is both its limitation and its possibility.

Grossman's aesthetic vision in this most political of his novels suggests that reading for the text's limits and boundaries, its untranslatability, may in fact be the only way of conceiving of communities that can exist beyond such borders:

'Listen,' Ora says and holds [Avram's] hand.

'To what?'

'To the path. I'm telling you, paths in Israel have a sound I haven't heard anywhere else.'

They walk and listen: *rrrsh-rrrsh* when their shoes drag in the dirt; *rrrhh-rrrhh* when their toes hit the path; *hhhs-hhhs* when they stroll; *hwassh-hwassh* when they trot; a rapid drumming *rrish-chrsh* when little stones fly up and hit each other; *hrappp-hrappp* when their feet step through bushes of poterium. Ora laughs. 'It's a good thing they all have the right sounds in Hebrew. How would you possibly describe these sounds in English or Italian? Maybe they can only be accurately pronounced in Hebrew.' (435)

English here is no longer the safe haven of Aron-eeng away from the state, but indicative of a universalism that offers no solution outside of a humanism that serves the state's own political ends.

If, as Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi argue, only texts "that will not prove alien to the receiving culture [...] come to be translated" (5), then Grossman's foregrounding of loss in translation (and as the condition of the transnation) is also a reassertion of alterity – a withdrawal from the receiving culture and the idea of the 'universal' story (cultivated by the market) which in the Israeli context has signified a political denial of the state's Middle Eastern context and a wilful blindness to the plight of the Palestinians. Loss as such, and the focus on alterity, becomes the possibility (instead of obstacle) to coexistence, as Ora adds after her reflection on the sounds of the landscape, "I wonder what it's like in Arabic [...] After all, it's their landscape too, and they have rhonchial consonants too, that sound like your throat is choking on dryness" (435-6).

The novel thus offers an awareness of one's boundaries and capacity to be unbound as the recognition through which an alternative community might be conceived. As a journey that tries to reach what Grossman terms the 'Other' – not just the gendered other of Avram, the 'enemy' of Sami or the ultimate alterity of death – it never quite achieves the complete self-abandonment that Grossman strives for. Grossman returns to the bonds of language and community, but he does so slightly changed through a recognition of the suffering body, loss and limitation, as concepts central to any notion of humanity that engages with life as, according to Esposito, "precisely, 'a life', singular and impersonal" (217). Grossman's literature is thus left with the space between the external and the internal, the human and its 'armour' as both what must be breached, and is never fully crossed. While *The Book of Intimate Grammar* ends with Aron's uncertain fate in the refrigerator, and Yair and his son in the conclusion of *Be My Knife* are lying together but apart, Grossman's lingering final images of Aron's hand clasping the Houdini tools that might save him, Yair's and his son's "long and thin and fragile" (307) fingers reaching towards each other and Avram's hand hovering over Ora's body, suggest the impossibility and necessity of continuing to reach across borders and cultures, "barely touching" (TETL 376), for that truly human contact that is always yet to come.

## Conclusion

### On Drawing Lines

[Being an intellectual] is not a matter of living (spiritually) somewhere else, across a chasm, in a distant and separate world; it's a matter of living *here* – and drawing a line.

MICHAEL WALZER <sup>125</sup>

If post-partition writers, operating in an Anglophone international literary market or 'world republic of letters' are in search of a literary space of "humane, and creative dissent" that was outlined in the introduction of this thesis, then it appears from their work that such a space may already be compromised.<sup>126</sup> Edward Said forewarned in his fourth Reith lecture that "the space for individual and subjective intellectual representation, for asking questions and challenging the wisdom of a war or an immense social program [...] has shrunk dramatically from what it was a hundred years ago" (61). Said, like the writers in this study, demonstrates that there is no entirely separate 'third way' or 'third choice' between the pressures of the community and that of an introverted art or independent thought: the contemporary intellectual cannot separate him- or herself completely from "power or authority" (Said *Reith* 61). From these post-partition novels, memoirs and travel texts that articulate some form of dissent, emerges a model for the writer-critic that is predicated on the recognition of filiation to the nation, community or local culture. The contemporary partition writer has to be 'bound', as Ghosh's works suggest, and limited, as Grossman proposes, if they want to challenge not only the borders of an ethnic nationalist discourse, but the implicit

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<sup>125</sup>"The Politics of the Intellectual: Julien Benda's *La Trahison des Clercs* Reconsidered." (375)

<sup>126</sup>Ghosh, *The Imam and the Indian* (285).

hierarchies of a cosmopolitan universalism that runs parallel to it. As literary spaces, however, they are riven by both different borders of allegiance and artistic boundaries.

In the Reith lectures Said was, in fact, in the process of reconsidering the role of the intellectual in a contemporary world where a “politics of identity and partition” rule (Said *Humanism* 75). The critic, in Said’s sense of the term, cannot be entirely removed from his surroundings as Julien Benda so famously theorized, or solely a citizen of critical humanism (as George Steiner claims), but is always, inevitably, a citizen of some polity, if an uncomfortable one at that.<sup>127</sup> As Said was well aware, and partition areas demonstrate, some of the most acute political problems in the world today stem not from the presence of citizenship, but arguably from its absence or denial from certain political or ethnic groups.<sup>128</sup> The contemporary cultural crisis unfolding in the simultaneous mobilization of identity politics by movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood or the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the cultural homogenization occurring in the wake of the violent penetration of capital into further and remoter reaches of the globe, suggests that the homeland cannot simply reside in the text – out of place – when the material rather than metaphorical stakes in claiming a ‘home’ are so acutely felt around the world.<sup>129</sup>

If Said was considering the predicament of the critic in the world at large, there appears to be something particular about the threat of exclusive, sectarian social-formations

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<sup>127</sup>Benda defined intellectuals, or ‘clerks’, as individuals whose “activity essentially is *not* the pursuit of practical aims, all those who seek their joy in the practice of an art or a science or metaphysical speculation, short in the possession of non-material advantages, and hence in a certain manner say: ‘My kingdom is not of this world.’” (30); while Steiner argues in “Our Homeland the Text” that “[t]he sole citizenship of the cleric is that of a critical humanism” (322).

<sup>128</sup> Consider the Palestinian case that was so predominant in Said’s thinking: Palestinians have long been denied citizenship in any real sense of the term. Not only do they not carry passports if they live in the West Bank or Gaza (the territories not having been recognized officially as a state), but even when Israeli residents, they are treated as ‘second-class’ citizens, without the same rights to mobility and congress as fully-fledged non-Palestinian Israelis. It is these slippery terms of citizenship that led Agamben to pose the Palestinians as exemplary *homines sacri* (see: *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*).

<sup>129</sup> The RSS are a paramilitary organization built around the politics put forward by Vinayak D. Sarvarkar’s *Hindutva- Who is a Hindu?* (Morey and Tickell xiv-xv).

and their capacity to erode the concept of a larger human community that supersedes them, that affects, as we have seen, not a turn towards individualism, but specifically to some form of collectivity. Amitav Ghosh writes in his essay “The Ghosts of Mrs. Gandhi” in *The Imam and the Indian* that in areas where violence is not only theoretical but real and possible, where streets can suddenly become hostile like a “desert in a flash flood” (SL 200), the writer cannot stand on the side-lines, but has a duty to intervene. In his elegantly spare prose Ghosh recalls reading V.S. Naipaul’s thoughts on a crowd of demonstrators: “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 concern with theirs. Yet he knows he never will; it is simply not in his nature to join crowds” (56). Ghosh, however, reflects that while he, inspired by Naipaul, believed that he, too, was not a ‘joiner’, when the moment came and a counter-demonstration marched against the anti-Sikh riots in New Delhi, “I did not hesitate for a moment: without a second thought, I joined” (57).

This rejection, by Ghosh, of the aloof author as an anachronistic model for the contemporary writer, echoes an even earlier critic’s reflections on the role of the intellectual in a different historical conflict. In her discussion of Franz Kafka’s *The Castle* and the difficulties of Jewish assimilation in inter-war Europe, Hannah Arendt reaches a similar conclusion to Ghosh’s.<sup>130</sup> She argues that social isolation is no longer possible in a world rife with sectarian violence, where “a man can be driven at any moment from the streets and broad places once open to all” (89). One has to acknowledge one’s part in a community (rather than stand aloof from it, spurning its gifts). In order to live a true human life, “[m]en’s lives must be nominal, not exceptional” (89). Arendt’s argument provides a case for the importance, or even necessity, of Zionism under the pressures of persecution, but more importantly here, it stresses the significance of identification with a community (not necessarily a nationalist one)

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<sup>130</sup> I am referring to Arendt’s article “The Jew as Pariah: a Hidden Tradition” (originally published in 1944) from Susannah Young-ah Gottlieb’s edited collection *Reflections on Literature and Culture* (see works cited under Arendt).

in affecting how the nation is defined. As Michael Walzer argues, the intellectual must, in fact, “speak the language of their fellows” if they want to be understood (375). Like Ora who returns to Jerusalem, Piya who stays in the Sundarbans or, indeed, Shehadeh himself who in the end confronts rather than escapes from the reality of the community in the final pages of *A Rift in Time*, post-partition texts repeatedly pit detachment against attachment and find an ethical imperative in reintegrating the writer in, rather than uprooting the author from, the community.

To return to my previous rephrasing of Adorno’s much quoted statement, in the contemporary world it may, as such, be moral to be at home in one’s home. It certainly isn’t possible to proclaim oneself as ethically homeless as it once was in postcolonial studies. If postcolonial criticism appears to have moved towards the celebration of a ubiquitous and depoliticized ‘cosmopolitanism’, through what Timothy Brennan argues is a focus on transculturation, migration and cultural hybridity, then this vision has often come at the expense of more nuanced readings of belonging.<sup>131</sup> In response, critics have increasingly called for a qualification of what we mean by ‘cosmopolitanism’, a critical impetus that has also informed the readings of this thesis. After Bruce Robbins argued for a formulation of the concept as “plural and particular” (2) and Anthony Kwame Appiah’s philosophy of ‘partial’ cosmopolitanism, a host of literary critics have sought to specify their deployment of the term.<sup>132</sup> Bishnupriya Ghosh proposes that the simultaneous resistance to nationalism and globalism that arose out of the post-emergency left in South Asia could be called a ‘cosmopolitics’, in a formulation which, like Robbins’ and Appiah’s, highlights the “privileging [of] provisional and contingent local contexts” in a global cultural aesthetics (8). Pranav Jani, likewise, demonstrates the presence of a ‘namak-halaal’ cosmopolitanism in post 1930s/40s Indian texts (a literature which was, to cite Jani “if not nationalist, then at least true to its salt”

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<sup>131</sup> See *At Home in the World, Cosmopolitanism Now* (2).

<sup>132</sup> Appiah argues in *The Ethics of Identity* that a ‘partial’ cosmopolitanism would actively privilege not only the tangible immediate bonds of kith and kin, but the more abstract bonds of the nation.

(20)).<sup>133</sup> According to Jani these texts attempted to bring about wider social emancipation through the national space.

What emerges from the post-partition texts studied here – whether popular or literary, fictional or autobiographical – is a particular form of belonging that, in the vein of Ghosh’s and Jani’s observations, is neither comfortably nationalist nor simply cosmopolitan, but retains its capacity to critique both. If anything, it draws on the kind of cosmopolitanism that James Clifford saw in Amitav Ghosh’s encounter with the villagers in *In an Antique Land*: “literal travel is not a prerequisite of irony, critique or distance from [one’s] home culture” (*Routes* 4), Clifford argues. Cosmopolitanism also resides in the intellectual moves of criticism. The international and political texts of this thesis reflect unstable, critical compromises, of a conflicted localism or a ‘critical humanism’, where the borders and flows that order places and the relationships between the bodies that inhabit them are constantly redrafted to interrogate not only different forms of belonging, but the representational modes they operate under.<sup>134</sup> Ghosh’s placed cosmopolitanism derives from regional philosophical traditions (specifically of the Vachanakara saint-poets and Sufis), while Shehadeh’s is a revolutionary universalism from a postcolonial lineage. Similarly, Aslam Khan’s and Shamsie’s gateways and spheres point to their ambivalent relationship to a cosmopolitan world literary field, as opposed to Grossman’s limited humanism, which is drawn from a specifically Israeli interaction with international culture. It has been my contention all along that such literary projects have revolved around the drawing, as much as the dismantling, of political and cultural lines. As Michael Walzer

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<sup>133</sup> Jani invokes this term via Leela Gandhi to mean being “true to one’s salt” rather than “loyal to one’s salt” (45).

<sup>134</sup> Todorov defines ‘critical humanism’ as the deployment of universality as an ‘instrument of analysis’ that is a product of the human mind and which should therefore not be considered as fixed but subject to revision (390). While critical humanism and conflicted localism, as studied here, overlap significantly as concepts, the recourse to a curbed humanism in Israeli/Palestinian literature in particular, as opposed to the foregrounding of a situated cosmopolitanism as in the case of India and Pakistan, reveals how the continued military conflict in the former case necessitates a focus on lives over localities.

proposes in the citation above, intellectual work is not rooted in a monastic separation from society, 'it is a matter of living *here* – and drawing a line', and these post-partition writer-critics are not only inside the community, party to the 'here and now' of the contemporary political situation, but also extract themselves just enough to enforce a limit. Walzer's 'line', unlike Arendt's and Ghosh's form of partisanship, is clearly a reference to some kind of independent critical intervention, to the capacity of criticism (or literature) to say 'enough' in the face of what Said termed the wisdom of war or oppressive and unjust social programs. That line is present in these post-partition writers' works as a line of affiliation, a thread (like Ora's in *To the End of the Land*) that can be traced back from the disembodied imagination of the intellectual to the community. It is therefore not merely a moral boundary, but one that rests on the acknowledgement of being bound at all.

These writers' particular engagement with not only the legacy of partition and its categorization of identities, but the 'world literary space' that Casanova speaks of is thus defined by an act of drawing lines (both aesthetic and political). If literary spaces that operate as completely removed from their material contexts are inconceivable in the contemporary world, as Said suggests, then certain forms of non-metropolitan literature, like the post-partition texts studied here, are mediating the transition from a more political writing to a 'world' literature (both in terms of market and field). Contemporary non-metropolitan literatures express different forms of resistance in literary modes that could be claimed as 'universal' and embrace the autotelic nature of literature to destabilize political discourses at the same time.<sup>135</sup> In so doing they demonstrate both the residual need for a postcolonial criticism, to understand and account for contemporary, politically-engaged literature in the world and how such a field must learn from its own *worlding*, the current move towards a disciplinary World literature which, as Casanova argues, while not entirely text-based or

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<sup>135</sup> See Young, "World Literature and Postcolonialism."

'internally' focused, abstains from the critical tendency within postcolonial studies to reduce the literary to the political.<sup>136</sup>

Writing for a wider English-language audience, post-partition literature is in the process of determining what the terms and limits of its political-engagement can be in such a World literary space, which, in its operation, reflects the paradoxical feature of their borderless literary forms that constantly conjure the border. While translating all difference into a 'universal' English language, the western centric international literary market simultaneously employs stringent local identities in order to categorize and sell non-Western texts. Although the authors here are all marketed undoubtedly as representatives of their particular national contexts, if not as spokespersons for specific political affiliations, they themselves gain ground as cultural critics not just for their association with what Ghosh terms "more troubled parts of the world" (*Imam* 62), but for the ease with which they mediate between such regions and a larger Anglophone literary field. While Shehadeh's *Palestinian Walks*, for example, is presented as an authentic Palestinian voice (the blurb on the cover of Profile Books' second edition reads "Few Palestinian have opened their minds and hearts with such frankness") and Uzma Aslam Khan is accredited with unlocking "doors and windows onto Pakistan and its Islamic culture" for "Westerners" according to *The Washington Times* review of *The Geometry of God*, their positive reception has been significantly aided by, if not dependent on, their ability to pitch themselves as suave metropolitans, capable of negotiating international literary circuits: trading in the currency of not only their community, but a *World* literature.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> See Casanova, "Literature as a World"; Kadir argues in "To world, to Globalize" that "the term 'world' is no longer merely a nominal noun or an expansive adjective" (6) it is also the action of giving literature a "particular historical density" (2) – which, I must add, is figured more in the terms of a deep experience of cross-cultural and international exchange, than as the political context of the present.

<sup>137</sup> See Claire Hopley's review "Dauntless and Female in Pakistan," for *The Washington Times*.

Despite Amitav Ghosh's protests against the 'literary Festival circuit' or "tamashas," as he terms them, all of these writers, Ghosh included, pursue multiple avenues of expression and self-promotion outside the "life in letters" that Ghosh advocates in his blog post on the subject.<sup>138</sup> Shehadeh and Shamsie both write occasional columns for *The Guardian* and *The International Herald Tribune*, Uzma Aslam Khan and Amitav Ghosh have their own slick websites with links to their novels, publications and reviews. As Sarah Brouillette also points out, Ghosh sent his Commonwealth prize rejection letter to *The Hindu Times*, and a copy of his letter alongside links to the subsequent media coverage are all available on his own blog. Objections to the flattening of literary value or the commercialisation and homogenization of cultural difference are thus expressed through highly accessible and media-savvy mediums in their own right. Grossman, likewise, was a radio persona in Israel for a long time, and his articles for *Haaretz* are often picked up by the English-language press such as *The Guardian*, *The Independent* or *The New York Times*.

Considering their (reluctant) participation in the public performance of authorship, these texts might be better understood as turning Graham Huggan's famous formulation on its head.<sup>139</sup> Instead of exercising a 'strategic essentialism' (as Spivak terms it) as a political or commercial tool, what these writers may in fact be displaying (albeit to different degrees) is a form of strategic universalism – and one which probed further, reveals clear limits, boundaries and biases. The use of universal narratives of cosmopolitanism or human rights may be a conscious choice on behalf of these politically-active writers to disseminate their work to an international audience, through a wider literary market place. Writing for a more global

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<sup>138</sup>After Salman Rushdie was unable to attend the Jaipur Literary Festival in 2012 (due to local protests and perceived threats on his life), Amitav Ghosh critiqued the importance of defending the literary festival in his blog post "Festivals and Freedom". Ghosh argues that authorship should be more about a life of letters than spectacles and shows, and therefore what is important is to defend the freedom of expression rather than the right for politically contentious figures such as Rushdie to perform publicly.

<sup>139</sup> Huggan argued, via Spivak, for a 'strategic exoticism' in postcolonial literature which he defined as "the means by which postcolonial writers/thinkers, working from within exoticist codes of representation, either manage to subvert those codes [...] or succeed in redeploying them for the purposes of uncovering differential relations of power" (32).

audience, partaking in the category of 'non-metropolitan' texts, and having, as such, "managed to make it beyond some more specific locality," these texts not only "have attached to [them], always, the aura of [their] transcended origin" (60) as Sarah Brouillette argues, but they use their very ability to travel and transcend cultural boundaries as an opening to express political emancipatory narratives. Shehadeh, for example, surreptitiously shifts highly political and at times very nationalist content under the guise of ecocritical celebrations of nature, or ostensibly non-partisan aspirations to human rights. We see this already in the marketing of *Palestinian Walks* via the image of Banksy's graffiti on the West Bank Wall (Fig.1). While the first edition of the book, published by Scribner (the American subdivision of Simon Schuster) uses a photograph of an old building in the hills to emphasize the 'timeless' scenery from the West Bank in a throwback to the imperial travelogue; these later editions from Profile Books re-politicise the work through their focus on the contentious West Bank Wall, even replacing the subtitle of "Forays into a Vanishing Landscape"—with its connotations of mobility—with the more stagnant 'notes'. However, they have done so in a way which keeps its political content bland, universal, and easily marketable. The image of the girl in front of the graffiti posits Shehadeh's book, like Banksy's art work, as a form of consumable dissent.<sup>140</sup>

Banksy's plaited and short-skirted girl is reminiscent of a recognizably commercial 'Western' image of childhood, such as Judy Garland's Dorothy in Victor Fleming's 1939 adaptation of *The Wizard of Oz*—a work which in turn influenced postcolonial 'cosmopolitan' writers such as Salman Rushdie who saw in the film the "human dream of leaving" of going away, of "leaving the greyness and entering the colour" (14).<sup>141</sup> The cover image thus places Shehadeh's 'local' text and its implied representation of the daily lives of Palestinians (in this case denoted as Muslim, as the hijab suggests) in conversation with international

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<sup>140</sup> Banksy is familiar to most Western audiences as an urban graffiti artist who now exhibits in art galleries and earns a lucrative living from the extensive merchandising of his 'street art'. He, therefore, represents a kind of resistance that has been commercialized and shorn of its political edge.

<sup>141</sup> See Rushdie's article "Out of Kansas" in *Step Across this Line* (3-33).

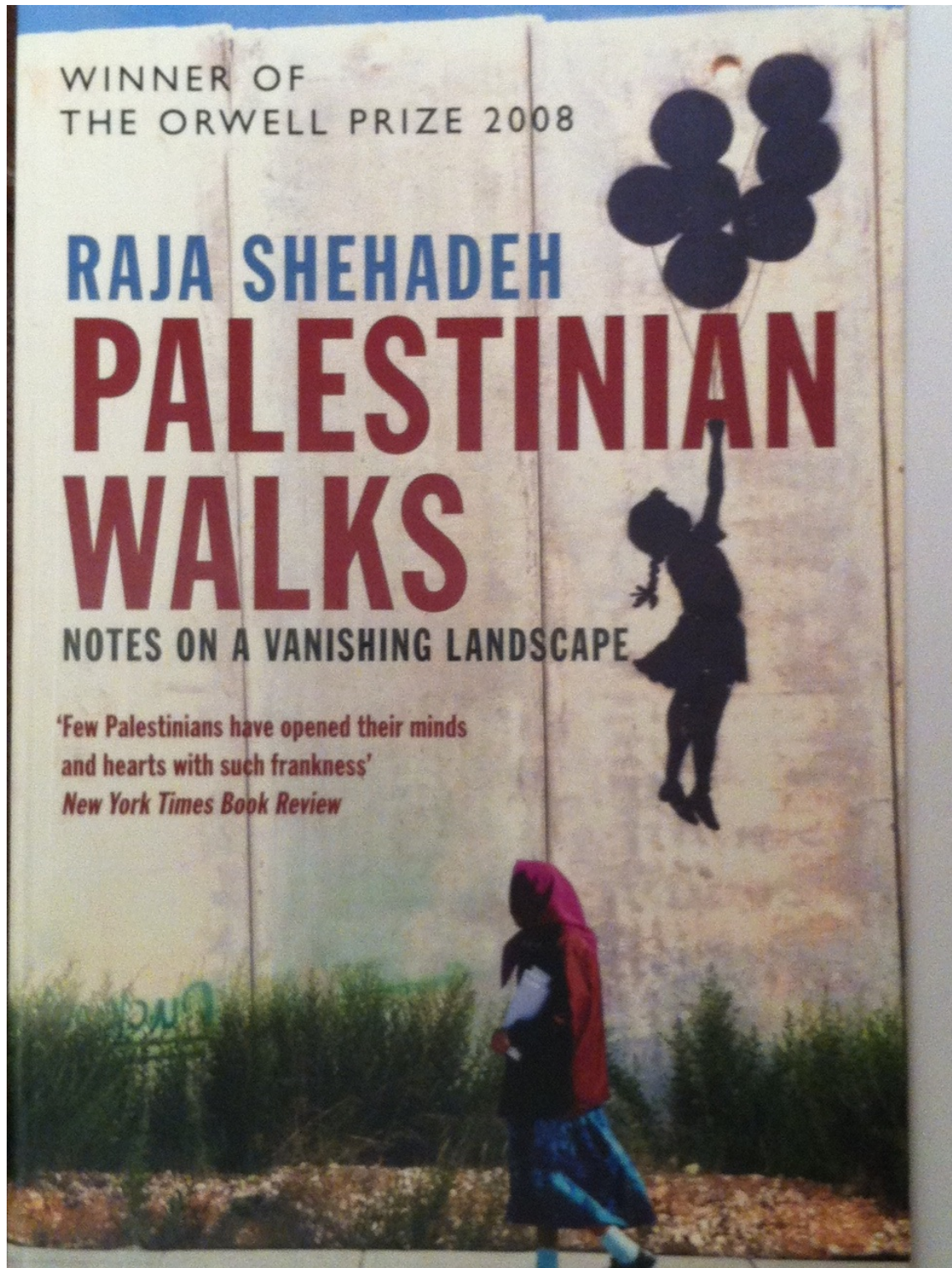


Figure 1. Cover of Profile Books' 2007 edition of *Palestinian Walks*.

cultural producers such as Banksy and Rushdie who espouse a particular Anglophone cosmopolitanism, where it “is not that ‘there’s no place like home’ but rather that there is no longer any such place *as home*” (33), as Rushdie plays on the film’s tagline. The girl floating off into the distance with Banksy’s balloons, while pointing to the power of art and dreams to surmount realities, also suggests that it is not the right to stay and live in their own state that informs Palestinian dreams, but the capacity to make a new home in movement.<sup>142</sup> Thus if there is an implied ‘human rights’ message on the cover – the local Palestinian girl aspires to the rights of Banksy’s universal ‘every girl’, floating off over material walls and political borders, towards Rushdie’s liberating homelessness – it is one which is rooted in the discourse of the intended audience of the text: an Anglophone, European or American reader. The yellow brick road on Shehadeh’s work, leads not to the utopian Emerald City of some form of statehood for the Palestinians (however free, fair and heterogeneous) but to the cosmopolitanism configured by cultural producers in London and New York.

The underlying point here is that the kind of universalism which the marketing of the book aspires to reflects a particular form of cosmopolitanism favoured by the World literary field or market. The shift from a historical travelogue to a politicized (though not political) text follows Shehadeh’s own move from a national – even postcolonial – writer to an author of ‘World literature’. While the text appears to be leaping, like Dorothy, out of the dreary ‘black and white’ realities of nationalism into a cosmopolitan literary field, it is in actuality enacting the reverse movement: Shehadeh, like many other non-metropolitan writers, may be using the glossy image of a ‘technicolour’ cosmopolitanism to slip in local political realities and complexities of belonging that can only be conveyed through the ambivalent medium of black and white literary print. As such, it could be claimed that writers like Shehadeh and their publishers, rather than selling their texts through their political or ‘exotic’ provenance, are

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<sup>142</sup> While reflective of a certain cosmopolitan dream, such a notion runs counter to a longstanding Palestinian political project to achieve not only nation statehood, but also to gain the right to remain or return.

portraying political and situated texts as ‘universal’ or cosmopolitan in order to gain audiences and political interlocutors. In the Palestinian context, merely writing to an English audience is, after all, a political act. Palestinian activist and memoirist Ghada Karmi in a conference in London in 2011 called for a literature that could speak to the international powers that be in the region, i.e. a literature in English – a strategic political manoeuvre that is by no means new to the area.<sup>143</sup> More than twenty years ago, internationally-renowned Palestinian author Sahar Khalifeh phrased the problem as follows:

You cannot liberate the Arabs without liberating the Israelis; you cannot liberate the Israelis without liberating the Americans (82).<sup>144</sup>

Although Khalifeh was speaking as a Marxist in the 1980s – and in this sense invoking international class liberation – her comments resonate with a strategic publication method in the Palestinian context. Politically-aware Palestinian writers are conscious of the importance of image and representation in a conflict that is not just waged locally and geographically, but through the information highway and international media.

If Palestinian literature’s relationship to the English literary market and the canon of contemporary World literature it appears to shape can be considered unique (which it, of course, in some sense is, coming out of a particularly fraught political context in which the Palestinian side has only recently begun to receive any mainstream media sympathy in Europe, let alone America), a similar case could be made for Uzma Aslam Khan’s popular fiction. Aslam Khan’s novels, also, seem to be shorn of the specificity of their politics in a way that assists them in expressing their own resistance to particular cultural (and literary) forms. If we can recognize that *The Geometry of God* is a provocative novel by its title, then the detail from Paul Klee’s “Limits of Reason” (1927) that adorns its cover in the hardcover Haus edition from 2010, or indeed the skeleton that Interlink Publishing chose as the frontispiece of the

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<sup>143</sup> See “Recording Memory: The Palestinian Experience.”

<sup>144</sup> See her interview with Peter Nazareth for *The Iowa Review*.

book, neither suggest the setting of the novel, nor the writer's origin, as so many other postcolonial texts have been presented. In that sense, Aslam Khan is exceptional even to a South Asian English literature marketing trend which has favoured cover images of "jasmine flowers, spices, saris, bangles" (Hussain), as Aslam Khan points out. The absence of some of these more stereotypical symbols has allowed her work to travel and be read by a mainstream audience: American TV host Oprah's magazine recommended the work to its readers as a story about "A Family United and Divided by Faith."<sup>145</sup> The political impetus of reaching such an audience and altering their perception of Pakistan is not lost on Aslam Khan who, as we saw earlier, is highly conscious of her country's international reception.

These texts thus do draw political lines and take clear standpoints even when, or perhaps particularly when (as Grossman also demonstrated) they are claimed as universal. However, if postcolonialism in its mode of resistance still plays a role in challenging hegemonic structures wherever they occur, there is also a great deal of value in the *worlding* of politically grounded literature as seen in the works responding to and resisting partition that have been studied here. Emancipatory movements, as Neil Lazarus points out in *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, are still clearly present in contemporary non-metropolitan cultural production, but there is also, increasingly, in works stemming from areas where the nationalist moment has passed, a desire to capture a more nuanced engagement with their material contexts through an art that engages with and revels in its own artifice.<sup>146</sup> Regions facing drastic economic and political change, such as South Asia and the Middle East, have seen a spectacular rise in graphic novels exploring what has been theorized as the postcolonial legacy

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<sup>145</sup> See Cathleen Medwick's review.

<sup>146</sup> I would argue that the Palestinian territories can be included here, and the visible move towards articulating their struggle in terms of human rights rather than nationalism as seen in chapter two speaks to this fact. While the conflict, of course, has continued in the region there is a change in how writers are viewing the relationship between literature and the state. Palestinian poet laureate, Mahmoud Darwish, for example, claimed in interview with Najat Rahman that following the Oslo Accords "the image of the epic has ended and been transformed into the image of the state," consequently, as "the collective is closer to achieving its project" there becomes room for the "individual voice" in poetry (324).

of different forms of neo-imperialist, state and sectarian violence. These graphic literatures draw lines not only as political commentary, but also for artistic pleasure.

If prose narratives, as Ananya Kabir suggests, privilege a form of closure that assigns “blame and guilt” (“Hieroglyphs” 490) (and can thereby perpetuate the kind of restrictive ethnic discourses that cannot achieve a critical distance from the partition), then it is time to consider how alternative literary forms such as the graphic novel may offer more nuanced explorations of the different forms of violence – whether sectarian or cosmopolitan, physical or epistemic – that affect not just partition states but the wider world today. Vishwajyoti Ghosh’s *Delhi Calm*, which depicts the fate of a group of activists during the Emergency in India, for example, uses a combination of sepia-tinted, ink-splattered images and fictional newspaper cut-outs to create a visual collage that disrupts the underhanded discourse of the political actors in its story, and finds aesthetic relief in the visual appeal of its own representational form.

As we see in Fig.2., the image that culminates the scenes of slum-clearance in *Delhi Calm* evokes both a postcolonial struggle with the legacy of empire and an aesthetic of resistance that harnesses textuality. The radio held up triumphantly by the dark silhouette rising out of the rubble, in a mirror image to “Liberty Leading the People,” announces the victory of India over the West Indies in the game of cricket that has run parallel to the state violence in the panels preceding this one. If cricket here serves as a reminder of the colonial ethos of ‘playing the game’, as Henry Newbolt encouraged the servants of empire to do, then it also points to the fact that the new state may be playing according to old rules when entrenching lines between ethnic groups and classes.<sup>147</sup> The amputee, in turn, echoes Naji al-Ali’s cartoon Palestinian, sacrificing limbs and territories to endure, or a number of other iconic images from a rich network of traditions using the image as popular protest.

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<sup>147</sup> Newbolt’s famous poem ‘Vitaī Lampada’ draws a parallel between cricket and empire-building, centred around the refrain “‘Play up! play up! and play the game!’” (Newbolt and Dickinson 38-9)

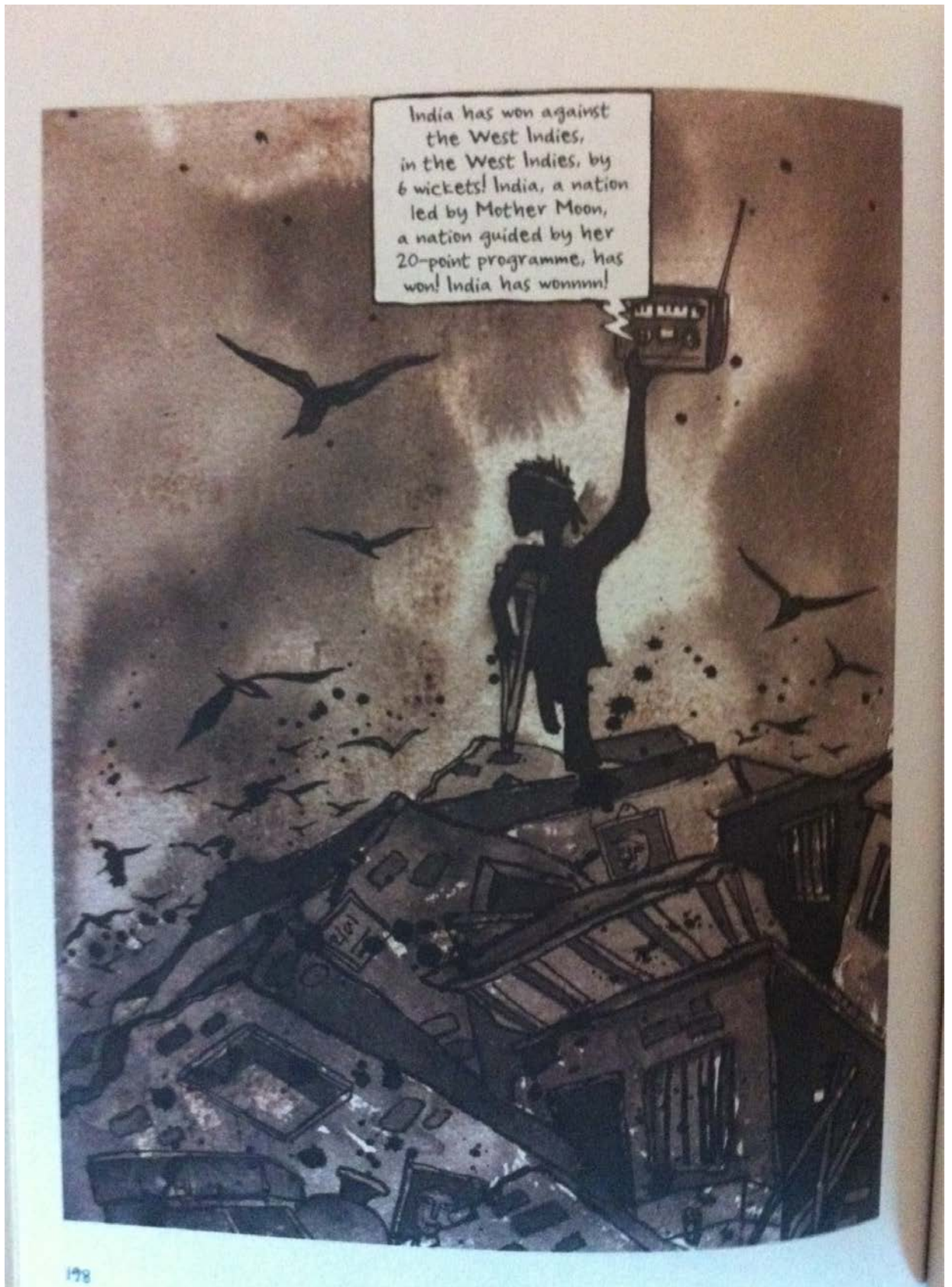


Figure 2. Vishwajyoti Ghosh's *Delhi Calm* (148).

If there is a line here, it is steeped in ambivalence: we have both violence and resistance through opposing verbal and visual modes, but their combination creates an ironic effect that is part of the medium's own textuality. If postcolonial states have proven themselves capable of playing the games of power and oppression under the same old banners of liberation, then suffering has also become iconic in certain forms of resistance narrative, Vishwajyoti's image suggests. The symbolic woman of a nineteenth-century revolutionary history has been adapted by a contemporary postcolonial movement to form the mute and maimed body of a resistance rhetoric that doesn't question the biological discourse it has inherited. The merging of word and image in a unique way of "apprehending the world" (as Ghosh speaks of blogging) may thus offer writers the means to represent both violence and the violence of representation in more conscientious ways.<sup>148</sup>

The post-partition texts studied here, while less variegated in their forms (although including a spread of different literary forms from traditional novels, to travel texts, memoirs and romances), demonstrate that there is a visible need to move beyond the binary nature of the disciplinary debates over the status and practice of non-metropolitan or 'postcolonial' literature today. The borderless aesthetic that constantly conjures the border serves as only one example where text and context are intimately intertwined, both challenging and enforcing each other in an ambivalent literary practice. Post-partition texts, to rephrase Damrosch's and Young's descriptions of World literature, wear their borders lightly.<sup>149</sup> The boundaries they represent and the lines they attempt to draw are unstable; however, such instability is not a politically-evasive cosmopolitanism, celebratory of all forms of transgression. Rather, it is a peculiar form of sensitivity to artistic ambivalence and textual critique. If the potential dissolution of postcolonial literature into a larger World literature field reflects the preference for crossing the disciplinary, cultural and political boundaries that

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<sup>148</sup> See "On Blogging: 4 of 4."

<sup>149</sup> See Robert Young "World Literature and Postcolonialism." (211) and David Damrosch *What is World Literature?* (129).

govern academia today, then the post-partition works in this thesis invite us to rethink the value of drawing some aesthetic and political lines, however ambivalent.

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