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Dissolved Boundaries and Fluid Spaces: The Spatial Imagination of Amitav Ghosh in *the Shadow Lines*

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I. Introduction

Amitav Ghosh's Sahitya Akademy award winning novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988) negates the idea of a nation being a confined space; or in other words, it espouses what critical geographer David Harvey would term "the collapse of spatial distinctiveness" (1989: 209). The text, through its repeated engagement with many transnational events and episodes, however focuses on a fundamental irony embedded in the subcontinent's unique and strongly divided topography: the irony is its failure to curb increasing cross-cultural interactions between the divided nations notwithstanding the presence of rigid boundaries between them and their boastful promise for cultural impermeability. On this premise, the present article, while highlighting Amitav Ghosh's postmodernist rejection of nations being specific "constraining [spatial] enclosures" (Kirbi 1996: 13), also seeks to explore the writer's principal illustrations of space as an undivided boundary-defying cosmopolitan category.

Though *The Shadow Lines* recounts events relating to a time that spans across pre- and post-independent generations, one of its prime focuses revolves around the notion of space and spatial non-uniformity. The novels' expansive spatial diversity is introduced at the very outset through the unnamed narrator's detailed chronicling of the family history of the Datta-Chaudhuris, where the disintegrated family scatters across diverse geographical locations while simultaneously rupturing numerous national and territorial ghettos and frontiers. In the puzzlingly intricate movement of the plot, which oscillates back and forth in space and time, the story's relentless involvement with the partition and its recurrent invalidation of the same as a spatial divider is obvious and undeniable. In other words, the text, through its purposive elicitation of continually prodding questions relating to space, time, territoriality at different crucial junctures, interrogates the validity of partition while concurrently questioning its ability to create separate ethnically, culturally and religiously closed spaces.

The novel's plot, which seems to be woven like a complex and fibrous cosmopolitan network, flaunts a set of characters who are perennial cross-border itinerants, and hence are trespassers into the limitless arena of global space. The unnamed narrator, Ila and Tridib are some such representational characters who are the habitual violators of fixed territorial settlements; their continual cross-border movements and recurrent involvements in trans-territorial events and episodes exemplify not only the novel's transnational character, but also its ostentatious sustentation of a cosmopolitan spatiality.

Before going further into our discussion, we must divide the article, as does the text itself, into two parts: "Going Away" and "Coming Home" in order to present separate analyses of spatial fluidity in the two major, divided portions of the book.

II. Going Away

The introduction of the symbolic family tree of the Datta-Chaudhuris, almost at the beginning of the novel, provides enough connotative gestures at the dissolution of spatial boundaries and confinements. The tree symbolizes the breakage of spatial delimitations through the global spread-out of its branches that rupture not only the conceptually self-limiting topographical divisions, but also their attendant and circumscribed social, political and cultural spaces. In addition, the narrator's fortuitous coming across the *Bartholomew's Atlas* in Tridib's room, plays a pivotal role

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in encapsulating Amitav Ghosh's intended theme of "out of placeness" (Bauman 1988: 225). It can be observed that Tridib orchestrates a formulaic escalation of the narrator's newly developed fascination with the beyond-border places like Madrid, Cuzco, Cairo, Addis Ababa, Algeirs and Brisbane etc. so that the latter becomes a slavish associate in his weird, imaginative adventures. Tridib's insatiate imaginary craving for places beyond the border is an expression of his irresistible subconscious longing to transcend boundaries-a desire which he wilfully infuses into the narrator's voyeuristic childhood fantasy thereby transforming him into a co-practitioner in his relentless imaginative ventures. It is discernible that the *Bartholomew Atlas* is a flippant, transgressive medium for both these fancying adolescents to surpass the geographical boundaries and imaginatively situate themselves in physically unreachable places—places that are nonetheless eminently reachable on the figuratively de-stratified terrain of the *Atlas*. It can also be noted that the narrator's increasingly intensifying captivation by Tridib's projected images of the "cafes in the plaza Mayor in Madrid," the "crispness of the air in Cuzco," the "printed arch in the mosque of Ibn Tulun," and with the "stones of the Great Pyramid of Cheops" (SL: 22) etc. is an oblique suggestion of Ghosh's clandestine design to predispose his characters to a proliferative global consciousness that will continue to remain his prime thrust throughout the text. The *Bartholomew's Atlas* thus generates what critic Frederick Jameson would term "virtual space," or "hyperspace": these are postmodern spatial buzzwords that conflate real and imaginary spaces to create a flowing spatial field that retains the capability to disrupt and transgress its own confinement.[1]

It is interesting to note that the narrator's beyond-boundary consciousness is not only associated with the radical and transformational idea of global space, but also with people, particularly those showcasing a wide variance of activities and involvements that in D. E. Johnson and S. Michelson's representational postmodern idiom "trouble the place of the border" (1997: 31). The narrator's incognito imaginary proximity with Mrs Price's son Nick (with whom he does not have any previous acquaintance) is worth considering in this context. We see that the narrator quixotically positions himself beside Nick on a symbolic mirror, on which the latter grows as his substitutive or accompanying "double," in a scenario where Nick is attributed a surfeit of eerie and phantasmal epithets, including a "spectral presence" and a "ghostly presence" with "no features" and "no form" (SL: 55). Thus, the symbolic mirror, that can create preposterous imaginary proximities between distant and incongruous characters, generates an illusory fluid field where space vanishes "in the heat of the postmodern world" (Valins 2003: 160), to borrow a fashionable phrase from critic O. Valins.

The introduction of Mrs Price's father Lionel Tresawsen along with the information relating to his enormous traveling ventures across the globe further substantiates Amitav Ghosh's idiosyncratic predilection for the creation of a boundary-defying cosmopolitan cartography. A man born in a small Southern Cornwall village, Mabe, Tresawsen travels "all around the world" (SL: 56) including far-off places like Fiji, Bolivia, the Guinea coast, Ceylon, Calcutta, etc. An imaginary line connecting these places on the map would show that Lionel Tresawsen's Odysseus-like travelling itinerary creates an inclusive cartographic lining that transgresses, trespasses and violates the limiting confinements proposed by the traditionally constricted topography of different nation states. A. N. Kaul very rightly says: "Crossing of frontiers-especially those of nationality, culture and language-has increased the world over, including India. Of this tendency *The Shadow Lines* is an extreme example" (1988: 299).

Further, Nick's desire "to travel around the world like [his grandfather] Lionel Tresawsen" and "to live in faraway places halfway around the globe, to walk through the streets of La Paz and Cairo" (SL: 57) extensively corroborates to many of the telling instances cited beforehand in support of Amitav Ghosh's decisive agenda to conceptually dismantle spatial boundaries and frontiers. The narrator's veiled keenness on Nick-which he has already expressed beforehand through his eager inception of Nick's image as some kind of his invisibly accompanying double-a spectral and ghostly presence mysteriously lurking around and growing in his vicinity-reaches its anticipated maxims when he discovers in Nick a "kindred spirit" (SL: 57), yet undiscovered amongst his friends. Similar feelings capture the narrator's buoyant, boundary-defying consciousness when he, while "looking up at the smoggy night sky above Gole Park," wanders "how the stars looked in London" (SL: 57). In this scenario, he nurtures a clandestine desire for a subliminal substitution of Gole Park for London through a secretive erasure of physical distances between these two places far apart. We also learn that the obvious reason behind the narrator's proliferating fascination with Nick is firmly grounded in his keen and self-conscious identification

[1] Frederick Jameson, in his article "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" defines "postmodern hyperspace" as the "latest mutation in space" which helps the human body to transcend its own physical confinement and locate itself "perceptually and cognitively" in the "mappable external world" (83). The Bartholomew's Atlas in *The Shadow Lines* does create a hyperspace where both Tridib and the narrator are able to transcend the spatial confinements of their respective bodies and situate themselves, fancifully though, in the actually unreachable places which nonetheless are very reachable in this hyperspace.

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with the latter's willful desire to be a global itinerant-a desire which he, of course, had inherited from his grandfather Lionel Tresawsen's amaranthine globe-trotting spirit and credentials.

Amitav Ghosh's frequent and prescient presentation of people (whether in a photograph or in a residential apartment) needs to be examined. It seems that it is nothing but a endevour on the writer's part to showcase a few representational characters of transnational space who either possess an extensive variety of national identities with widely differing professional, ideological, and political affiliations, or are people involved in a kaleidoscopic range of cross-border activities, such that the assortment leads to a "postmodern diffusion of heterogeneous orientations" (Paulston & Liebman 1994: 215). For instance, the cluster Ghosh presents in the residential apartment at Lymington Road comprises Dan, "a bearded Irish computer scientist," "a girl from Leicester," and "a morose young Ghanian" (SL: 106-107). In this "multi-cultural medley" (Werlen 2005: 56), someone is a Trotskist and Nazist (like Dan); someone is an anti-Nazist (like the Ghanian) and someone is an upper-class Asian Marxist and a Fabian (like Ila), where these characters loaded with their respective ideological comportments try to spread their "influence on another continent," despite their supposed "impotence at home" (SL: 107). It goes without saying that Ghosh's recurrent and purposive use of such clustered assortments of characters at many places in the novel is nothing but an integral part of his overall project of cosmopolitanism. The assortment creates an emblematic mini-cosmopolis where intersecting, intercepting, and interfacing ideological cross-currents not only coexist in a synergetic harmony with their beyond-boundary ethos and implications, but also with their attendant cultural, political and ideological spaces mingled and overlapped into each other through what Elleke Boehmer would emphatically call "trans-societal flows" (2005: 246).

Tridib's politically engaging conversations with Ila at Brick Lane regarding the nagging potential dangers of people living in that place due to persistent German bombing and Ila's unpretentious but bizarre response to the former's comments need further examination in the context of our study. Firstly, we learn that Ila's insistent yearning to flee from India is heavily contingent on her craving for liberation from what she feels to be the oppressive cultural restraints of an orthodox Indian society; and, secondly, we also learn that her desire to liven the face of lurking death in a war-devastated England is premised on her concurrent longing to be a part of history: "We may not achieve much in our little house in Stockwell, but we know that in the future political people everywhere will look to us-in Nigeria, India, Malayasia, wherever" (SL: 115). In her unbounded excitement to achieve a timeless and global standing for herself as a part of the significant history of her times, Ila willfully reasserts her incorrigible stubbornness-which of course she has dauntlessly flaunted many times beforehand-to diffuse into the global space rather than being fruitlessly glued to the restricted sociopolitical and cultural milieu of her home country. Ila, through her bold and belligerent free ride into global space, acts as a "line of flight"[2] (to use Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor) to deterritorialize the locally restricted socio-political and cultural space which in the words of Keith Woodward and John Paul Jones III is an "institutionalized apparatus of capture" (2005: 237).

We find more textual evidence of Ila's obtrusive display of cosmopolitanism through her snotty denunciation of "local things" like "famines and riots and disasters" in places like Delhi and Calcutta-things which do not presumably have their transnational and beyond-boundary effects and ramifications-and her simultaneous keen embrace of global events like "revolutions and anti-fascist wars," which would set "a political example to the world" (SL: 115). Her passionate longing for being part of a global thing-that will expectedly have its permanent and inerasable imprint in the world's history-makes the narrator feel that she is "immeasurably distant" compared to his life lived "in the silence of voiceless events in a backward world" (SL: 115).Through what looks like a carefully drawn contrast between local and global events and through Ila's willful rejection of the former along with her revolutionary flight into the latter, Amitav Ghosh showcases how his representational cosmopolitan characters like Ila are "spatially disoriented" (Francese 1997: 3).

Tridib's amusing recollections of his enchanting experiences while writing letters to May showcase his premeditated and imagined contraction of space. In what appears to be an outlandish, imaginative adventure on his part, Tridib, while writing letters to May and Ila respectively, creates phantasmagoric visions of May as well as of Lymington Road and Hampstead (the spatial substitutions for Ila) right before him: his frenzied recreations of distant places and people serve the symbolic purpose of reduction of space and the compression of distances. Meenakshi Mukherjeee aptly observes that "Distance in *The Shadow Lines* is […] perceived as a challenge to be overcome through the

[2] Deleuze and Guattari have introduced the concept of "lines of flight" in their introductory chapter on "rhizome" in their collaborative book *A Thousand Plateaus*. A rhizome, they argue, is a representative postmodern structure that is fluid and is subject to continual ruptures, breakages and corresponding reconstitutions. The ruptures and breakages are effectuated by the "lines of flight" which are lines that breach the structure along its boundary and flee across it thereby disenabling the former from achieving stability. Ila continually breaks and violates the moral, ethical and cultural codes of the Indian nation by rupturing its restricted territory and flees abroad adopting western ways of life. She acts as a "line of flight" that ruptures the restrictive Indian cultural domains.

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use of imagination and desire until space gets dissolved" (1988: 256). Even through Tridib's meticulous descriptions of the passionately amorous encounter between a man and a woman in the pitted ruins of a German-bomb-devastated Lymington Road-an encounter whose actual occurrence cannot be factually ascertained because of Tridib's unclear and fluctuating memory-he craves for a transnational and liberated neutral space bereft of unwarranted national, cultural and religious bearings: "He wanted them to meet far from their friends and relatives in a place without a past, without history, free, really free, two people coming together with the utter freedom of strangers" (SL: 159). Notably, the kind of neutral and vacuum-space devoid of any undesirable national and cultural imprint that Ghosh associates with this place is sufficiently akin to Deleuze and Guattari'snotion of "smooth space" which is open, sprawling and non-striated as opposed to the striated space which is closed, stratified and territorialized.[3]

One can also examine the episode of the narrator's fanciful but visionary recreation of an illusory spatio-temporal matrix at the cellar of Mrs Price's abode in Lymington Road where he forms a whimsically fabricated assortment of characters not only from across divergent nations and continents, but also from separate and unconnected temporal spheres. He assorts the ghosts "nine-year-old Tridib," of "eight-year-old Ila" and of course, of Snipe and the narrator himself into a conglomerate, picturesque canvas where not only the disembodied individuals, but also the distant geographical spaces like Lymington Road and Raibazar coalesce, mingle and overlap in what appears to be an improbable spatio-temporal mix-up: "They were all around me, we were together at last, not ghosts at all: the ghostliness was merely the absence of time and distance-for that is what a ghost is, a presence displaced in time" (SL: 200). The dissolution of temporal and spatial coordinates, according to Meenakshi Mukherjee, is the crux of the novel as she writes: "One of the many intricate patterns that weaves the novel together is the coalescing of time and space in a seamless continuity, memory endowing remembered places with solidity, and imagination the recounted ones" (1988: 256-7). We must understand that in this seamless spatial continuity, space achieves an abounding postmodern fluidity and does not remain stagnant and restricted as Jack Richardson emphatically comments: "Yet, it must also be understood that spaces within which one sees are no more static than the subjects or objects that exist within space; in other words, space itself is a fluid construction" (2006: 63). It is also discernible that the imaginary spatio-temporal matrix that the narrator creates here is amply evocative of the Foucauldian notion of "heterotopia"[4] where a particular space creates heterotopic congregations and overlappings of diversified spaces and multiple times.

III. Coming Home

The second part, "Coming Home," shifts the focus from the writer's wishful delineations of an overt cosmopolitanism to that of the tangled socio-cultural and historical problematic of the Indian subcontinent; nonetheless, the narrative never disassociates itself from the potentially irresolvable questions of space and spatiality. Here the writer, despite his keen investigation into the complex historicity of the subcontinent, highlights the volatility of each divided nation's respective boundaries to hold them as cloistered, self-sufficient containers of different realities. The story's clumsy opening-up, which is both progressive and retrogressive, carries two sets of views; one, to envision India as an undivided and continuous space (one of its chief proponents is the narrator's great-grandfather); and two, to see India, Pakistan and Bangladesh as separate, sovereign nation states (its proponent, of course, is the narrator's grandmother). The latter however receives considerable amounts of subversions at many crucial occasions in the novel, one of which certainly is the unnamed narrator's increasing understanding of the cultural indivisibility of the subcontinent. The narrator's juvenile, obstinate and pre-suppositious attribution of a different reality to the other side of the border nevertheless receives enough corrective reinforcements with his expositional stepping in into adulthood. He rids himself of his falsified, juvenile fantasies and declares with a visible sense of disillusionment: "I was a child, and like all the children around me, I grew up believing in the truth of the precepts that were available to me: I believed in the reality of space; I believed that distance separates, that it is a corporeal substance; I believed in the reality of

[3] Deleuze and Guattari introduce the notion of "smooth space" and "striated space" in their collaborative philosophical treatise *A Thousand Plateaus*. Smooth space, according to them, is nomadic, i.e., it does not have any specific territorial, cultural and national orientation whereas, striated space is sedentary, i.e., it is nationally, territorially and culturally circumscribed. In this light, one can discern that the pitted ruins of the German bomb-devastated Lymington Road is actually a "smooth space" for being devoid of specific national, cultural and spatial associations.

[4] Michel Foucault in his excellent article "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias" differentiates between utopia and heterotopia in a scenario where the former represents a unified and singular spatio-temporal field whereas the latter represents a social field that is spatially and temporally heterogeneous and diversified. According to Foucault: "The heterotopia has the power of juxtaposing in a single real place different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other. […] Heterotopias are linked for the most part to bits and pieces of time, i.e. they open up through what we might define as a pure symmetry of heterochronisms" (1997: 334).

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nations and borders; I believed that across the border there existed another reality" (SL: 241).

One must also look at the way the narrator links two supposedly incongruous incidents: one his "nightmare bus ride back from school" and two "the events that befell Tridib and others in Dhaka" (SL: 241). The connection indicates his ingenious recognition of the religio-sentimental inseparability of the subcontinent's inconsequentially divided cultural domains. Through the effectual instauration of the nightmarish bus-ride episode, which, of course, is the immediate and direct fall-out of the epicentric "Mui-Mubarak incident," the narrator reflects on the very affective nature of the sub-continental citizenry's existence, where a violent incident can percolate from one country to another, despite territorial blockages formed by their inflexible boundaries. This is further through the narrator's metaphoric representation of the divided nations and their people as nothing but mutually reflective mirror images of each other: "one is caught up in a war between oneself and one's image in the mirror" (SL: 225). The narrator's crafty and covert delineation of the divided nations and their divided people through his ingeniously conceived self-reflexive mirror-image-an image which makes a significant reappearance after its many recurrent and efficacious use in quite a few other occasions inside the text-correctly epitomizes the undeniable crux of the novel. Suvir Kaul aptly comments: "What the narrator learns is that the separatist political logic of the nation state cannot *enforce* cultural difference, that some "other thing" will always connect Calcutta to Dhaka, Bengali to Bengali, Indian to Pakistani, an image in a vast mirror" (1988: 281).

Tha'mma is one important character in the novel who shares some of the narrator's one time juvenile fantasy of a unified nationhood with fixed and immovable boundaries. Her excruciatingly sentimental harangue over her overt rejection of Ila's belongingness to England testifies to her firm and rigid notions about nation and its territory:

> She doesn't belong there. It took those people a long time to build that country; hundreds of years, years and years of war and bloodshed. Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood: with their brother's blood and their father's blood and their son's blood. They know they're a nation because they've drawn their borders with blood. Hasn't Maya told you how regimental flags hang in all their cathedrals and how all their churches are lined with memorials to men who died in wars, all around the world? War is their religion. That is what it takes to make a country. Once that happens people forget they were born this or that, Muslim or Hindu, Bengali or Punjabi: They become a family born of the same pool of blood. That is what you have to achieve for India, don't you see? (SL: 85-6)

Tha'mma's conversation with her son, which takes a humorously dialectic form of a mini-discourse on space and spatiality, wavers between her irresistible longing for seeing territorial demarcations between nations and her son's forceful affirmation of its virtual impossibility. In response to her son's question that whether "the border is a long, black line with a green on one side and scarlet on the other," Tha'mma answers by saying that she wants "to see at least trenches […] or soldiers, or […] even just barren strips of land" along the border to which her son responds again by saying: "No, you won't be able to see anything except clouds and perhaps, if you are lucky, some green fields" (SL:167). Thus, Tha'mma's separatist sentiment revealed through her rigid reliance on "the unity of nationhood and territory" (SL: 86) and through her utter desperation to see differences along the borders ends up with the conclusion that "a border place no longer exists" (Hardt & Negri 2001:183). Tha'mma is visibly disappointed as she says:

> But if there aren't trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then? And if there is no difference, both sides will be the same; it will be just like it used to before, when we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us. What was it all for then-partition and all the killing and everything-if there isn't something in between? (SL: 167).

In an immediate corroborative response to her utter and vociferously expressed sense of disappointment, her son introduces the peculiarly elusive and mercurial nature of the borderline by stating that she would not be able to trace a Himalaya-like barrier along the border, as it starts right from the moment she steps into the airport. Her son's statement suggestively foregrounds the imaginative construction of the border while simultaneously impugning its actual, palpable presence which of course disturbingly thwarts Tha'mma's inherent and strong predilection for keeping things "neat and in place" (SL: 165). Borders that define a nation territorially are nothing but imaginary constructions; as Homi Bhaba states: "Nations, like narratives […] fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye" (1990: 1). Tha'mma's son's consideration of the border as a mental construct rather than as a substantive and sublimated presence brings to mind Deleuze and Guattari's maverick cartographic metaphor "map without tracing."[5] Amitav Ghosh's eclectic mapping of the subcontinent as a muddled and vaporous cartographic field makes the border a sham, a subterfuge and the adjacent lands corollaries of an

[5] Deleuze and Guattari introduce their famous concept of "map without tracing" while explaining the indeterminate and fluctuating structural features of a rhizome. A rhizome, they say, is a "map without tracing" since a tracing always threatens the former with an enforceable territoriality. In this way, the map continues to remain an open entity without any fear of being territorialized. In a similar vein, the subcontinent's cartography, in Ghosh's scheme of things, escapes rigid territorial formations and remains a "map without tracing."

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indistinctively flowing spatial field. Her son's startling comments push Tha'mma into an entangling paradox in terms of her knowledge, understanding, and belief of space, where she is innocuously caught in the interstices between her rigid, non-compromising notions of nationalism-induced territorial space on the one hand, and her son's dissident and disquieting rejection of the same on the other. Timothy Brenan, while explaining the volatile and arbitrary nature of nationhood very fittingly quotes a Peruvian publicist and organizer Jose Carlos Mariategui as: "The nation […] is an abstraction, an allegory, a myth that does not correspond to a reality that can be scientifically defined (Brennan 1990: 49). Anshuman Mondal states in a similar context that Amitav Ghosh rejects in *The Shadow Lines* the idea of a nation as an inclusive geographical territory:

> A nation therefore, much more than a portion of earth surrounded by borders that contain within them a 'people' to whom the nation belongs. It is a mental construct […]. Nations are *both* "real" and 'imaginary', material and immaterial. It is for this reason that Ghosh suggests that the borders that separate them are "shadow lines." (1988: 88)

Truly, as Ernest Renan points out, a nation cannot be determined by "the shape of the earth" (1990: 19).

Tha'mma's perennial urge to see a fixed, territorial boundary for her nation and her son's gentle but humorous ridicule of her ideas can be understood in the light of Deleuze & Guattari-proposed processes of "reterritorialization" and "deterritorialization" that perhaps most effectively articulate the novel's tangled cultural scenario. One can observe that Tha'mma's attempt to reterritorialize the disintegrating social, political and cultural landscape of her nation confronts its own subversion through her son's acknowledgement of the former's already accomplished deterritorialization.[6]

Contrary to Tha'mma's obsessive pre-occupation with an ideational predilection for spatial fixities, Jethamoshai's blatant refusal to accept India as a separate nation re-establishes the volatility and arbitrariness of dividing lines in the subcontinent. The latter's outright rejection of Tha'mma's plea to come to India for his safety testifies to his absolute cognizance of the above fact:

> I know everything, I understand everything. Once you start moving you never stop. That is what I told my sons when they took the trains. I said: I don't believe in India-Shindia. It's all very well, you are going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here, and I will die here. (SL: 237)

Tha'amma's self-proclaimed declaration of radical and aggressive nationalism is a proven failure and falls in line with Benedict Anderson's calling of the nation as nothing more than an "imagined […] community" (1983: 48) bereft of specific territorial delimitations. Tha'mma's desire to be an authoritarian surveyor of the "spatial panopticon"[7] (Foucault 1965: 92) of her nation-which of course is predicated upon her ignorant or self-conscious denial of the complicated cultural history of this part of the world-receives a destabilizing abrogation in the subtly humorous counter-argument provided by the narrator and his father. What Amitav Ghosh looks like proposing here is that "nationalism" is something that is to be understood not so much in terms of Tha'mma's present, radical political ideology which is essentialist and self-limiting, but rather much in terms of the subcontinent's larger and complicated cultural system that lies beyond her limited understanding of a nation's spatio-temporal configuration. In the context of the failed territorial definition of nationalism, Anderson redefines the same as: "What I am proposing is that Nationalism has to be understood, by aligning it not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which-as well as against which-it came into being." (1983: 12)

The famous or infamous "Mu-i-Mubarak incident" is a massive demonstrator of the virtual non-existence of the dividing lines between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The incident, along with its sudden and eruptive occurrence in India, acts an epicenter of resultantly spreading out politico-religious turmoil in Pakistan and Bangladesh. The spillover transnational and trans-spatial impacts, ramifications and repercussions of the event can be testified through correspondingly flaring-up events that include the observance of 31 December as a "Black Day" in

[6] "Deterritorialization" and "reterritorialization" are terms typically introduced by Deleuze and Guattari to denote the respective processes of fragmentation and reconstitution occurring to a rhizome such that it never achieves a structural stability. *The Shadow Lines* is replete with such occurrences happening to the nation's socio-political and cultural scenario. It reflects through Tha'mma's desire to reterritorialize Indian nationality and culture whereas her son and Jethamoshi's uncle are well aware of the former's already accomplished deterritorialization. For, according to Deleuze and Guattari: "Deterritorialization […] is always relative, and has reterritorialization as its flipside or complement […] deterritorialization […] always occurs in relation to a complementary reterritorialization" (60).

[7] Foucault borrows the idea of "panopticon" from eighteenth-century English philosopher Jeremy Bentham. A panoptical design is one which consists of a circular structure with an "inspection house" at its centre, from which the manager or staff of the institution is able to watch the inmates, who are stationed around the perimeter. Tha'mma imagines the Indian nation as some kind of an inclusive "panopticon-space" confined within definitive territorial limits, which she can visualize through her imaginative eyes.

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Karach the hoaxed poisoning of the water tanks in Calcutta by Muslims, the subsequent mob-uprising and curfew and finally, the riot in Khulna district in Dhaka. In addition, the narrator, while investigating Khulna and Tridib's death in this riot, implicatively calls the investigation "a voyage into the land outside space": "It was thus, sitting in the air-conditioned calm of an exclusive library, that I began on my strangest journey: a voyage into a land outside space, an expanse without distances; a land of looking glass events" (SL: 247). It is fairly discernible that Tridib's death brings us abruptly face to face with the illusory notions of space and territory created by a counterfeit sense of nationalism. The illusoriness of space finds another metaphoric substantiation through the narrator's preposterous undertaking of a retrospective backward journey into a vast expanse that runs beyond space and time. Thus, the theft of Prophet Mohammad's sacred relic, the ensuing violence, and Tridib's tragic death taken together are a combinatorial matrix of events that demystify the idea of boundaries, which, according to Edward Soja, are nothing but "life's linear regulators" (2005: 33).

The fascinating cartographic experiment performed by the narrator towards the last part of the text adds further corroborative insights to our point. The narrator's gripping analytical reading of the map reveals Khulna's inexplicable unconcern with events happening in adjacent foreign countries and its concomitant strange concern with the incident in Srinagar despite its farness from Khulna. The incident underscores the ethnic and cultural inseparability of the subcontinent, in spite of its fervidly divided topography. The narrator, at the end of his exegetic cartographic venture, abruptly discovers the irony that in this supposed act of partition, the nations have indeed paradoxically turned into each other's replica on the mirror:

> They have drawn their borders […] hoping perhaps that once they have etched their borders upon the map, the two bits of land would sail away from each other like shifting tectonic plates of the prehistoric Gondwanaland. What they felt, I wondered, when they discovered that they had created not a separation, but a yet undiscovered irony […] the simple fact that there had never been a moment in the four-thousand-year-old history of that map, when the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines-so closely that I, in Calcutta, had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka; a moment when each city was the inverted image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free-our looking-glass border. (SL: 257)

In the final analysis, it can be ascertained that though the central storyline predominantly revolves around the times before and after partition, the story, at another level, continually engages itself with the postmodern suspension of the "normal categories of time and space" (Jencks 1984: 124). Through his characteristic dissolution of boundaries-a notion that runs amok through the text as a major thematic undercurrent-Ghosh creates an overabundance of transnational and cosmopolitan space that is perplexingly slippery and elusive towards specific national and territorial fixations. The text, through its symptomatic disavowal of traditional notions like fixed topographical divisions and boundaries, leads us into an uncanny postmodern world where the idea of confined national space is readily substituted by an invading, sprawling, open and liberated global space.

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