The Ethics of Representation in the Fiction

of Amitav Ghosh

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Acknowledgements

"Something for you here," said my supervisor-to-be, Professor John Skinner, twelve years ago when handing me his copy of *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh. I was at the time completing my advanced studies in the Department of English at the University of Turku and had visited him shortly before to ask if he had any ideas for my Pro Gradu thesis. I am still in the department of English at the University of Turku. And I am still mulling over novels by Amitav Ghosh. John did not get to see how prolonged a process he had helped to set in motion. Nevertheless, I am grateful to him for launching me into this orbit and for staying as my satellite for eight years. To anyone inclined towards reading this volume, I speak John's ominous words: Something for you here...

The novels of Ghosh have followed me through a Pro Gradu thesis, a Licentiate thesis, periods as assistant and lecturer, and terms as a researcher in two Academy of Finland projects. They have accompanied me to a stint as a visiting researcher in the University of Aarhus, Denmark. They have also seen me through one marriage and witnessed the miraculous appearance of my two children. And now, finally, they have seen me squeeze them into a Doctoral thesis.

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While the first project I was involved in (*Fragments of the Past: History, Fiction and Identity in the New English Literatures*, 2004-2007) was led by John, the second one, the one that enabled the completion of this dissertation (*Silence as Voice*: *Reempowering the Disempowered in Contemporary English Literatures*, 2008-2011) is led by Lydia Kokkola, who became my supervisor in 2007. I owe a great deal to her flexible mind and to her astounding ability to discern traces of reason amidst nearly incomprehensible babble.

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Amitav Ghosh has kindly given me permission to publish excerpts from his novels and other works. The permission was granted by private communication on 31 March 2011.

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I. Introduction

The sensitivity of Amitav Ghosh towards issues of political importance, as well as of cultural significance, is apparent among other things in his reaction to the information that his fifth novel, *The Glass Palace* (2000), had been nominated for the 2001 Commonwealth Writers' Prize. This had happened without his knowledge, and Ghosh promptly withdrew the novel from the competition on the grounds that it linked an area of contemporary writing to realities of "a disputed aspect of the past" instead of the realities of the present day (Ghosh 2002a, 35). Further, he saw that 'the Commonwealth' was not an appropriate attribute for a cultural and literary group that included many other languages and realities beside those represented by the English language. To clarify this point, he has compared 'the Commonwealth' to another, on the face of it rather hilarious, attribute of epistemic violence, which is no longer in use:

> During the Second World War, the Japanese called their empire in Southeast Asia - after this incredibly damaging and violent campaign in Southeast Asia - they called this entire region 'The Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere', as I'm sure you're aware. Now, if someone came to me and said would you accept 'The Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere Prize' would I accept? Of course I wouldn't! Why should I accept something, which is just a euphemism for some incredible violence that was done to the world that is now seeking to whitewash itself? (Ghosh in Sankaran 2005)

Ghosh's withdrawal from the competition for the Commonwealth prize was widely noticed. As the attention accumulated, Ghosh ended up contacting many of the writers that had previously won the prize, assuring them that he had been making a philosophical point worth discussion, not trying to criticise them for accepting the prize.

As John C. Hawley observes in his monograph on Ghosh (2005), and as I have pointed out in the context of the

representation of violence in the writing of Ghosh (Huttunen 2008a & section III.3. of this dissertation), Ghosh seems to be intent on moving his readers beyond the "aesthetic of indifference" in his narrative representations. One of the reasons why he is considered such an important writer is the fact that his narratives offer a sensitive and multifaceted view on the contemporary problems of the worlds he writes about. When asked to what extent his background as a historian, journalist and an anthropologist has affected his work and whether his novels are entirely a work of fiction, he answered as follows:

> For me, the value of the novel, as a form, is that it is able to incorporate elements of every aspect of life - history, natural history, rhetoric, politics, beliefs, religion, family, love, sexuality. As I see it, the novel is a meta-form that transcends the boundaries that circumscribe other kinds of writing, rendering meaningless the usual workaday distinctions between historian, journalist, anthropologist, etc. (Ghosh in Caswell 2004).

This highlights one of the most characteristic features of his writing: its generic heterogeneity, or discursive inventiveness, which enables him to retain sensitivity to various kinds of discourses, voices and agents, while narrating into existence unforeseen connections between them.

Amitav Ghosh was born in Calcutta in 1956. He is the son of a diplomat and former Lieutenant Colonel in the Indian army and a housewife. As a consequence of his father changing postings, he grew up in East Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Iran and India. His family originates from eastern Bengal and migrated to Calcutta before the Partition in 1947. Ghosh went to the Doon School in Dehra Dun and received a BA in History from St. Stephen's College, Delhi University in 1976. In 1978 he received an MA in Sociology from Delhi University. His doctorate, completed in 1982 at Oxford University, is in Social Anthropology. As part of his degree, he went to Tunisia to learn Arabic in 1979 and, in 1980, he conducted field work in Egypt for his doctorate. After completing his doctorate, Ghosh worked as a

journalist for *The Indian Express* in Delhi. Since then, he has acted as visiting fellow and professor in several universities around the world, while creating a bulk of work, including seven major novels and a large amount of journalism and cultural-political commentary in the form of articles and essays.

The novels and other writing by Ghosh have been granted several major awards and have been nominated or short-listed for even more. He is regarded as one of the most important of the Indian writers in English of the post-Rushdie generations, and in the Bengali tradition within this larger category. His reputation is mainly due to the ambivalent nature of his fiction as both intellectually important and topical, whilst remaining immensely readable for the wider public. He has built a strong profile both as an academic and as a writer of journalism, cultural commentary and fiction. His novels, then, are blockbusters in America and on the Subcontinent, while being eagerly studied by the academia of both continents. The position of Ghosh among the reading public in Britain has not been as strong as within the academia there, but this is likely to change since his latest novel, *Sea of Poppies* (2008), was short-listed for the Man Booker Prize. This combination of academic viability and popular accessibility is rare and a very important one. It enables Ghosh to sensitively narrate politically and philosophically topical themes for all to read, without appearing to be pedantic or promulgating, and without appearing to endorse any of the views he voices.

Broadly speaking, the themes examined by Ghosh both in his novels and in his essays and journalism include the following: the impact of colonial knowledge systems and discourses on formerly colonized people/s, societies and discourses; the ambivalent relationship of the same societies to modernity at large; the restoring of agency and voice to people traditionally regarded as the muted objects of 'grand,' or colonial, narratives; the (re)construction of histories of the same people and the emphasizing of the heterogeneous nature of various discursive and other constellations. Ghosh has approached these themes in generically very inventive and heterogeneous novels, subversively manipulating literary genres stemming from

Western modernity to suit his goal of dismantling discursive constructions that the same modernity stands on.

Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan examines Ghosh's writing in his volume, *Theory in an Uneven World* (2003). I will draw on Radhakrishnan's work on several occasions later, as it comes close to my own views on how theory and literary criticism should be written – especially in terms of ethics. In the preface to his book, Radhakrishnan explicates his idea of theory as follows:

> Theory here follows a deeply ethical impulse. Whereas merely historico-political blueprints of progress, development, and techno-globalization can afford to characterize "unevenness" as the hapless shibboleth of "losers," or justify it as an inevitable result of a world-historical and hence unipolar capitalism, an ethically inspired and motivated theory dares to envision co-operations and solidarities across the divide and the asymmetry. (2003, vi-vii)

This dissertation focuses on Amitav Ghosh's narrative strategies for the ethical representation of co-operation and solidarity across myriad discursive divides and asymmetries in various circumstances. The primary purposes of this dissertation are to clarify how these representational strategies are constructed and how they function. This is done in the hope that such an ethically informed approach to narrative representation might alleviate the problems ensuing from the construction of discursive totalities and power relationships that help to maintain barriers between people/s from different backgrounds.

As will become evident in the articles in this dissertation, the narratives by Ghosh construct epistemologies that transform the poststructuralist idea of language and discourse as power. They constitute a fictional counterpart to what the ethnographer, George Marcus, describes as an ethical, rather than power-related, approach to cultural phenomena (1998, 57-78). Marcus maintains that this kind of approach, though cognizant of discourse as power, "is not built explicitly around the trope of power, but rather of ethics, that is, the complex moral

relationship of the observer to the observed" (1998, 75). Ghosh's novels transform the relationship between self and the other, or observer and observed, into a two-directional act of knowing. The object of enquiry appears as an active agent who is in a relationship with the observer, instead of being a passive object of scrutiny. Further, the move away from "structural appropriations of discourse formations" to exposing "the quality of voices by means of meta-linguistic categories (such as narrative, trope, etc.)" (Marcus 1998, 66) resembles Ghosh's foregrounding of oral stories that are told by his characters.

In addition to examining the representational strategies used to create connections between and within multicultural and multilingual societies and cultures, this dissertation approaches the issues of identity, agency, voice, silence and discursive appropriation in the fiction of Ghosh from an ethical viewpoint. In general, the articles in section IV are based on the philosophical investigations of Emmanuel Levinas. In Levinas's view, the other eludes the cognitive powers of the knowing subject. In other words, the other exists outside the ontology of traditional Western philosophy, which conceives of all being as objects that can be internalized by consciousness or grasped through an adequate representation. The self can only 'know' things by projecting on them through language what it already contains in itself. Knowledge, then, is equal to linguistic appropriation of the object of knowing. Consequently, the other cannot strictly speaking be described in language, but is ultimately unreachable (Levinas 1969). For an introduction on the adaption of Levinas's thinking to novels by Ghosh, see III.1.2.

The philosophical ideas of Levinas have their inspiration in the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger on the one hand, and on the religious traditions of Judaism on the other. During the 1930s and 1940s, his work mainly concentrated on the phenomenological concepts of the two aforementioned philosophers, but during the 1950s Levinas rejected phenomenology and turned to writings in the Jewish tradition as the inspiration for his delineation of the relationship between the self and the other. He rejected the ontological basis of the Western philosophy, comparing its way of conceiving of things

outside the self to the journeys of Ulysses: the Western self, as Ulysses, journeys far into the strange world outside at considerable risk, but eventually always returns back home, i.e. back to the self, which is the starting point for the realization of things outside. Against this way of conceiving of the self as both the point of departure and goal of every enterprise, he posits the journey of Abraham, who left for good towards the unknown Promised Land, never to return. Accordingly, Levinas is often seen as standing between two traditions stemming from the cultures of the Greeks and the Jews—Hellenistic and Judaistic.

Levinas's method of concentrating on the way the self constructs itself in relationship to the other, and the way in which language and discourse distort the other resonate strongly with literatures that seek to represent the minorities and 'silenced' groups of the world. Therefore, the ideas of Levinas provide fertile ground for literary criticism dedicated to the examination of literatures emanating from conditions of discursive oppression and obfuscation, like for instance postcolonial studies, ethnic-minority studies, queer studies, or feminist studies. Literature and criticism concentrating on the representation/examination of multicultural societies brought about by the neo-colonial circumstances created by movements of global capital and people/s can also benefit from Levinas's thinking. And, in this particular instance, Levinas's thinking can in my opinion be successfully used to explicate how Amitav Ghosh dismantles and re-constructs the discourses rising from Western eras of Enlightenment, colonialism, modernism and postmodernism. The deconstruction of discursive totalities that are built on binary constructions is at the heart of both Levinas's and Ghosh's project towards the transcending of power-related discursivity.

At this point, it is useful to briefly list certain elementary aspects of Levinas's philosophy of the other and the ethical. These aspects serve as the constitutive basis for his philosophy as a whole. First, Levinas's ethics is non-foundational. It does not endeavour to establish a secular, objective and universal morality on comfortable rational foundations. This aspect of his thinking is directed against the ontological foundation of the mainstream Western philosophy. Second, Levinas's philosophy does not set

forth cognition as the measure for everything that comes into contact with the self. Ethics is not an issue of knowledge: it does not lean on any categories, codes or principles which would exist prior to the ethical relation, in other words prior to the immediate encounter with that which lies outside us. Third, Levinas's ethics is non-ontological: it comprises an endeavour to think 'otherwise than being', to quote the title of his second major work ([1974] 1998). The ethical relation is not founded on static essences, identities or wholes that can be found just waiting there outside the self. Fourth, the ethical relation is immediate and singular. It demands responsiveness and responsibility towards what is at hand at any given moment. It thereby calls our attention to the immediate practical present. The self and the other are fluid and their relationship takes on different forms according to the particular circumstances at different moments. And these ethical instances serve to interrupt and inform essentialized linguistic totalities within the domains of the public and the political.

The above tenets do not seem to correlate with what one would customarily connect with the word 'ethics'. Indeed, as Colin Davis has stated in his introduction to Levinas's thinking, it is difficult to see why Levinas is linked with ethics in the first place:

> His work fulfils none of the conditions by which ethical or meta-ethical philosophy might be recognized. He does not intervene in the classic debates between consequentialists and deontologists; he does not answer the Socratic question 'How should one achieve happiness?' or the Kantian 'What ought I do?' Although he refers to Plato, he does not explicitly engage with the work of other fathers of ethics, such as Aristotle, Kant or Hobbes. He does not provide foundations or rules for morality, nor does he discuss virtue, or rights and duties, and he offers no account of the language and logic of ethical inquiry. (1996, 47)

The last item in Davis's list is particularly intriguing from the point of view of literary studies. The study of literature is decidedly about language and representation, which in Levinas's

view cannot reach the ethical dimension of our existence. However, as will become evident in sections III.1.1. and III.1.2., it seems that especially fiction with its polyphonic and flexible representative strategies is a useful forum for referring to things ethical, by way of staging them, or hinting at them, or showing them without subordinating these objects of scrutiny to too much defining and thereby distorting language. Levinas's language in his own writing (especially in *Otherwise than Being*) "maintains an ambiguity, or oscillation, between differing registers of language, that ensures the interruption of ontology" (Critchley 8). In a similar manner, Ghosh's narratives shatter the linguistic totalities of modernity through their differing registers of postructuralism and humanism, maintaining an open-ended ambivalence that both dismantles and re-constructs various totalizing discourses. The writing of Ghosh, I shall argue throughout this study, can be realized as a practical example of the coming together of deconstruction and Levinasian ethics. I hope to show that the aporia, or gap, between the registers he enacts opens up a dimension of alterity or transcendence that carries ethical significance.

Seen against the background of Levinasian ethics Ghosh's narratives imply that in attempting to know the world we simultaneously change it by projecting onto it meanings conveyed by language and narration. In his narratives, the ultimate experience of truth (i.e. the ethical) is often represented by silence, which can never be gained through knowing, i.e. through language. Silence also represents the gap between the world and the words that are used to narrate it. For instance, in the 'official' histories that were written by the colonizer, much remains unvoiced because colonial narration and ideology does not match the reality of the colonies. On another level, those left outside colonial history find it problematic to describe themselves and their realities through a language that is linked to discursive domination through imperial and neoimperial practise. Amitav Ghosh, who writes in English, tries to find ways for narrating the realities of people who are outside Western ideology through the language of this ideology. He aims at the ethical levelling and

subversion of the political and cultural power-relationships carried by language.

Although Ghosh represents the world as socially constructed and creates discursive realities to examine the movements of power, he is also trying to find a way of escaping the realm of discourse controlled by the hegemonic Western mode of knowledge production and its ways of narrating the world. One of the possible ways of circumventing this powerful and deeply rooted 'way of knowing' is to constitute transcendent, ethical realities that cannot be accessed through a specific language and discourse. Therefore, in meeting the other, we should try to remain open and responsive to it, rather than immediately attempting to define it from our own starting points. Alterity, meaning the unknowable and unreachable nature of the other, cannot be attained, but it can, and must, be approached. In Levinas's view, this ethical approaching of the other's alterity is our responsibility. The means by which this can be achieved include the use of a kind of 'imaginative empathy' and reciprocity in the encounter with the other.

Radhakrishan has examined these concerns as they appear in relation to the concepts of imagination and space in Ghosh's second novel, *The Shadow Lines* (1988). These same concerns are relevant in the context of all Ghosh's novels, and his writing in general. Space in Ghosh's narratives is manifested as a many-faceted problematic that brings together time, place (imaginary and real dimensions), location (whether geographical or discursive) and identity (both personal and national/communal/collective). Radhakrishnan has come up with several insights that novels by Ghosh offer concerning this multi-dimensional collective (Radhakrishnan 2003, 27-28). Below I have paraphrased those insights that concentrate on the imagining of spaces and realities as a subversive and interconnecting act (See section II.2.1. for more extensive treatment of space in Ghosh's narration):

- Spaces have to be imagined in order for them to become real

- The process of imagining spaces brings to the fore both the need for fixed spaces and their limitations.
- The transcending of these fixed spaces is globally motivated and locally executed.
- Understanding the reality of any specific space does not require 'inside' information: spaces are "reciprocally ek-static/exotopic" (2003, 27).
- Through global empathy and 'precise imagination' we can understand and experience realities other than our own.
- The imagining of the other's reality based on violence and exoticism has to be distinguished from a dialogic imagination open to reciprocal and equal transcendence.

In Radhakrishnan's view, these basic insights involving the use of a certain kind of ethical imagination in the envisioning of interhuman and interdiscursive relationships amount to

> a newness in and of the imagination. If only the world could be imagined that way! – new and emergent perceptions of nearness and distance; longdenied and repressed affirmations of solidarities and fellow-heartedness in transgression of dominant relationships and axes of power; new and emergent identifications and recognitions in profound alienation from canonical-dominant mystifications and fixations of identity. (2003, viii)

The above themes inform my own examination of Ghosh's narratives to varying extents. What is expressed in packed language by Radhakrishnan above, shall unfold during the course of this dissertation as characteristic of Ghosh's ethically aware narrative representation, in which precise imagination has an essential role.

Another examination of Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* highlighting the use of precise imagination comes from Shameem Black (2006). She connects the use of imagination with a certain kind of cosmopolitanism, understanding the latter as "the imaginative and ethical process of opening the self to the

strangeness of an expanding world" (45). This particular brand of imaginative and ethical cosmopolitanism "offers a specific way of inhabiting the transnational and transcultural currents of globalization" (45). Black outlines "the wonderful paradox of imagining precisely" in Ghosh as a special mode of comprehension:

> Conceptualizing others requires the leap beyond positivism that imagination connotes, but to offer more than a self-serving fantasy of cultural difference, this practise of imagination demands a respect for the specificity and uniqueness of other lives. (2006, 54)

Black foregrounds this "rooted cosmopolitanism" as a way of simultaneously inhabiting the world and the home, the self and the other. This way of being in the contemporary world of globalization would be based on "the desire to actively imagine rather than passively accept one's world" (2006, 50).

As can be deduced from the above, the concept of imagination has been given a central role as the vehicle for the ethical transcending of monolithic discursive constructions in the new millennium. This is the case especially within the theoretical moorings of what has come to be referred to as the 'ethical turn' in literary studies since the late 1990s (see section III.1.1. for a detailed charting of this phenomenon). In addition to insights provided by Radhakrishnan and Black, Ghosh's adaptation of imagination also resonates with Drucilla Cornell's idea of transcendental imagination. Cornell insists that ethics is inseparable from "the full disruptive power of imagination" (1992, 35). For Cornell, as for Ghosh, I argue, imagination does not signify a moral power of 'deep comprehension' of what is already there as it does when understood through humanism. Rather, imagination represents the power to transcend what is given and to admit and designate the possible. Cornell further sees imagination as enabling "redemptive perspectives" which "displace and estrange the world" and make us "aware that we are in exile" (16). In the core of the dissertation, I shall be concentrating on Ghosh's narrative representation of the ethical

relationship between the self and the other precisely as the displacing and estranging of the familiar and the expected. Here the other is conceived not only as the other human being, but also as another time/space, discourse, narrative technique, knowledge production strategy or literary genre. Nature and animals also function as the others of human beings in Ghosh's novels.

The narratives by Ghosh are primarily about creating connections between various others without depriving any participant of their authentic voice and agency. Ghosh's technique is to present these others (be they individuals, communities or discourses) in a relationship and in contact with one another, while retaining their individual characteristics. The motifs Ghosh uses to explicate and symbolize the nature of these narrative relationships include precise imagination, the mirror-window dyad, photography (image vs. language), the idea of simultaneous discovery/definition, silence vs. discourse and the transcending of language. The way each of these symbols of the relationship to the other functions will be explicated later in the articles.

In the following section II, I shall introduce six novels by Ghosh through problematics evolving around the themes listed above. Although it lies in the background of many of the theories and viewpoints that come through here, the ethical approach is not specifically adopted to the novels before the end of the contextualizing section III. Section IV, the core of this dissertation, which comprises six articles on the introduced six novels, will then stand more ostensibly on the ideas of Levinasian ethics in relation to the representation of the other. Section V after the articles includes an overview on the critical reception of the novels before turning by way of conclusion into the examination of the ways in which the political comes through in Ghosh's narration.

Parts of sections II, III.3. and III.4. are based on five articles I published during the years 2003-2009:

2009. Ethics, language and the writing of Amitav Ghosh. In Borg-Barthet, Stella (ed). *A Sea of Encounters – Essays Towards a*

Postcolonial Commonwealth. Cross/Cultures series (Vol. 117), Amsterdam/NY: Rodopi, 335-348.

2008. Representations of riots in *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh. In Bell, David & Gerald Porter (eds). *Riots in Literature*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 93-107.

2004. Representation of London in *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh. *Literary London: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Representation of London*. 2:1. Available: http://homepages. gold.ac.uk/london-journal/index.html (29 Dec 2010)

2003. Ethics of Multi-Sited Representation in the Fiction of Amitav Ghosh. *The Atlantic Literary Review* 3:4. 164-182.

2003. Narration and Silence in the Works of Amitav Ghosh. *World Literature Written in English* 38:2. 28-43.

And the six articles that form the actual core of this dissertation are:

2011. [forthcoming] Amitav Ghosh's *The Circle of Reason* – dismantling the idea of purity. *The Nordic Journal of English Studies*.

2011. [forthcoming] The ethics of representation in *The Glass Palace* by Amitav Ghosh. In Dwivedi, O. P. & Joel Kuortti (eds). *Changing Nations/Changing Words: The Concept of Nation in the Transnational Era*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, India.

2011. [forthcoming] Language and ethics in *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh. In Sankaran, Chitra (ed). *History, Narrative, Testimony: Essays on Amitav Ghosh's Fictional Narratives*. New York: SUNY Press.

2008. *The Shadow Lines*: The world of experience and the language of meaning. In Prasad, Murari (ed). *Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines: A Critical Companion*. New Delhi: Pencraft International, 208-224.

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2008. *The Calcutta Chromosome* – the ethics of silence and knowledge. In Huttunen, Tuomas, Kaisa Ilmonen, Janne Korkka & Elina Valovirta (eds). *Seeking the Self: Encountering the other: Diasporic Narrative and the Ethics of Representation*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 24-38.

2003. Connections beyond partitions - *In an Antique Land* of Amitav Ghosh. *The Atlantic Literary Review* 4:3. 87-107.

II. The novels

The aim of this section is to introduce the novels that will be examined in later sections. Although I avoid overlapping with other sections as much as possible, regrettably a certain amount of repetition is unavoidable. There is some repetition within the article section (IV) and also between that section and others. In introducing the novels, I shall concentrate on themes that expand on those examined in the articles, while giving the reader a general view of the texts as regards the plot and the characters.

This section then concentrates on themes that most obviously come up in the examined novels, instead of specifically tying these novels to ethical concerns. Consequently, my goal at this point is not so much to bind the novels to an ethically informed theoretical or methodological framework, as to introduce them before delineating the field of ethical study of literature and tying Ghosh's writing into it (sections III.1.1. & III.1.2.). In trying to bring forth the themes and motives peculiar to each novel, I apply a variety of theoretical views that clarify these issues, instead of subordinating them to any one theoretical model. In the articles, on the other hand, my primary concern is not thematical; there I am more interested in the ethically informed techniques used in the depiction of these themes and issues. Some of the subsections here are quite theoretically informed, while others are more descriptive in nature. Combined, they introduce the novels as well as the themes that run through Ghosh's oeuvre. Each sub-section introduces a new aspect of Ghosh's writing, to be found in some form in all his novels.

II.1. *The Circle of Reason*

The first novel by Amitav Ghosh, *The Circle of Reason*, was published in 1986. It attracted some critical attention, including an endorsement from the influential critic and novelist Anthony Burgess. This work could be characterized as an episodic, picaresque novel in three parts (e.g. Mondal 2007, 7). The parts are linked by the protagonist, Alu, who flees the Indian authorities after being falsely accused of terrorist activity, the intelligence officer, Jyoti Das, who is trying to capture him and a book, *The Life of Pasteur*, by René Vallery-Radot. The general motif running through the novel is that of weaving as the method for creating connections by intertwining various discursive threads.

In the first section, Alu lives in the village of Lalpukur with his uncle, Balaram. Balaram is devoted to science, or rather sciences, both mainstream and what could be characterized as marginalized 'pseudo-sciences', like phrenology. His behaviour, accordingly, is both rational and irrational and his bizarre idea of scientific reason finally culminates in a feud with his neighbour, Bhudeb Roy, who stands for straight lines in accordance with the Western ideology of teleology and rational causal relationships instead of acknowledging that reason is circular. The feud takes on a political character in the eyes of the authorities and as a result Alu, who is the sole survivor of the tragic climax of this quarrel, is deemed a political extremist in the eyes of the police. In the second part, following his escape, Alu finds himself in the fictive Gulf emirate of Al-Ghazira, where he joins the multi-lingual, multi-cultural and in every way motley crowd of illegal migrants/immigrants from Africa, Bangladesh, India and other Arab states. He lives in the house of Zindi, a former courtesan, and works as an illegal labourer. He miraculously survives the collapse of a large shopping-mall which he is helping to build. After the accident, Alu embarks on a mock socialist project to form a money-free commune in the Souq, the ancient market area where he and his fellow immigrants are staying. Again, his actions are regarded as hostile by the authorities, and the community is attacked. Alu once again makes a narrow escape

accompanied by Zindi, with Jyoti Das on their heels. The third part is set in the Algerian Sahara. The heart of Jyoti Das is no longer in the chase; he follows Alu and Zindi merely because it is expected of him. Alu, Zindi and Das all end up under the roof of an Indian doctor, Mrs Verma. Events culminate in Alu and Zindi's departure for India and Das abandoning his job and setting off for Europe.

The Circle of Reason has a decidedly loose plot structure, but this is compensated for by an interlocking texture of recurring images and motifs, like for instance weaving and sewing machines, migrating birds, or the biography of Pasteur. The main metaphor of the narrative is weaving, which symbolizes the act of narrating or writing into existence stories and realities:

> So many words, so many things. On a loom a beam's name changes after every inch. Why? Every nail has a name, every twist of rope, every little eyelet, every twig of bamboo on the heddle. A loom is a dictionaryglossarythesaurus. Why? Words serve no purpose; nothing mechanical. No, it is because the weaver, in making cloth, makes words, too, and trespassing on the territory of the poets gives names to things the eye can't see. That is why the loom has given language more words, more metaphor, more idiom than all the world's armies of pen-wielders (*The Circle of Reason* 74)

In another instance, the history of weaving is presented as the counter-history of Western history of scientific and technical development and expansion (*The Circle of Reason* 57-8).

The novel shows how colonial power structures and knowledge production strategies become reproduced and subverted when applied in colonial and post-colonial circumstances. It also features the ways in which subaltern people both escape the grip of the political logic of the modern state and fall prey to it. Further, the narrative brings to the fore the ways in which diasporic and migrant connections escape the same logic. In the end, the novel shows how Reason is made to abandon its hegemonic position in the name of practical

everyday concerns in many-cultured human encounters comprising multiple customs and traditions. This happens through the dismantling of the discourses of modernist binary constructions (reason/religion, science/tradition, and so forth). I shall examine this process of the disintegration of linguistic totalities in the article on the novel (IV.1.)

Although the novel features many cities and villages from India to Africa, places as such have relatively little significance for the sections featuring oral representations, or stories that come through in Ghosh's novels. In one of his essays Ghosh comments on the place-connectedness of the Western novel genre and sets it against such Eastern epics as *The Thousand and One Nights*, which give more value to story-telling than place: "In these ways of storytelling, it is the story that gives places their meaning" (Ghosh 1998b), he states and compares them with Joyce's Dublin or American regionalists like Faulkner, whose works would be inconceivable without their specific locations. It seems that although the novel as a genre always needs a location, in these times of constant and rapid changes of place the story is of equal relevance, or even more important. At least this is so in Ghosh's way of writing. In his novels the stories can be freely and fluently adapted to various local circumstances that his texts also need to describe to become narrated as novels. In this way, he juxtaposes the Western novel genre with other ways of story-telling (oral stories, poems etc.). And Ghosh's manner of giving weight to the settings of his novels is such that it emphasizes the connections, the relations between places and their interconnectedness, not only the separate or distinct places themselves. His description of place/s, then, can be seen as a strategy for connecting two different ways of representation: the delieation of grand schemes and the depiction of the local and particular.

This representation of location, however, requires a certain kind of dislocation from the writer (in this case, Ghosh himself). In the following, he refers to the paradox of having to go through an act of dislocation to be able locate oneself through prose:

To write about one's surroundings is anything but natural: to even perceive one's immediate environment one must somehow distance oneself from it; to describe it one must assume a certain posture, a form of address. In other words, to locate oneself through prose, one must begin with an act of dislocation. [...]

This then is the peculiar paradox of the novel: those of us who love novels often read them because of the eloquence with which they communicate a 'sense of place'. Yet the truth is that it is the very loss of a lived sense of place that makes their fictional representation possible. (Ghosh 1998b)

The goal of Ghosh seems to be to merge the place-dependent representative model of the novel with the story–dependent models of poems and various types of oral stories. This strategy makes the construction of many-sited novels easier: if a certain place does not dominate a narrative, it becomes possible to narrate for instance the journey of the originally Western scientific idea of purity (symbolized by Pasteur's discovery of germs, and the carbolic acid used against them in *The Circle of Reason*) from an Indian village to an Arabian oil-town and on to the Algerian Sahara. In Ghosh's novels, places are significant as the crossing-points of various socio-cultural discourses and historical trajectories, but no original, pure society or place from which these discourses spring can be found in his texts. If something appears to be original and pure (nation, race, religion, identity), the narrative will soon reveal that purity to be an illusion. Of course, the change in the position (or even definition) of 'place' is related to the changing world order. In the contemporary world, places are increasingly inhabited by people from a myriad of national, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, all denominators which have lost much of their place-related definitive power.

The article on *The Circle of Reason* in section IV examines the way in which the narrative strategy of the novel dismantles the idea of binary constructions that Western modernity is based upon. It looks at the way the novel deconstructs the discursive

totalities of Western modernity, while remaining alert to questions of voice and agency, and the way in which the narrative constructs new connections by transcending those based on binary models. Towards the end, the article also introduces the concept of 'ethical deconstruction,' which is meant to offer a two-directional, constructive, way of deconstructing that does not merely dismantle, but builds up something new in the same act. The following sub-section, however, is meant to offer overall insight into Ghosh's narrative strategy in general, by way of his first novel.

II.1.1. The end of origins: Ghosh's history of the present

The title of this subsection contains a veiled reference to Michel Foucault's notion of genealogy. In general, the starting points for narration in all of Ghosh's novels are quite close to the way in which the genealogical approach functions. In an interview he gave in 1981, Foucault urged people to "fight against the impoverishment of the relational fabric" (1997, 158). The interview was about homosexual relationships, but, in the words of Paul Rabinow, it

> might be transposable to others, albeit with some imagination and tenacity. The problem, as he [Foucault] saw it, was to create new social forms. Why not imagine new practises (and eventually new forms of law) that were not restricted to individual rights but began from a premise of giving new forms to relational activities? This work is not only ethical, it is also political; but it is politics without a program (Rabinow 1997, 37-8).

As will become evident later, *The Circle of Reason* (as well as later novels by Ghosh) does attempt to create new forms of relational activities. The tendency of Ghosh's writing to move somewhere between the dimension of ethical relationships and the poststructuralist realm emphasizing difference and 'discourse as power' has been commented on by several critics and will form the central area of examination in this dissertation. Parallel with

the search for interhuman relationships there is an awareness of the world as a narrative and discursive social construction where knowledge is produced discursively by those versed in the hegemonic language/discourse.

Through the examination of subjects, objects and the relations between them at a particular moment in time (not so much through time), Foucault's genealogy is capable of becoming a kind of 'history of the present.' In a similar vein, the narrative strategy in *The Circle of Reason* is not to examine the intermingling of discursive formations and practices through time, but rather to examine them as existing side by side at a particular moment in time. This breaks the idea of teleological cause-and-effect chains by denying that these phenomena are tied to certain points on a temporal continuum. In the novel we have for instance the ancient market area, the Souq, juxtaposed with the modern part of Al-Ghazira with its shopping centres governed by global capital based on oil.

In contrast with traditional archaeology, genealogy concentrates on particular events rather than world-embracing systems. In the novel, world-embracing systems come into being as the natural off-springs of connections between particular circumstances. But, like archaeology, genealogy remains detached from the individual human intentions expressed within those particular events. Therefore it does not idealize or vindicate anyone, which Foucault saw as an asset compared to more traditional historiography. In the novel, the numerous alternative versions of the same events (for instance the collapse of the shopping centre, The Star) are narrated in a style which is characteristic of the discourse and narrator in question, but at no point does Ghosh prioritise any one of them. It can be said that in a way the narrative adopts a neutral position in relation to these various viewpoints by giving equal space to all of them. Neutrality in relation to the narrative strategy of the novel would then mean refusing to privilege any of the views that are represented. Genealogy further differs from archaeology in its focus on a much wider area of interaction. It is not restricted to the internal development of specific discourses, but examines the interaction "between the proponents and the antagonists of any

discourse or discursive formation; between discursive formations and their functional milieux" (Faubion 1998, 33). In *The Circle of Reason*, discourses interact in several functional circumstances: proponents of the discourses of science, religion, socialism, capitalism, tradition and modernity are described in the settings of an Indian refugee village, an ancient market area (the Souq), a modern oil-town and a village in the Algerian Sahara. And the narration is certainly not restricted to the internal developments of these various discourses. On the contrary, the borders between the discourses vanish and they seem to merge into one another creating new relational fabrics.

Whereas archaeology is capable of explaining historical discontinuities and ruptures only at the expense of historical continuities, Foucault's genealogy allows for the depiction of historical processes as neither continuous nor discontinuous, but as "a multiplicity of timespans that entangle and envelop one another" (Foucault 1998, 430). In the words of Faubion (1998, 33), it allows one "to conceive of history as a plurality of encounters and temporalities." As will be seen in section II.2., this comes to the fore most clearly in Ghosh's second novel, *The Shadow Lines* (1988). *The Circle of Reason* comments on the continuity of historical processes, for instance, in a scene where Bhudeb Roy, who wants to close the village school, voices a call for straight lines. In a mock analogy of the change from the period of colonialism to neo-colonialism, he shouts: "A new time beckons. The time to teach is over. The time has come to serve the people" (99). But despite the unselfish tone of this declaration, Bhudeb Roy is clearly motivated by money in much the same vein as the Western states which taught and promoted Western culture during the colonial period; a project they continued by 'helping' the newly independent 'third-world nations'. In honour of the Western teleological model of history, Roy demands for straight lines in the manner of Europe, America and Japan. But this is not consistent with the strategy of the novel, where there are no straight lines. Its idea of history is circular and it relies more on "the details and accidents that accompany every beginning" (Foucault 1998, 373).

And, finally, genealogy does not search for origins, or the ultimate truths implied by the concept of origin. Behind every illusion of 'origin' there lies more history and interaction. This is consistent with the strategy of the novel, where, as Robert Dixon (1996, 7) has pointed out, there are no pure origins. For instance, the village of Lalpukur in the first part does not represent original or pure traditional village life: it is inhabited by refugees fleeing the violence of the Partition and later the war that resulted in East-Pakistan becoming Bangladesh (pp. 59-60). And the Souq in the second part is the crossing-point of various ancient trade routes inhabited by people from a myriad of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds.

All the themes that come to the fore in later writing by Ghosh are budding in this first novel in one way or another. The transcending of distinctions following from the idea of purity anticipates the more obvious thematization of partitions and borders in his next work of fiction, *The Shadow Lines*, where they are viewed from the points of view of politics, geography, imagination and historiography. The unnamed and undescribed first-person narrator of this second novel is, in a way, a more developed version of Alu, on the one hand providing a kind of nexus or crossing-point for different persons, events, places and stories, and on the other hand functioning as an active agent who gives these intersecting strands a configuration of his own. Yoti Das's interest in birds and the analogy between the migrating birds and the migrating characters in *The Circle of Reason* are reminiscent of the connection between Man and nature and animals that is developed further in *The Hungry Tide* (2004). And the fact that the travelling in this first novel mainly happens within the colonies is, in addition to being reminiscent of the strategy adopted in *The Glass Palace* (2000), consistent with the thematics of ignoring the Oriental/Occidental polarisations, or the typical postcolonial theme of migrating between the colonies and the West. An interest in science comes through quite prominently in all novels by Ghosh, but is most obviously thematised in *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), as is the motif of a quest (Yoti Das tailing Alu in *The Circle of Reason*).

Most of Ghosh's novels contain this theme of searching and finding/discovering something. But the most important and prominent theme in the writing of Ghosh is the transcending of the discursively constructed cultural differences, lines and borders for the good of common humanity and interaction. These differences may be conceived spatially, temporally or culturally, and they may be related to class, race or ethnicity, but the on-going mission of Ghosh seems to be to indicate their constructedness and to bring to our awareness other ways of constructing the world based on ethically informed connections.

II.2. *The Shadow Lines*

Ghosh's second novel, *The Shadow Lines* (1988), has received more critical attention than his other, by no means unnoticed, novels. New editions of the novel designed for literary scholars and common readers alike are constantly released, especially in the Indian subcontinent. *The Shadow Lines* is listed in the curricula of several universities around the world. This novel has the most prominent position also in this dissertation, as it has in my other output, too. I have published three articles on *The Shadow Lines*, and the following introductory examination of the novel (II.2.1.) draws heavily on my earlier work (see Huttunen 2004).

The Shadow Lines is strongly aware of the ideology of nationalism and its shortcomings in the subcontinent.[1] In the background of the novel lies the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984 and the violence and unrest that followed. The miraculous, close to magic-realist features and incidents typical of Ghosh's first novel are here replaced by tight plot structure and realist narration. In *The Shadow Lines*, Ghosh weaves temporal and spatial dimensions into a personal texture on which the anonymous narrator builds his identity. The novel narrates the

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[1] Literature on Partition and nationalism on the Subcontinent, both fictive and academic, forms an immensely large body of intellectual reflection far exceeding the scope of this dissertation. I shall therefore not dwell on this subject in any detail, except when Ghosh's writing absolutely demands it. For an ethically tinged examination of *The Shadow Lines* in connection with Indian nationalism and its religious and secular undertones, see Kumar (2008).

history of an Indian family that lives in Calcutta, but has its roots in Dhaka on the Pakistan side of the border. The experience of Partition and of living in the nation-state of India in the 1960s is presented through the symbolism of lines, be they political, communal or geographical, or lines dividing consciousness or identity. The intersecting histories of the family and their British acquaintances, the Price family, are narrated as stories that come into existence through the unnamed narrator of the book. Most of these stories are told by the narrator's grandmother; his Uncle Tridib; his cousins, Robi and Ila; and the family friend, May Price. The stories interweave life in Dhaka before Partition, life in London during the war, and the life the narrator leads in Calcutta during the 1960s and London of the 1970s. Through his narration of several stories representing differing worldviews and socio-cultural discourses, the narrator attempts a kind of self-produced unity very much like the one Mahatma Gandhi had in mind for the diverse population of India. In addition, his critique of lines that produce divisions can be seen as directed at the discourse of secular nationalism that the prime-minister, Jawaharlar Nehru, stood for.

From a narrative point of view, *The Shadow Lines* concentrates on the various ways of narrating/giving meaning to the world. It brings together fictive reconstructions of the past based on memory and official history based on ostensibly neutral facts. Ghosh highlights imagination as a way of transcending hegemonic official representations and challenging their neutrality. In this novel, Ghosh seems to concentrate more on the political and power-related aspects of language and narration. There is also a growing awareness of the relativity of the discursive realities that language constructs. Consequently, Ghosh appears to have moved on from his first, experimental, novel, which highlighted the power of narration as the creator of worlds and realities. In *The Shadow Lines*, it is more the shadowing, or muting and eclipsing, nature of these realities that is examined.

The novel offers the reader several ways of experiencing/narrating the world. The narrator regards his imaginary reconstructions of the past as being more truthful than

the actual present. He lives through other people's stories. For him, the actual (as opposed to imaginary) present only serves as the impulse for the narrative reconstruction of memories. For his cousin Ila, the actual present is 'the real.' Ila cannot see any reason for dwelling in the past or in the imagination. For her "words had nothing to do with an excitement stored in her senses" (*The Shadow Lines* 30). Then there is the way that official discourses, like the newspapers, narrate the world. When the narrator tries to write about the riots that killed Tridib, he finds himself struggling with silence. For him, this silence is equivalent to a lack of meaning. This reflects the inadequacies of official narratives, or descriptive and allegedly objective narration in general. Ghosh's message here is that we can only know the world through words. But words carry meanings, they carry power relationships and ideological overtones. For instance, the national discourse of the official reports in newspapers creates gaps, because the words and the world they are meant to describe do not always meet. The newspapers do not take the riots into the national narrative they support because this would mean giving them meaning. The communal and religious riots are left outside the national secularist narrative because this serves the interests of the national discourse. At the end of the novel, the narrator is finally able to give voice to this silence, when May Price relates the story of her own personal experiences of the circumstances surrounding Tridib's death. Here narration and imagination seem to function as tools for weaving together different worldviews and ideologies, as well as voicing the silences created by the nationalist discourse. The symbol for the encounter with the other, be that a person or the other half of the divided Indian identity on the other side of the border, is the mirror. These mirrors form into 'mirror-windows' allowing the narrator to see out to other selves in addition to seeing his own image reflected.

The way these mirror-windows, or "looking-glass borders," (*The Shadow Lines* 233) function in the novel, is explicated in the article (IV.2.) in the sub-section that examines the ethically represented transcendence of discourse through the use of the symbolism of mirrors and desire. The article as a whole addresses

the theme of the shadowy lines and over-lappings between the world of experience and the language of meaning. In the article, I argue that imagination has a vital function in creating ethically informed connections between these two 'realities'. The same topic is approached below through the concepts of space and location as they become narrated in the novel. Ghosh's views on the dislocation required from the writer narrating his/her immediate environment and on the place-centeredness of the Western novel versus the story-based narration of Eastern epics are also relevant here (see section II.1.).

II.2.1. 'Knowledges' of London -- narrating space

In his discussion of the "stage of imperialism," Fredric Jameson detects "a growing contradiction between lived experience and structure, or between a phenomenological description of the life of an individual and a more properly structural model of the conditions of existence of that experience" (1991, 410). The levels of "the immediate and limited experience of individuals" and the socio-cultural background governing that experience have drifted away from each other to the extent that they begin to "constitute themselves into that opposition the classical dialectic describes as […] essence and appearance, structure and lived experience" (1991, 410-411). In other words, the spheres of the actual reality of sense-perception, "the immediate experience," and of the socio-cultural influences affecting the way in which this experience is realized, "the structural model of the conditions of existence of that experience," do not coincide.

Serendipitously using London as his example, Jameson states: "the truth of [the] experience no longer coincides with the place in which it takes place. The truth of that limited daily experience of London lies, rather, in India or Jamaica or Hong Kong" (411). Although the original position and the direction of movement of the colonial and postcolonial migrant characters in the novel is opposite to those of the Western modernist writers of the colonial period to whom Jameson is referring, obvious parallels can be found between the two cases: they are both "bound up with the whole colonial system of the British Empire

that determines the very quality of the individual's subjective life" (Jameson 1991, 411). As indicated, the actual lived experience of the narrator in the novel is originally that of Calcutta of the early 1960s and later that of the London of the late 1970s. But, due to the early influence of stories told mainly by his cousin, Tridib, the form governing these actual experiences is mainly that of an imaginary London of 1939, or that of images of various far-away places which have come to him in the form of these stories. As concerns the imaginary past London and its frame of reference, the present perception, there is a cultural and temporal, as well as a geographical, gap between these dimensions to begin with, as the narrator lives in Calcutta and these influences come from a London of the past. Later on, the geographical difference is eliminated when the narrator moves to London, but the temporal, and consequently also the social, gap remains.

Tridib is an archaeologist, who has spent an important period of his childhood in England, and who is in love with an English girl (or an image of one) whom he last saw as a baby. He prefers to perceive reality through the imagination rather than through his senses and is aware of the relativity of truth. According to him, everyone lives in a story, "because stories are all there are to live in" (*The Shadow Lines* 184). It is just a question of which story one chooses. Tridib chooses to invent his own stories, to construct a reality of his own. In his view, a place does not merely exist, it has to be invented. And people have to invent their own realities and places, otherwise we will never be free of other people's inventions (*The Shadow Lines* 37).

As a contrast to Tridib's influence in the novel, there is that exercised by another cousin, Ila. For Ila, who is the cosmopolitan daughter of a diplomat, places appear somewhat differently than they do to Tridib and the narrator, who has created detailed image-maps of these places he has never visited, and to whom they appear as both exciting and slightly romanticized. This emerges quite clearly in a conversation during one of Ila's visits to Calcutta.

I began to tell her how I longed to visit Cairo, to see the world's first pointed arch in the mosque of Ibn Tulun, and

touch the stones of the Great Pyramid of Cheops. I had been talking for a while when I noticed that she wasn't listening to me; she was following a train of thought in her mind, frowning with concentration. I watched her, waiting eagerly to hear what she would have to say. Suddenly she clicked her fingers, gave herself a satisfied nod, and said aloud, inadvertently: Oh yes, Cairo, the ladies is way on the other side of the departure lounge. (*The Shadow Lines* 26)

As the narrator puts it, for Ila "Cairo was a place to piss in" (*The Shadow Lines* 27). This is an instance of migrant experience, surely, but very different from the kind the narrator dwells in. His experience is travelling in the mind, the imagination, while hers is travelling actually in person. The migrant subject does not have to move physically or geographically as Ila does, but he/she may be migrant on the social and cultural level like the narrator. He is migrant in his imagination, clinging to influences coming from outside (Dhaka, London, foreign places on maps) and reducing the actual reality to a minimum.

If, for Tridib, present reality is of no consequence in itself, but appears merely as the stimulus for imaginary constructions, for Ila the actual is the real. One day in London Ila takes the narrator around the city to see used-clothes stalls and the vegetable market (*The Shadow Lines* 36). The narrator is bored, but gets excited when he recognizes the old location of the Left Book Club, where according to Tridib a member of the Price family had worked before the war. He drags Ila into the office and asks for confirmation, but the woman inside the store knows nothing of the days before the war. Ila is indignant and surprised at the narrator. For her, the building now looks like any musty old office. She is not in the least interested in the narrator's stories of the Price family or pre-war London. Ila's time dimension is the present, her world is the actual one and her way of travelling is physical: for her the current is real. She experiences the world through her senses, not through her imagination. For her, in consequence, a story is just "a string of words that she would remember while they sounded funny and then forget" (*The Shadow Lines* 35). In contrast, Tridib experiences the world as

concretely in his imagination as Ila does through her senses, and for him words and stories form into experiences that are permanently available in his memory. The narrator, who is drawn to Tridib's way of handling reality, has problems of communication with Ila due to these very differences of worldview:

> I could not persuade her that a place does not merely exist, that it has to be invented in one's imagination; that her practical, bustling London was no less invented than mine, neither more nor less true, only very far apart. It was not her fault that she could not understand, for as Tridib often said of her, the inventions she lived in moved with her, so that although she had lived in many places, she had never travelled at all. (*The Shadow Lines* 27)

When the narrator arrives in London and is taken to meet old Mrs Price for the first time, he astonishes the others by his knowledge of the city's geography. He is capable of finding the house without a map, although he has never visited the area before:

> It was easy enough on the A to Z street atlas of London that my father had brought me. I knew page 43, square 2, by heart: Lymington Road ought to have been right across the road from where we were. But now that we had reached the place I knew best, I was suddenly uncertain. The road opposite us was lined with terraces of cheerfully grimy red-brick houses, stretching all the way down the lenght of the road. The houses were not as high or as angular as I had expected. (*The Shadow Lines* 63)

As Meenakshi Mukherjee has observed, in the novel "the realignment of the sense of geography happens through an acknowledgement of the subjective space that all human beings inhabit" as well as by "plotting the different points of the globe on the accurately measured pages of the Bartholomew Atlas" with its Euclidian space (Mukherjee 2000, 135). The narrator has united

the lines and figures on the map he had examined in Calcutta with the images of the area he had created from Tridib's stories of war-time Lymington Road. But small discrepancies appear in combining these images with the real material London of the late 70s: the houses do not look right. This is partly due to the relation between an image of a place never personally perceived and the real appearance of this place; they cannot be totally interchangeable. Also, the image of the narrator belongs to a different time dimension (that of 1939) than that of his first actual encounter with the real place. The physical aspect of the area may have changed during the forty odd years in between. However, this is not a problem for the narrator, who has his preferences: "I wanted to know England not as *I* saw her, but in her finest hour - every place chooses its own, and to me it did not seem an accident that England had chosen hers in a war" (*The Shadow Lines* 62). England's finest hour occurred when Tridib visited London, or so it seems to the narrator, who cherishes the stories of war-time London and Lymington Road.

On their way to Mrs Price's house, the narrator shows off by naming streets and buildings as they pass them. He claims that an incendiary bomb had fallen on a house called Lymington Mansions on Solent Road on October 1st, 1940, and destroyed the whole street. Robi insists that the Germans had developed that kind of bomb much later in the war. The narrator insists that his version is correct, because Tridib told him so. "How was *he* to know? He was just a kid, nine years old. Every little bomb probably seemed like an earthquake to him," says Robi (*The Shadow Lines* 60-1). Obviously, Robi is placing his historiographical information before that of Tridib's actual lived experience, which is the one the narrator believes. The question of authority regarding the two versions is left open; the argument does not continue. There has recently been a demand for the "provincialization" of European nationalist historiography by means of writing over it other kinds of narratives of human connections that rely on dreamt-up pasts for their validity.[2]

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[2] I am here referring especially to Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000, 49), who is affiliated with the Subaltern Studies group. This group, founded by Ranajit

Clearly here we have a dreamt-up version of the past of the Solent Road that is based on a quite peculiar chain of human connections.

Later Robi and the narrator go to take a look at the supposedly bombed-out Solent Road. The road, of course, looks like any other road in London. The narrator notices a small car at the side of the road and finds himself "suddenly absorbed in the trappings of the lives that went with that car." What is peculiar here is that he is not interested in the material present of Solent Road or the car. He has his images of the road in bombed-out condition and, on seeing the car, he immediately begins to imagine the lives of the people who use it. He comments on the present state of the road by saying that naturally he did not expect to see what Tridib had seen all those years earlier. He continues: "But despite that, I still could not believe in the truth of what I did see […] it seemed to me still that Tridib had shown me something truer about Solent Road a long time ago in Calcutta" (*The Shadow Lines* 62).

The narrator seems to be occupied with a phenomenon that Jameson links with modernism, both epistemologically and generically. He is in a situation in which "we can say that if individual experience is authentic, then it cannot be true; and that if a scientific or cognitive model of the same content is true, then it escapes individual experience" (Jameson 1991, 411). To begin with, the narrator refuses to integrate received (spatial as well as temporal) versions of London (the map of the city, the details of official history, even eye-sight) and his own imaginary construction, which he considers more truthful than the others. In a sense, he is presented as being superior to his British friends in this respect: as a member of a colonized group he has knowledge, and quite intimate knowledge at that, of the colonizers world. The same cannot be said in reverse. When May Price comes for a visit to Calcutta, she is frightened by the strange country and shuts herself in her hotel room.

Guha in the early 1980s, aims to write anew the histories of the Subcontinent, highlighting the part the subaltern classes have played in the process. The group will be examined in more detail in section II.3.1. and the first article.

One evening Ila and Nick Price take the narrator to see the area that has become the Indian area of London. They walk along Brick Lane, which the narrator is eager to see because he remembers it as the street where Nick's uncle used to live before the war, when it was a Jewish area. Again, he is surprised at what he sees: "The first surprise that was waiting for me was that it wasn't a lane at all […] I had no means of recognizing the place I saw; it did not belong anywhere I had ever been" (*The Shadow Lines* 100). He had imagined the street to look like the lanes he had seen in Oxford, but what he finds is buzzing district thronged with people speaking "in a dozen dialects of Bengali" and Indian shops with Bengali neon-signs. When Nick points out a building that used to be a synagogue in the Jewish period of the area, he exclaims that Nick's uncle and his friends lived in its vicinity before the war. Nick appears incredulous, and the narrator leads them to the building where Alan Tresawsen allegedly lived. The narrator describes the windows of the house, one of which is boarded over with wooden planks. The other one is open and they can discern edges of curtains inside. The narrative continues: "That was the window of Dan's bedroom, I decided" (*The Shadow Lines* 103). An aside to the Brick Lane and the lives of people there in the year 1940 follows, triggered by the sight of the house. The dimensions of the imaginary 1940 and the actual present 1979 are juxtaposed in the narration. At the same time, Brick Lane is presented both as the Jewish area of the War period and as the Indian area of the 70s.

The narrator clearly prefers his imaginary past London to the actual present one. Through this preference, the imaginary past comes to coincide with Jameson's "essence", the primary contents of his consciousness, or "the structural model of the conditions of existence" of the actual present. The actual present experience through sense-perception is Jameson's "appearance", which in the context of the narrator serves mainly to trigger the "essence", the imaginary past. Consequently, the Solent Road, the Taj Travel Agency, or the room in Mrs Price's house of the 1970s ("appearance", immediate lived experience) bring forth the "structural model" of realizing them, which is the imaginary London of 1939 ("essence", the structural model of the existence

of lived experience). As with Jameson's theory, the social and cultural forms governing these two types of experiences do not coincide, but conflict at the levels of time, place and the nature of reality (imaginary constructions vs. actual sense-perception).

Jameson's account of urban experience is reminiscent of the narrator's experience of London:

> [The] conception of city experience - its dialectic between the here and now of immediate perception and the imaginative or imaginary sense of the city as an absent totality - presents something like a spatial analogue of Althusser's great formulation of ideology itself, as "the Imaginary representation of the subject's relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence." (Jameson 1991, 415)

The narrator also uses London for a very specific kind of "spatial analogue", to borrow Jameson's phrase. He counts the miles he wanders in the streets of London towards Stockwell to see Ila, with whom he has fallen in love. As he is incapable of finding a linguistic metaphor for the state of love ("And yet between that and its metaphors there is no more connection than there is between a word, such as mat, and the thing itself" (96)), he resorts to a spatial one. The route he has taken through London and the miles he has walked function as a metaphor for his love for Ila.

The placing of the imaginary before the actual indicates that the narrator has primarily an imaginary identification with London. In line with Althusser's characterization of ideology, he has created an imaginary relationship to the real existing London. It is just that this representation is temporarily quite far apart from the real conditions of existence. As stated, Jameson links the phenomenon of a growing contradiction between lived experience and the socio-cultural conditions for the existence of this experience with colonialism and the physical and cultural movements caused by it. He also argues that new poetic strategies will spring from this contradictory experience:

> There comes into being, then, a situation in which we can say that if individual experience is authentic, then it cannot

be true; and that if a scientific or cognitive model of the same content is true, then it escapes individual experience. It is evident that this new situation poses tremendous and crippling problems for a work of art; and I have argued that it is as an attempt to square this circle and to invent new and elaborate formal strategies for overcoming this dilemma that modernism or, perhaps better, the various modernisms as such emerge: in forms that inscribe a new sense of the absent global colonial system on the very syntax of poetic language itself, a new play of absence and presence that at its most simplified will be haunted by the exotic and be tattooed with foreign place names, and at its most intense will involve the invention of remarkable new languages and forms. (Jameson 1991, 411)

As the narrator acknowledges, he has created his own secret map of the world, "a map of which only I knew the keys and co-ordinates, but which was not for that reason any more imaginary than the code of a safe is to a banker" (*The Shadow Lines* 196). This map of the world is one response to Radhakrishnan's call for postmodern spaces that are imagined "in excess of and in advance of […] actual history in the name of experiences that are real but lacking in legitimacy" (2003, 61). The representation of London in the novel consists of several levels: the past is represented through an amalgamation of official history and personal imagination, and the present through maps and eye-sight. Radhakrishnan continues: "each of these […] realities must imagine its own discursive-epistemic space as a form of openness to one another's persuasion" (2003, 61). What has to be avoided is the situation where one version speaks for all, or where all the versions are "islands unto themselves" (2003, 61). I would say that the novel as a whole forms a space in which all the above-mentioned spatial representations of London are given room without vindicating or prioritising any of them. The swift and fluent switches between different times and representations in the narrative underline the impression that these various representations are dissolving into each other and, as a result, producing a whole which retains the specifics of each of its

components. In other words, a whole within which the various spatial representations do not exist as "islands unto themselves", but rather are open to one another's persuasion. In relation to history, the novel further provides an example of holding "history, the discipline, and other forms of memory together so that they can help in the interrogation of each other, to work out the ways these immiscible forms of recalling the past are juxtaposed" (Chakrabarty 2000, 93-94).

The merging of various spatial and temporal dimensions into a heterogeneous whole is at its most obvious in the scene where, shortly after Ila's marriage to Nick Price, the narrator and Ila go down to the cellar of Mrs Price's house in London, where Ila tells him that Nick has been unfaithful to her. It is the same cellar in which Tridib sat during the war in the event of air raids, the same place Ila had drawn in the dust under the large table in Raibajar long ago, and the place where Ila had recently realized that the narrator was in love with her. Sitting on a camp bed beside the weeping Ila, the narrator contemplates the miscellaneous stuff in the cellar:

> Slowly, as I looked around me, those scattered objects seemed to lose their definition in the harsh, flat light of the naked bulb; one of their dimensions seemed to dissolve: they flattened themselves against the walls; the trunks seemed to be hanging like paintings on the walls. Those empty corners filled up with remembered forms, with the ghosts who had been handed down to me by time: the ghost of the nine-year-old Tridib, sitting on a camp bed, just as I was, his small face intent, listening to the bombs; (---) the ghost of the eight-year-old Ila, sitting with me under that vast table in Raibajar. 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 all that a ghost is, a presence displaced in time. (*The Shadow Lines* 183)

Different versions of the same space, those of imaginary London in 1939, Raibajar in the early 1960s and actual London in the late

1970s, are united and mixed simultaneously in the narrator's perception of the cellar. His experience of the cellar includes all these dimensions. The actual three-dimensional material world loses a dimension ("one of their dimensions seemed to dissolve") and its place is taken by the dimension of the imaginary past ("those empty corners filled up with remembered forms").

According to Jameson's model, a typically modernist problematics of the dissociation of essence and appearance is solved in *The Shadow Lines* through the construction of a typically postmodern spatial vision. Realities that "stem from different zones of time or from unrelated compartments of the social and material universe" (Jameson 1991, 373) have been united and a "mode of perception" has been achieved, which seems "to operate by way of the simultaneous preservation of […] incompatibles, a kind of incommensurability-vision that does not pull the eyes back to focus but provisionally entertains the tension of their multiple coordinates." (Jameson 1991, 372). These "multiple coordinates" of the cellar are the imaginary and the actual, and the past and the present.

The Shadow Lines does not reinforce the Western notion of an individual subject or consciousness through which the world is realized. In addition to the level of individual subjectivity, there seems to be a longing for an ethical inter-subjective space transcending the boundaries of separate subjectivities. As Meenakshi Mukherjee has observed, although the narrator appears to be a "lucid reflector", he also functions as an "agentive site" for other lives (and for other spatial versions, for that matter):

> The transparency of the unnamed and undescribed narrator lets different persons, events, places luminously enter his story, and find new configuration there; or, altering the metaphor, it is possible to see the narrator's consciousness as a porous space that absorbs other lives and other experiences until they leak into each other to reveal a pattern. (Mukherjee 2000, 140)

The novel does not engage in typically postmodern epistemological problematics, although, as shown above, in some respects it can be said to make use of postmodern narrative technique to ethically transcend the modernist condition of alienation between essence and appearance in the Jamesonian sense. It is precisely this openness to "unrelated compartments of the social and material universe"(Jameson 313), referred to already in the introduction in connection with Radhakrishnan and Black, that constitutes the ethical dimension of this narrative.

In relation to space, then, *The Shadow Lines* is occupied with the transcending of differences and the establishing of connections between various representational models and epistemologies. As should be obvious by now, the insights by Radhakrishnan on the intertwined usage of space and imagination in the novel (see introduction) are quite correct. Places have to be imagined for them to become real. The contradiction between actual and imaginary in the novel can surely be seen as a typical instance of both discursive and epistemological alienation characteristic of the colonial/postcolonial condition. But the juxtaposition and final merging of various 'knowledges' of London in the narration aspires to more than mere description of the dispersed colonial identity. This many-layered representation tries to overcome the discursive power politics whereby the narrative version of official historiography takes precedence over personal memories, or according to which actual sense-perception is more truthful than imaginary constructions. But the novel is not an attempt to effect a reversal of these binaries. It is more an instance of the ethical provincialization of these monolithic, or universal, representations and epistemologies, in order to reveal other realities and ways of realizing the world eclipsed by them.

Accordingly, the narrative gives us the London of nationalist history, and of actual present sense-perception, but also the London of personal imagination and an imaginary past that was constructed mainly in the Calcutta of the 1960s. The result of mixing these various narrative strands is a representation of London that brings together the nationalist version and London as it appears to subjects of the

Commonwealth, whether seen in person or through the imagination. The novel represents the invention of new narrative forms resulting from the discrepancy in social and geographical locations of the actual object and the circumstances for its realization anticipated by Jameson (1991, 411). Whether seen predominantly as the product of postcoloniality or globalization (which are linked as cultural processes), the novel seems to present a feasible way of narrating the contemporary cosmopolitan experience of space.

The various spatial dimensions (whether real or imaginary) are interwoven into a narrative structure which maintains ethically informed connections between these different dimensions. As I argue in the article on the novel (IV.2.), there is an ethical openness in the encounter and intermixing of these spaces. They are not left as separate islands, or merely juxtaposed to gain the effect of highlighting their differences. The differences between various imaginary and real spatial dimensions are related as an obvious part of their 'being', while the actual goal is to transcend these differences without discarding the idiosyncratic features of different dimensions. The next major work by Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, also relies on juxtaposing temporal and spatial dimensions, albeit in a manner different from that put forward in *The Shadow Lines*. The aim in this narrative with multiple time-lines and geographical locations is to bring forth both the common features and differences between the various times and places it presents.

II.3. *In an Antique Land*

In his third book length volume, *In an Antique Land* (1992), Ghosh connects the sciences of historiography, ethnography and philology with the representational strategies of fiction. At the same instant, he also compiles meta-scientific dimensions by tracking the journey of the mediaeval documents the narrator is researching from Cairo to various museums in the West during 1800s (meta-history). He also offers self-reflexive comments by the narrator on his relationship with the villagers he is supposed to be 'studying' (meta-ethnography).

In an Antique Land is a generic mixture weaving together the representative techniques of historiography, ethnography, travelogue and diary-writing. The narrator of the book (I am not sure whether this work can rightfully be referred to as a novel) brings together elements of anthropological field work in Egypt and India, the history of a Hindu slave of a Jewish merchant in the 11th century, and Ghosh's personal diary written during the fieldwork. At the same time, the book also functions as a travelogue. In a way, the narrator provides a meta-anthropological commentary on anthropological field work with his self-reflexive comments on his own attitudes and feelings when meeting the villagers, and a history of history by following the movements of the medieval documents of the Cairo Geniza from Egypt to the various museums in the West. By constructing these kinds of meta-narratives, Ghosh tries to present the reader with those areas of reality that would be eclipsed by writing that adheres exclusively to one genre or paradigm. The narrative structure of the book is fragmentary, with passages on the medieval slave Bomma and the history of the region alternating with passages on late 20th century Egyptian villages and India.

Through the narrative juxtaposition of the area of the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean of the 11th century with Egyptian villages and the India of the 1980s, Ghosh examines the theme of globalization, or modernization. The heterogeneous trading society of the medieval Mediterranean and Indian Ocean was brought to an end by the Spanish and Portuguese expansion in the 15th century. In the 1980s, Egypt went through an

exploitative period of colonialism and became fertile ground for global capital to feed on. In general, both societies can be characterized as multicultural, but there are major differences in the nature of their multiculturalisms. Ghosh presents history as a process in which the world partitioned, giving rise to Western hegemony. In the mediaeval era, it was possible for a Hindu slave to serve a Jewish merchant, who took part in Muslim ceremonies and magic cults. As Doris Bachmann-Medick has observed, this happened in circumstances that enabled syncretistic religiosity and "a reciprocal influence of religions on one another" (10). In the modern multiculturalism managed by global capital with Western economy, science and war-machinery as its representatives, such tolerance is out of the question.

Where *The Shadow Lines* was immensely popular in the Subcontinent, *In an Antique Land* with its fashionable merging of narrative models gave Ghosh access to the international literary stage. In the mediaeval trajectory of the narrative, the narrator appears as a historian and in the 'modern' trajectory of 1980s and 1990s as an ethnographer. This work also marks the beginning of his more straightforward critique of colonialism and its continuing impact. As Mondal (2007, 12) observes, the first two novels feature the effects of colonialism in the forms of the relationships between Indians and Britons, or the presence of Partition, as well as in the consequences it has had on a mind formed under the influence of the colonial education system (e.g. Balaram). But these are implicit critiques in the sense that in these cases, the purpose is more that of balancing the power of colonial discourses by de-centralizing them through the ethical revealing and narrating of the internal dynamics of non-European worlds and realities that have been pushed to the margins of Eurocentric narratives. The idea is more to reveal other histories besides the Eurocenric ones. But *In an Antique Land* draws attention to today's political problems between Hindus and Muslims, or Jews and Arabs, caused by the ruptures brought about by colonialism and the all-invading power of modern knowledge production models.

While my article in section IV on *In an Antique Land* does not ostensibly adopt Levinasian ethics, the approach adopted in it

is nevertheless strictly in line with the theories of the ethical that enter the more recent articles. Towards the end, the article, which as its main theme has the transcending of the partitions created by the monolithic discourses of modernism, reacts to the ambivalence between liberal humanism and post-structuralism evident in this volume, as well as Ghosh's writing in general. In the following introductory section, I shall examine the manner in which Ghosh's postmodernist narrative constructs the subjectivity of the slave, Bomma, from textual traces, and then 'strategically' essentialises it into a subaltern subject. I do this against the background of Radhakrishnan's discussion of postmodernism, essentialism and the postcolonial subaltern subject.

II.3.1. Modernism, postmodernism and the subaltern subject

Postmodernism began to emerge among the English-speaking intellectuals and artists of the Subcontinent in the early 1980s. Postmodernist ideas stood for an emphasis on difference and self-reflexivity as well as meta-discursive critique of representation as such. Postmodernism was ideologically opposed to grand narratives and the concept of state, which was regarded as a modernist structure in need of dismantling. Thus postmodernism, and specifically the poststructuralist variant of it, became a useful tool for placing the unsuccessful modernist discourses of Indian nationality under scrutiny. It has to be emphasized, however, that India as a postcolonial entity adopted not so much the *ideology* of postmodernism as its *methods*, which were largely used for the replacing and de-centering of the influences and totalities of modernism. The Anglophone intellectuals were dealing with a postcolonial situation, and were attempting to form meaningful narrative of themselves by wielding postmodern methods against modernist tenets.

The emphasis on discursive self-reflexivity and a meta-discursive relationship to his own writing that come through in *In an Antique Land* are among the most apparent postmodernist features of Ghosh's work on an ideological level. Representations

of the past are an integral part of his oeuvre. In the context of history, his message seems to be that fiction may be as good, if not better, a basis for representing the past as historiography, which is seriously inhibited by its own discursive form and logic. The same is true of the scientific discourse in general. Science and its sub-branches stemming from the Enlightenment and modernity (with Ghosh, notably history, medicine, anthropology and ethnography) are woven together with fictional representation. Moreover, Ghosh's works usually contain meta-fictional and meta-scientific levels that comment on the nature of discourse in general or on the writing of fictional or scientific text. In *In an Antique Land*, he makes this technique an integral part of his argument.

Amitav Ghosh has a close relationship both to the ideology and the writing of the Subaltern Studies group,[3] as well as to many of the scholars affiliated with it. He has also published in the group's series, *Subaltern Studies*.[4] The many years he spent with other members of the group in St Stephen's college in Delhi, as well as the general intellectual climate in the Subcontinent of 1980s are clearly evident in Amitav Ghosh's thinking. Widespread concern with the crisis of nationalism and the general confusion of the era welcomed the assimilation of postmodernist tenets and opposed the modernist legacy. It seems that Ghosh's manner of constructing subjectivities in his narratives is quite close to the 'strategic essentialism' coined by Spivak (1988). Although she did deconstruct the subaltern subject as it had been built by many of the Subaltern Studies group's members, she was not too concerned about its essentialist and positivist characteristics, but saw them as an asset in so far as they were used strategically for political purposes. In her research the subject in the end appears as a politically functional

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[3] For a description of the group's ideology, see the first article (IV.I.).

[4] What later expanded into *In an Antique Land,* was originally published as a straightforwardly historiographic text in the series. *'The Slave of MS. H.6'* in Partha Chatterjee & Gyanendra Pandey (Eds.) *Subaltern Studies: Writing on Asian History and Society, Vol. VII,* New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1992, pp. 159-220.

mixture of deconstructive (postmodern) and essentialising, or positivising (modernist) ideas.[5]

Rosalind O'Hanlon is another critic who has examined the group's writings. In her view, the reconstructions of subaltern histories by some representatives of the group allow the traditional Western subject to enter their discourse:

> At the very moment of this assault upon Western historicism, the classic figure of Western humanism—the self-originating, self-determining individual, who is at once a subject in his possession of a sovereign consciousness whose defining quality is reason, and an agent in his power of freedom—is readmitted through the back door in the figure of the subaltern himself. (O'Hanlon 1988, 191)

O'Hanlon ends up by arguing that the writing of subaltern histories requires great skill and subtlety if slippage into essentialist humanism is to be avoided. Narrative subtlety and skill are usually recognized as the characteristics of the writer of fiction, not historiography. But given the fact that they are both narration, O'Hanlon's argument supports the adoption of the traditional techniques of historiography when writing fiction and vice versa, as Ghosh does in *In an Antique Land.* In O'Hanlon's view, the most important thing in these constructions of subaltern subjectivity is to forget the myth of origins as a means of legitimation. The Cartesian ideas that the subject is self-constituting and that a being which has its origin outside itself is not a proper being to begin with has to be discarded. Only then is it possible to move on to the idea that histories and subjectivities are constructed from fragments that "do not contain the signs of any essential belonging inscribed in them." O'Hanlon further argues that this kind of skill, "the ability to argue for a distinctiveness of practice without slipping into a metaphysics of presence" is difficult to develop (1988, 197). The ability of Ghosh to navigate along the fine line between essentialism and total

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[5] The notion of strategic essentialism is clarified towards the end of the first article (IV.I.).

dispersal in his textual constructions of subaltern subjects has been noted by Robert Dixon, who argues that "Ghosh develops a style of writing that is sufficiently nuanced and elusive to sustain the "theoretical fiction" of a recovery of presence without actually falling back to essentialism" (1996, 16).

In his critique of postmodernism, Radhakrishnan lists the ways in which the identity problematic has been "brought to the third world on the postmodern platter" (2003, 14). In his view, the question of identity has come across to the subaltern people as a backward, unfashionable, quest through postmodernism. In a sense, the subaltern is forced to choose between a relevant but reactionary (modernist) project and a fashionable subjectivity that is hollow and devoid of any experiential basis (postmodernist subject). Further, among the subaltern groups, the subjectivity problematic is both urgent and morbid: these people have to adopt an alien (colonial, or Western) epistemology to develop self-understanding. And this adoption of alien epistemology results in a situation, where "identity is divorced from the agential authority of specific narrative projects and their hegemonizing strategies" (2003, 14). As a result, subaltern identity and its discourse are epistemically evacuated. They are alienated from their prerogative to make truth claims: the truth claims would come "from the Self of the dominant West" (2003, 14). On the question of essences, or essentialism, approached above, Radhakrishnan notes that, as a Western construct, deconstruction totally misunderstands the burden of the idea of essence as it affects those disempowered by colonialism (2003, 15). It also fails to understand the need for 'strategic essentialism,' as discussed by Spivak. He further observes that essentialism is actually very much a modernist phenomenon and propounds a link, or a continuum, with modernism and its preoccupation with history and origins (2003, 16). Finally, he considers the term 'strategic essentialism' to be redundant, because essentialism is always strategic in and by its very nature, and "the recourse to essences is a matter of strategy to gain control over processes of history along agential lines" (2003, 17).

Reiterating Spivak's idea of the subaltern subject as something that cannot be regarded as having an *a priori* essence,

waiting to become activated into agency after discovery can readily be applied to the character of Ghosh's slave, Bomma, in *In an Antique Land*. The narrator constructs the subjectivity of Bomma as a two-dimensional narrative process. On the one hand, he combines and imaginatively interprets and interweaves the textual traces from the scraps of manuscripts he has found in museums and institutions around the world through his narrative process; on the other hand, he relates his search for these documents. He also includes an erudite Notes-section, which bears witness to the empirical philological and linguistic research he has also conducted on the documents. Clearly, this subaltern subject that is put together from textual traces (that is, traces both physically as scraps of paper and discursively as textual fragments) is not an already existing essence made agential after being discovered. Rather, it (or he) becomes agential in the very process of being narrated into existence. Bomma decidedly belongs to O'Hanlon's subjectivities that are constructed from fragments that "do not contain the signs of any essential belonging inscribed in them." The idea that the subject is self-constituting and that a being which has its origin outside itself is not a proper being to begin with (O'Hanlon 1988, 197) has clearly been discarded.

Spivak concludes that the subaltern subject would benefit from the use of strategic essentialism, the "use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (Spivak 1988: 205). Radhakrishnan's "recourse to essences [as] a matter of strategy to gain control over processes of history along agential lines" (2003, 17) refers to the same thing. The identity of Bomma is narratively built upon traces by the narrator, both practically (his search for the manuscript scraps) and theoretically (a poststructuralist subject as a crossing point of textual traces). But this is not all there is to this subject. It is by no means two-dimensional. Radhakrishnan criticizes the postmodern "essentialism-narrative nexus" for its polarity: it offers either essentialism or a mere subjectless process. What is missing, in his view, is the politics of representation (2003, 19). This seems to be what Spivak, too, is asking for when she voices a call for the adoption of essentialism in a political interest.

So far, I have sketched the formation of Bomma's subjectivity as a narrative process that combines textual traces. But history, like identity, is a narrative construction, and thus a product of a deeply imaginative and interpretative process. It is not a place for fact-based empiricism. What happens when Ghosh narrates Bomma into existence is that the textual traces are glued to one another through imaginative principles, so that together they form the meanings the narrator wants to create. In Ghosh's narration, this process results in an ethico-political subject. As Radhakrishnan explains,

> "Value" thus presides over the narrative project (also, the identity project), both as an epistemological and as an ethico-political imperative. The imperative is epistemological insofar as the "subjects" involved in the process need to be able to think of their intended identity as a worthy object of knowledge, and ethico-political since the value is also related to questions of representation, hegemony, authenticity, correctness, and fairness. (2003, 18)

I shall examine the way Bomma's identity is narrated also in the article in section IV.3. The ethico-political nature of Bomma's, if I may, essentialised, subaltern identity can, however, be briefly outlined as follows: The narrator's construction of Bomma is clearly meant to disturb the colonial historiographical legacy: it creates a subaltern subject, a slave, who lived in the era before the European expansion and the appearance of colonialism and its dividing epistemology of modernism. Further, Bomma represents a world that was inter-connected by trade in a manner quite far from the capital-dictated connections of Western modernism or globalization. Bomma also represents an ethical call for syncretic connections between such geographical places, people/s, social classes and religions that nowadays seem quite distinct as the outcome of the partitioning of the world after Western expansion. Further, the narrative is self-reflexively open about the way this subject is created through its meta-narrative of tracing the manuscripts that have been spread around the world.

In the prologue to *In an Antique Land*, the narrator juxtaposes the presence in the Middle East of "the greatest Crusador army ever assembled" of 1148 and the German and Allied forces of the World War two of 1942 (*In an Antigue Land* 15). Amidst the military manoeuvrings of the summer of 1942, an article examining letters from the year 1148 appears in a Hebrew journal in Jerusalem. The article contains a mention of a letter written by a merchant in Aden: "Within this tornado of grand designs and historical destinies, Khalaf ibn Ishaq's letter seems to open a trapdoor into a vast network of foxholes where real life continues uninterrupted" (*In an Antique Land* 15-16). These foxholes provide a route to the realm of the ethical: Towards its end, the letter has a mention of a slave belonging to the addressee, Ben Yiju in Mangalore, India:

> That is all: no more than a name and a greeting. But the reference comes to us from a moment in time when the only people for whom we can even begin to imagine properly human, individual, existences are the literal and the consequential, the wazirs and the sultans, the chroniclers and the priests—the people who had the power to inscribe themselves physically upon time. (*IAL* 16-17)

But in the case of Khalaf Ibn Ishaq, it is merely a chance accident "that those barely discernible traces that ordinary people leave upon the world happen to be preserved." (17). And then, the even more imperceptible trace of Bomma appears at the end of the letter. The epistemologically and materially postmodernist as well as the 'essentialising' ethico-political components of Bomma's subjectivity are neatly represented in the above quotations from the prologue: We have "a trapdoor into a vast network of foxholes" (postmodernist) "where real life continues uninterrupted" (material). The block quotation above is an indirect reference to the ethico-political drive behind the construction of Bomma's subjectivity: Bomma as a subject is directed against this prevalent discourse on "the consequential, the wazirs and the sultans, the chroniclers and the priests—the people who had the power to inscribe themselves physically

upon time" (*In an Antique Land* 16-17). And then there is the coming together of epistemologically postmodernist (more specifically post-structuralist) "barely discernible traces" with the ethico-politically informed "ordinary people leave upon the world happen to be preserved" with its emphasis on the haphazard way in which people who fall outside the powerful discourse of the ruling classes are acknowledged.

All in all, the process of constructing Bomma is quite post-structuralist in nature. It is postmodern both physically, or materially, as the process of finding and collating the scraps of manuscripts and epistemologically as the process of connecting textual traces. But it is equally ethical in its creation of imaginative formations transcending this discursive realm. However, the outcome of this process is a subject in his own right, not an epistemically void knot amidst discourses. Bomma is not an example of the postmodern "epistemological revolutions at the expense of organicity and the solidarities of representational politics" (2003, 19) that Radhakrishnan sees as ill-befitting the needs of postcoloniality. *In an Antique Land* as a whole is an example of ethical solidarity between representational strategies as it combines several discourses into an unprecedented ethico-political whole. And the way Bomma is narrated a historical trajectory of his own intervowen with that of Ben Yiju makes him appear quite organic and, for a want of better term, essentialised subject with an ethico-political meaning and purpose of his own. Bomma as an essence is a token of the strategy to obtain "control over processes of history along agential lines" (Radhakrishnan 2003, 17). As the narrator says in the book, Ben Yiju and his slave, Bomma, are preserved as "tiny threads, woven into the borders of a gigantic tapestry" (*In an Antique Land* 95). They represent small agential lines in the borders of the processes of history.

Throughout Ghosh's work there is an interest in the nature of language and the ways in which it moulds and determines our ways of comprehending and experiencing things. The notion of subject is constructed in representation through discursive connections with other people and the world. The identity that comes through in Ghosh's texts is not, then, a solid and detached

essentialist entity in the modernist manner. Neither is it its own origin. It is closer to the fluid and changing discursive construction in the postmodern sense. Consequently, identity is a fiction. But, contrary to the modernist definition of fictive as the opposite of real and truthful, the identity in Ghosh's writings is not an unreal fiction. Paradoxically, it is real just because it is both politically discursive and ethically imaginary. This is so because discourse and language construct the world for us, and we have to combine the passive reception of this construction by actively inventing our own versions. By this means we can arrive at a truth that is equally discursive and ethical. And despite its discursive component, this identity is not merely an itinerant knot in the universe of discursive fragments: this 'essentialized' subaltern subject does have real material and ethico-political viability through the historical trajectory that is imaginatively narrated into existence simultaneously with it. This would make it quite close to the kind of subject delineated by Spivak, O'Hanlon and Radhakrishnan above.

Concerning the ideologies stemming from modernism and the Enlightenment, Ghosh promotes humanism and syncretism, but, as was seen above, is opposed to most other discursive constructions pertaining to modernity. He is also quite vehemently opposed to nationalism, precisely as a political entity. Ghosh, then, has an eclectic relationship to both postmodernism and liberal humanism. He endorses the postmodernist views on the nature of discourses and the ways in which reality is constructed by them. But his concept of the subject is both modernist and postmodernist: it is discursively constructed and can sometimes be realized as an agentive site, or a meeting place of various outside discourses. But his subjects are not two-dimensional. They do have a socio-cultural location and a historical trajectory which essentialise them in the modernist manner. And they are essentialized in view of certain political purpose. Then again his subjects are not self-generated individual detached observers of outside reality in the modernist sense, but they exist only in close relationship and connection with others as active agents, instead of appearing as passive observers.

II.4. *The Calcutta Chromosome*

The fourth novel by Ghosh, *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), returns to the problematics of scientific, philosophical and colonial knowledge production that were first taken up in *The Circle of Reason*. Like his previous work, *In an Antique Land*, this deconstruction of colonial medical history is a generic mixture, blending techniques from science fiction, the thriller, detective novel, ghost stories and historiography. The narrative takes as its starting point Ronald Ross's 1898 discovery of the role of mosquitoes in the spreading of malaria. The hegemonic version of Ross's research and achievements provided by colonial medical history (the 'political', the hegemonic discourse) is narrated through his diary and the stories of Murugan, an American scientist who has studied Ross's career. This version is deconstructed through another version featuring a group of illiterate coolies manoeuvring Ross's research. This group worships the Goddess of Silence, embodied by the character of Mangala in the late 1890s story-line. They act according to the principles of silence and secrecy, and represent the ethical drive in the narrative, interrupting and deconstructing the hegemonic version of colonial medical history. Their way of going about things avoids becoming defined by colonial scientific knowledge production strategies. This way neither they, nor anything they do, can be 'known', i.e., it cannot be appropriated into scientific or other discourses. The work of this group is directed at the transferring of personality traits from one person to another in a kind of joined effort of Western science and the transmigration of souls. The temporal dimensions of the narrative comprise past, present and future. The social scale is varied. The Calcuttan social hierarchy of the 1990s, for instance, is narrated from bottom to the top, with meticulous descriptions of the households and living conditions of the different social classes. The reader is also given a glimpse of the multicultural New York of the future and, of course, the colonial past of India with the illiterate coolies and colonial administrators and scientists is depicted in detail.

In a sense, the novel presents questions concerning religion and the epistemological nature of god/goddess as counterparts

of science, its methodologies and the idea of rational knowledge. The question of discursive knowledge has been addressed as "the spirit of knowingness" from an ethical viewpoint by Cora Diamond, who writes of the feeling of mystery in our lives:

> There is far more to things, to life, than what we know or understand. Such a feeling is tied to a rejection of the spirit of *knowingness* often found in abstract moral and social theorizing, a spirit which may recognize the existence of phenomena not yet satisfactorily explained or dealt with, but which is reductive in its idea of our relation to the world, and in what it takes understanding and knowledge to be, a spirit that is often 'restless' in its supposed wisdom, eager to re-order human lives in accordance with its rational plans. (Diamond 1998, 51-52, orig. emphasis)

This reads almost like a description of the character of Ronald Ross as he is depicted in the novel. It is also reminiscent of Farley, who happens to see Mangala's ritual with the syphilitics in process, but dismisses it as quackery because he cannot do otherwise within his discursive scientific frame. Farley's conscience demands that he reveal to those people that they are being fooled by Mangala, "to expose the falsehoods that she and her minions had concocted to deceive those simple people. It was his duty, he knew, to tell them that mankind knew no cure for their condition" (*The Calcutta Chromosome* 149). The idea that Mangala could be ahead of science, indeed that anything but science could ever find a cure for syphilis, is beyond Farley's rational worldview, which is largely directed by the spirit of knowingness, as delineated by Diamond above.

In her study on the human urge for transcendence into a god, Martha Nussbaum (1990, 365-391) reminds us that the life of a god would be decidedly non-human. The ancient Greek gods, for instance, do not share the distinctive characteristics of the human life. They do not have the "forms of dependency and neediness that lead humans to reach out for others" (1990, 373-4). They lack many of the limits and defects that are an essential part of human life. They have no diseases, they do not need to exert

themselves to get what they want, and no unforeseen trouble comes their way. They have no physical or intellectual restrictions. And, above all, they are immortal. Compared to them, human life is "a brief, chancy, and in many ways miserable existence" (1990, 371). The idea of divinity is equal to the idea of human transcendence into an existence without the constraints of human life. But gods, unlike humans, are not political beings. As Nussbaum observes, this is the feature that separates humans from gods on the one hand and from animals on the other: "politics is about using human intelligence to support human neediness; so to be truly political you have to have both elements. Beasts fail on one count, gods on the other" (1990, 373).

Mangala's project in *The Calcutta Chromosome* brings together gods, humans and animals, as well as features a kind of transcendence. The concept of god in the novel is clearly closer to Christ than the Greek gods: Christ, like Mangala, shares the human and godly features, has in a sense lived the non-transcendent life and consequently has understanding of suffering and death. Nussbaum sees this dualism as one of the most important characteristics of Christianity. After the Greek gods, the human dimension of Christianity has "turned us back to our own world with new attention and concern" (1990, 375) In the novel the relationship between the Goddess of Silence and Mangala is characteristically left undefined: it is difficult to say whether Silence is the Goddess and Mangala some kind of high priestess, or whether they are both realizations, or versions, of the same Goddess, sharing godly and human features. Mangala and her congregation are also strongly reminiscent of the concept of God and the notion of religion as defined by Levinas. I shall examine hte novel in relationship with Levinasian philosophy in the article in IV.I.

Although it does not dwell on them, the novel features several religious dualistic doctrines (*The Calcutta Chromosome* 212). One of them is the Nestorian doctrine that insists on the separateness of the human and divine aspects of Christ. Another dualistic system mentioned in the novel is the Manichean one. As John Thieme observes, in his treatment of dualistic systems like Manicheanism, Ghosh goes beyond the usual scope of

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postcolonial theory (see eg. Abdul Jan Mohamed) which typically holds that Manicheanism represents Western discourse that constructs binary relationships in which the colonial subject is always the inferior of the two participants. Thieme reminds us that originally Manicheanism was heretic according to the Augustinian theology, which was monistic and denied the separate existence of evil besides the omnipresence of God. Consequently, Thieme interprets the function of dualistic systems (including Manicheanism) in the novel to be one of "an Eastern challenge to the exclusiveness of Western discourses that deny the other's capacity for utterance" (Thieme 2000, 286). This is consistent with silence as religion in the narrative, as well as with the discursive omnipresence of the Western history of science.

These religious doctrines surface in the context of the archaeological excavations conducted by the Hungarian Countess Pongrácz, who has become the follower of the teachings of Valentinus. In the novel the divine and human features of Mangala do not seem to be distinct, and they certainly are not antagonistic: she is represented equally as a god and a human being in the narrative. The narrative also links Mangala and her initiates with an ancient Valentinian cult and its version of cosmology, "in which the ultimate deities are the Abyss and the Silence, the one being male and the other female, the one representing mind and the other truth" (*The Calcutta Chromosome* 212). Valentinus was the gnostic philosopher from Alexandria who brought dualistic religious beliefs to Rome in the second century A.D.

In addition to questions of ethically transcending the borders between gods and sciences, or religions and scientific methodologies, or silence and knowledge, the novel presents the description of parallel realities and social spaces as a means of forming connections over differing realties and ways of being/living. Parallel realities and space come to the fore for the first time in *The Shadow Lines*, where different spatial and temporal dimensions intertwine in the narrator's mind and narrative. I have already examined the narrator's personal concept of city-space in that novel. In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, space comes through predominantly as social space. On one

level, the novel narrates connections across the various class differences of the Calcutta of the 1990s, at the same time providing meticulous descriptions of the various homes, or 'conditions of inhabitance,' of the characters. In the following, I look at these themes of parallel realities and social spaces by way of introduction to the novel. The actual article (IV.4.) concentrates more on the problematic of silence as knowledge and knowledge as silence, as it examines the way in which this novel ethically subverts and dismantles the ways in which modernist discourses have set the world for us.

II.4.1. Parallel realities and social space

In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, the World Wide Web takes on the function of weaving as the creator of connections. The Web and the railway stations, on which people keep appearing and disappearing, function as crossing points between different, albeit parallel, realities. When in *In an Antique Land* the researcher (re)constructs the story and identity of the slave Bomma from ancient textual fragments that have been dispersed around the museums of the world, Antar in this later novel is going through the paraphernalia of everyday human life with his computer, Ava. Ava finds a battered ID card that it fails to recognize. This elusive trace leads to Murugan, who in turn has found traces/fragments of the secret group he is trying to find. The problematics of how to narrate what these fragments, or traces, represent in a discourse that by its nature excludes its target of representation is in the background of both novels.

The two networks of railroads and the World Wide Web connect spaces, as well as dimensions of reality. The places where people enter or exit these two systems are railway stations and personal computers (PCs). Both of these networks also 'host' different dimensions of reality, as becomes evident in the writer Phulboni's story of the small and empty Renupur station with its siding that runs parallel to the main line, or at the ending of the novel, where a crowd of voices appears from Antar's computer to help him into another reality. The significant railway stations in the narrative, in addition to the already mentioned Renupur, are

Sealdah Station in Calcutta and Penn Station in New York.
People are seen appearing or disappearing at these stations all
through the novel. Railway stations are also places that all kinds
of people visit, as is evident from the motley group of regulars in
the doughnut shop at Penn Station. As put by Martin Leer, they
also function like "a kind of real-world Internet portals" (Leer
2001, 55). And they seem to share some features of Internet chat-
sites, with people gathering in the cafes, or doughnut shops, to
gossip.

The scene that most apparently features the existence and
overlapping of parallel realities is the story relating Phulboni's
experiences in the Renupur station. The story itself, although
thematically an essential part of the novel as a whole, appears
somewhat separate from it on the narrative level. The varied
influences behind the story include the Indian tradition of
'railway stories,' examined by Leer with specific reference to *The
Calcutta Chromosome* (Leer 2001); a story by Rabindranath Tagore,
translated by Ghosh as "The Hunger of Stones" (in Ghosh 2002);
The Signalman, a story by Charles Dickens; and the stories by
Paneshwarnath Renu.[6] In Phulboni's story the mysterious
Laakhan, who functions as the intermediary between alternative
realities, appears in the station where Phulboni is sleeping. He
has come to signal in a train from another reality with his lamp.
Phulboni, like Grigson before him, follows the signal lamp and is
almost killed by the train that suddenly appears from the dark on
the rusty and overgrown siding. As Leer points out, railroads in
India have not obliterated regional differences, but they have
created new ways of passage that enable a 'Laakhan' to board a
train at a certain station and appear as 'Lutchman' at another
station when leaving the train. This makes the person in question
harder to pin down for the authorities (Leer 2001, 58). But clearly
here railroads and stations also provide a passage, or mode of
connection, between parallel dimensions of reality.

The overlapping of these realities is apparent on at least
two more occasions, which both happen to people who have had

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[6] See Chambers (2009) for clarification of the complex intertextual relationships
behind this 'story inside a story'.

malaria, and which have to do with sleeping and/or feverish hallucinations: when he receives a phone call from Tara/Mrs Aratounian/Mangala (responding to the future, 1990s and 1890s embodiments respectively), Antar has the feeling that she is actually in the same space with him (*The Calcutta Chromosome* 223-4). On another occasion, Murugan has a strange dream in which a test tube is broken when it falls onto the floor. He wakes up and finds on the floor "an inch-long shard of thin glass, probably from some kind of tube" (*The Calcutta Chromosome* 158). In a similar vein, John Thieme sees the novel's "near-repetition of variant forms of the same situation" (eg. Phulboni and Grigson both following the lantern and almost getting killed by the train, or the versions of Phulboni's story (*The Calcutta Chromosome* 228)) as destroying the idea of essentialist discursive versions of events (Thieme 2004, 265). Leer sees this as an instance of a chronotopological switch in the narrative that allows for "stories to coexist on different levels as each others' ghosts – as happens both in genetic processes and in cyberspace" (Leer 2001, 59). Consequently, this delineation of parallel realities/spaces in *The Calcutta Chromosome* is also evident at the level of narrative strategy, which is in this respect reminiscent of the narration of *The Shadow Lines* (especially the scene in the cellar examined in section II.2.1.).

As Suchitra Mathur points out, the congregation of silence performs its rituals and other actions in what could be described as intermediate spaces: "the outhouses, anterooms, ramshackle houses under construction, and private apartments, where the actual work of "interpersonal transference" takes place, are neither completely outside the dominant socio-political structure, nor completely controlled by it" (Mathur 2004, 133). A neat depiction of the paradoxical closeness of the public/dominant/visible and secret/ethical/invisible spaces is evident in the scene where Murugan finds the clay figurine in the refuse area behind the memorial arch of Ross. The figurine occupies the same space as the arch: it is actually hidden inside the memorial arch, albeit at its back, in a small hole which is practically imperceptible. Again, this seems to imply that these 'images,' the vast memorial arch denoting visible political

discourse and the tiny figurine referring to invisible ethical reality, represent synchronous dimensions of reality that exist in the same space, as was the case with the Renupur siding and the main railway line.

The novel also thematizes aspects of space other than the parallel existence of dimensions of reality and their crossing points. Khair has commented on the "shrinkage" of space in Indian literatures in English that goes for both social and geographical meanings of the word:

> The shrinkage of space lies not only in Babu fictions' self-confinement to middle-class areas of experience and the privileging of bourgeois and/or cosmopolitan – especially Babu-cosmopolitan – realities […]. On a higher level of abstraction, it marks the coalition of India and even Indian realities abroad into a homogeneus space of narration which, partly with the help of a stylized (and staged) language, denies the distances between these forcibly coalesced spaces. (2001, 324)

I have already examined Ghosh's representation of space in the context of *The Shadow Lines*. In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, his narration is also acutely aware of problems of representing space, geographically as in his second novel, but, as noted above, primarily socially. Geographically, the novel covers a wide area of space. Countries as diverse as the USA, India, Egypt and Sudan (Africa), Hungary, Sweden and Finland (Europe), and the Soviet Union and Armenia are mentioned. The novel also features characters coming from these areas, one of the most exotic of these being Madame Salminen, who appears to be a Finn. The way the specific discursive, or linguistic, features in the characters' prosodies are depicted in the text has been examined by Khair (2001), whose chapter on the novel is a substantial contribution to the research on Ghosh in general. Suffice it to note here that each character is given their own discursive space in the narrative, transcended by the use of English as the connecting language of narration.

The diversity of social space in the novel is evident in its description of the domestic surroundings of characters belonging to various social classes. The apartments of Antar (pp. 14-17), Sonali (pp. 95-99), and Urmila (pp. 129-134), as well as the guest house of Mrs. Aratounian (pp. 79-81) and the estate of Romen Haldar (pp. 185-188) are all described in detail, while even a glimpse of a British bungalow from early twentieth century India is provided. It is perhaps significant that much of the narrative happens in the private spaces of peoples' homes, in addition to the 'intermediary' spaces occupied by Mangala's group (outhouse, construction site, etc.). One of the few decidedly public places in the novel, besides railway stations, is the Rabindra Sadan auditorium, where Murugan meets Urmila and Sonali and where Phulboni is voicing his desperate plea to become included in the congregation of Silence and in the approaching 'crossing'.

Antar, who lives alone and works from home, lives in a future suburban area of New York. The building he lives in has previously been lively, full of rented private apartments, but is now being increasingly taken over by various businesses that use it for storage space. Antar is glad to get out after his day of work, "to step out of that bleak, cold building, encaged in its scaffolding of rusty steel fire escapes; to get away from the metallic echo of its stairways and corridors" (*The Calcutta Chromosome* 14). Sonali is a well-to-do film star and reporter, who obviously would not have to work for money. She lives alone in a new expensive, upper-class neighbourhood, but, although clearly a representative of upper classes, she shares her private space with a boy from the 'coolie' classes. The gap-toothed boy (the future embodiment of Laakhan/Haldar) is not strictly speaking a servant, but does some cleaning and cooking in compensation for rent. Sonali's apartment is expensive but without taste: it is characterized as "grotesque" with its "marble floors, the ornate gilt mirrors on the walls, the tall palms in the corners, in their polished brass planters. It wasn't like anything you expected to see in Calcutta, except in a five-star hotel." (*The Clacutta Chromosome* 95) Urmila, who is a young and ambitious reporter, lives with her extended family in a relatively poor, lower middle-

class conditions. There is not enough space in the apartment, and Urmila's mother keeps pressing her to get married and stay at home, instead of acting like a modern single working woman. Urmila is supposed to be the one taking care of all the daily household tasks, in addition to her work as a reporter. She sleeps on a campbed in the corridor outside the cockroach-infested kitchen. And Haldar, who has a relationship with Sonali, is a rich developer, who owns a mansion with a pillared portico. Finally, there is the 1990s embodiment of Mangala, the old Mrs. Aratounian, who has turned her nursery into a guest-house. The guest-house is on Robinson Street, which is "lined with large modern blocks of flats and a few old-fashioned colonial mansions." Aratounian's guest-house is "a massive four-story edifice, studded with graceful columned balconies" (*The Calcutta Chromosome* 80).

In the novel the scale of 'houses', which range from derelict outhouses and ramshackle construction sites via colonial mansions to modern estates and apartments, reflects the wide social scale and diversity of its characters and the Calcuttan society as a whole. This disrupts the dominant method of depicting social life as pertaining to middle-class circumstances in Indian English fiction (see Khair 2001). The connections the narrative forms between these characters from widely different backgrounds would be unusual in real life. But behind these connections functions the chromosome, which in this context implies the ethical reaching across differences of class and other qualifiers of social position. Whatever the real-life credibility of the relationships established in the novel, it clearly does not belong to the brand of Indian fiction in English that concentrates on the description of the social spaces and ideologies of the middle-classes, or of the cosmopolitan 'babu' experience, delineated by Khair.

At the level of narrative technique, the novel is a mixture, which forms connections between literary genres. The most obvious elements deployed in it come from the genre of science fiction. Chambers characterizes the novel as falling within the general definition of science fiction on account of its mixture of fantastic and real. There are also theories borrowed from current

scientific thinking, such as genetics and cloning technologies, and these are used to support the main impossible premise of the narrative: the idea of interpersonal transference (Chambers 2003, 59). But there are also elements of cyberpunk, and of the Victorian and Edwardian variants of detective stories, as well as features of what Khair describes as "a central genre of babu adolescence." According to Khair, this is "the tradition of the three Hs: Holmes, Hitchcock and the Hardy Boys" (see Khair 2001, 327) that has been common among the babu classes of India. However, in the novel these narrative techniques are put to a use that differs from that of their original context and function. As an example of this, Khair has listed some of the differences between *The Calcutta Chromosome* and cyberpunk as a genre. I shall briefly repeat some these differences here:

> For one, Ghosh's vision of the future, unlike that of cyberpunk, is not that of a dystopia. Second, Ghosh's cyberspace is an appendage of lived life, not its substitute. […] Third, cyberspace is not central to Ghosh's narration: humans are. Technology is not a fetish for the lack of humanity. The contacts established through computers are human contacts, not disembodied data. […] Ghosh's narration of subaltern subversion, in its physical enactment and strong social consciousness, also saves his novel from becoming the sort of 'consumer-oriented, technologically dependent libertarianism' that cyberpunk often seems to be. (Khair 2001, 331-332)

The future in the narrative certainly represents an ethical utopia in the Levinasian sense of reaching the ethical interpersonality, rather than any kind of dystopia. Indeed, it seems that Ghosh uses the cyberpunk elements in his narrative to create a society based on establishing agency and connections where they have not traditionally been discerned. The purpose of the article on this novel is to show that these elements (the chromosome and the way it works and is transmitted) serve to transform the power-relationships among social classes and genders ethically, and eventually even to transcend the limits of the discursively

constructed totality of the self into a silent society based on ethical relationships.

II.5. *The Glass Palace*

Leaving the intense introspections evident in *The Shadow Lines* for the sweeping horizons of historical epic, *The Glass Palace* (2000) describes the histories of the teak and the rubber trade, the Burmese royal family, the British Indian Army, the Indian National Army and the overall joined history of India, Burma and Malaysia from 1880s to 1990s. As is customary of Ghosh, these histories are conveyed by characters stemming from varying social backgrounds. This time, the characters in general come through as caricatures of the ideologies they represent. The stock of characters includes among others the rapacious and opportunistic businessman Rajkumar; Uma, the housewife who turns into an idealist activist; the Western-trained middle-class bureaucrat The Collector; the inward-turned humanist photographer Dinu and the happy-go-lucky (to begin with) soldier, Arjun. The physical characteristics of these characters conform to the ideologies they represent.

After the generic inventiveness and technical brilliance of the preceding two novels (*In an Antique Land* & *The Calcutta Chromosome*) this fifth novel follows straightforward linear narration in line with the classic realist historical novel. *The Glass Palace* is epic, like his latest novel, *The Sea of Poppies* (2008), and it is written in straightforward realist narration, like *The Hungry Tide* (2004) that followed it. This seems to signal a shift in Ghosh's narrative technique. There is a conversion into a strikingly placid style after the linguistic fireworks of *The Calcutta Chromosome*, which abounds in differing narrative styles and variations that indicate the idiosyncratic features of the parlances of the various characters. This has been commented on by Shameem Black, who sees this new style as an instance of a "flattened aesthetic" meant to make the linguistically diverse characters sound alike. This allows different readers to imagine linguistic difference for themselves without the confusing markers of sociocultural difference in the text (Black 2010, 166). I would say that this

change in narrative style corresponds to a change in the emphasis of concern from the narrative appropriation of the target of representation to that of readerly openness. The meticulous fidelity to the socio-cultural varieties of English of the earlier novel has transformed into a simplified and minimalistic mode of writing, allowing the implied readers from differing backgrounds to form an imaginative understanding of the text. Thereby the Western reader, for instance, is not continuously distracted by the sociocultural signifiers of Burmese, Hindustani, Tamil, Bengali or Japanese that form the list of prevalent implied languages in the novel.

Black has calculated that the narration of the novel documents the language choices of its characters on over seventy-five occasions (2010, 172). She also observes that these allusions are in many cases compiled in a manner that assures the reader of their possibility in real life. Consequently, in a scene unfolding for instance between a Westernized Bengali and a Malayan Tamil, it is made clear that the conversation proceeds in the lingua franca of either Hindustani or English (Black 2010, 173). This highlights Ghosh's rejection of popular means for representing sociolinguistic amalgamation in novels, such as magic realism and chutneyed English, or mixed argot, used by Salman Rushdie.

The novel presents all the languages filtered through it according to a consisted method that Ghosh and his editor developed together. When a foreign word appears in the text for the first time, it is printed in italics. The subsequent instances of the same word are printed in a typeface similar to the rest of the English prose. In most instances, the first appearance of a foreign word is either explained or is understandable from the context. The later instances of the same word are free of any explanatory material. As a consequence, the bits and pieces of foreign languages are smoothly incorporated into both visual and narrative registers of the novel after their first appearance. As Black concludes, this method of writing "refrains from privileging any single foreign language and opens up English equally to all of their claims on expressive power" (Black 2010, 175). Through this method Ghosh tries to ethically alleviate the

social and political power-relationships between different languages and to make his narrative accessible to as many multiple readers as possible.

The novel proceeds mainly through the examination of various ideas through discussions, in which differing ideologies are pitted against each other in an ethical manner that prioritises or vindicates none of them. Yet such juxtapositioning brings into view the pros and cons of each way of seeing the world more clearly and reaches towards a synthesis of viewpoints where each view is allowed to retain its voice and stance while they are brought into a meaningful relationship with each other. The debates address, among other things, nationalism, which is one of the major concerns in this novel. The discussions are not superfluous to the narrative; they cannot be over-looked in favour of the actual story line. In *The Glass Palace*, meaning lies not in individual utterances, but in their dialogical negotiations, the emphasis being on the manifold entirety of the plurality of viewpoints. The stances of most of the major figures become gradually modified during the course of the narrative through mutual interaction. Themes like theory and experience, duty and emotion etc., tend to become interwoven to muddle the borders between polemics and praxis.

Between the discussions the reader finds meticulous descriptions of the practical procedures of the teak and rubber trade, and descriptions of the private lives of the various characters. The impact of colonial commerce (the trade in teak, rubber and petroleum) and the spreading of Western consumer goods and technology (anthropological interest in cameras, cars and aeroplanes) come through in meticulous detail, while the narrative charts the vicissitudes of four families over four generations. The intersecting lives of the Burmese Royal family, the family of the business man and timber merchant, Rajkumar, and the families of Saya John and Uma Dey are woven together from previously unaddressed angles on the interconnected histories of India, Malaysia and Burma. The action in the novel is centred in Burma, but it features diasporas to India, the eastern half of the Indian Ocean (South East Asia), Europe and North America.

Among the many debates (e.g. about colonialism and women, Gandhi and the Ghadar party, Congress vs. the anti-Fascist position on the Second World War etc.) the one that is most resonant relates to the moral dilemma of the Indian officers in the British Army, some of whom later deserted to form the INA (Indian National Army). The article on the novel (IV.5.) examines more closely the way in which these discussions function, while the existential problem of the Indian officers in the British army is examined in the following sub-section. This problematic situation was largely created by the disabling discursive self-alienation brought about by the colonial discourses.

II.5.1. Self-alienation and totalitarianism – colonial and totalitarian discourses

One of the central themes in *The Glass Palace* is the way colonial discourses (primarily the military discourse) have moulded the subaltern identity and resulted in severe alienation. Self-alienation is apparent in the characters of the soldier, Arjun, who has been moulded into a war-machine in the hands of British military discourse and in the character of the Collector, a Britain-trained colonial administrator. Both these characters are destroyed: they end up in a dead end in their existential moorings and kill themselves. Arjun, the more prominent of these figures, can initially express himself only within the discourse of the military culture. As he finally realizes his condition as a puppet of this colonial discourse and manages to create some distance from it, he is left with nothing. He has nowhere to place his allegiances, so to speak, no language that would help him build a new self with other affiliations. This is consistent with Radhakrishnan's statement, introduced in the section on *In an Antique Land*, that in the colonial context, the subjectivity problematic is both urgent and morbid: people have to adopt an alien epistemology to develop a self-understanding. Further, the discursively colonized people are alienated from their prerogative to make truth claims: their truth claims inevitably come "from the Self of the dominant West" in the

discourse of the West (Radhakrishnan 2003, 14). Arjun becomes the victim of the discursive and political component of his subjectivity, which in the colonial context is often strong enough to annihilate the imaginary ethical side of human existence that is neede to balance the forces that mould us.

Arjun does finally recognizes this self-alienation, but his acts of self-assertion result in failure. Arjun's self-understanding, his image of himself, is radically altered through a discussion with his batman, Kishan Singh. Kishan Singh talks about the fear that makes the two of them hide as they do at that very moment: is it the fear of the Japanese or the British? Or is it the fear of themselves, the fear of the shadow of the gun instead of the gun itself. The allusion here is to the British military forces and the British Indian Army as the 'shadow' of these. Like the characters in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Arjun is almost delirious with fever, and ends up having hallucinatory visions that sadly reveal to him a reality he did not know existed.

> For a moment, it seemed to Arjun that Kishan Singh was talking about something very exotic, a creature of fantasy: a terror that made you remould yourself, that made you change your idea of your place in the world—to the point where you lost your awareness of the fear that had formed you. The idea of such a magnitude of terror seemed absurd—like reports of the finding of creatures that were known to be extinct. (*The Glass Palace* 430)

Arjun then concludes that the difference between officers and other ranks was that the common soldiers had no way of reaching and comprehending the instincts that made them act. They had no linguistic means of shaping their self-awareness, no access to the ethical. Therefore their fate was to remain strangers to themselves, always at the mercy of the directions of others. But in the same instant he arrives at this conclusion, the topsy-turvy way he has conceived of himself and his servant suddenly dawns on him. The "delirium of his pain" transforms his thinking:

He had a sudden, hallucinatory vision. Both he and Kishan Singh were in it, but transfigured: they were both lumps of clay, whirling on potters' wheels. He, Arjun, was the first to have been touched by the unseen potter; a hand had come down on him, touched him, passed over to another; he had been formed, shaped—he had become a thing unto itself—no longer aware of the pressure of the potter's hand, unconscious even that it had come his way. Elsewhere, Kishan Singh was still turning on the wheel, still unformed, damp, malleable mud. It was this formlessness that was the core of his defence against the potter and his shaping touch. (*The Glass Palace* 430-31)

Here the decidedly discursive power-mechanisms of British colonialism in identity formation are represented through the metaphor of image or vision. The image of the potter's thumb (the colonial discourse) and the clay (the colonial subject) is recurrent in Ghosh's novels, but nowhere else is it applied to the effect it orchestrates in this passage. Arjun begins to realize that it is in fact he, not his servant, who has ingeniously and inconspicuously been formed (or, as he later reflects, de-formed) by the British military and other discourses without him noticing the process, which Kishan Singh has actually been capable of resisting. Arjun finds himself at a loss:

He had never thought of his life as different from any other; he had never experienced the slightest doubt about his personal sovereignty; never imagined himself to be dealing with anything other than the full range of human choice. But if it were true that his life had somehow been moulded by acts of power of which he was unaware—then it would follow that he had never acted of his own volition; never had a moment of true self-consciousness. Eveything he had ever assumed about himself was a lie, an illusion. And if this were so, how was he to find himself now? (*The Glass palace* 431)

Arjun finally decides to place his loyalties not with the Japanese like his friend Hardy, but with India, and joins the Indian National Army. After the Allied forces win the decisive victory over the Japanese, the last remnants of INA continue fighting in the jungles of Burma. Arjun is with these last remaining soldiers when Dinu meets him in a deserted village. When Dinu wonders why the INA is still fighting although the Allied forces have beaten the Japanese, Arjun answers that he did not join the Japanese, but the Indian army, which still has a cause for fighting the Allied forces.

When Dinu observes that they have no hope, Arjun's answer is desperate:

> 'Did we ever have a hope?' he said. 'We rebelled against an Empire that has shaped everything in our lives; coloured everything in the world as we know it. It is a huge, indelible stain which has tainted all of us. We cannot destroy it without destroying ourselves. And that, I suppose, is where I am…' (*The Glass Palace* 518)

This scene, implying that the monster of the Empire will live on inside its creations which therefore have to be destroyed is one of the most hopeless in Ghosh's whole oeuvre. Arjun feels that he and the likes of him must die in order to completely destroy the Empire. For Dinu, Arjun's way of thinking represents "the greatest danger." In his view, Arjun chooses the stand where "in resisting the powers that form us, we allow them to gain control of all meaning; this is their moment of victory: it is in this way that they inflict their final and most terrible defeat" (*The Glass Palace* 518-19). This reflects Ghosh's view on language and discourse as dangerous at large: they define their objects in certain ways, and their ingenuous processes of definition and knowledge production are very difficult to escape from. This is why the transcending of cultural and ideological definitions, or even the whole dimension of discursively constructed knowledge, through ethically formed personal imaginary identifications is so important in his narratives. As Ghosh has observed, Indians have to cope with "the absolute fact of defeat

and the absolute fact of trying to articulate defeat to yourself and trying to build a culture around the centrality of defeat" (Ghosh in Aldama 89). Ghosh is here referring to the tremendous power of the discourses of modernity on identity formation in the colonial context. This could be extended to cover the failure of India as a whole under the modernist discourse of nationalism. This can, then, be seen as an instance of the pessimistic mood that tends to haunt the literatures stemming from the tradition of the Bengali Renaissance.

The novel also reacts to the existence of totalitarian regimes. The military regime in the modern state of Myanmar comes under scrutiny towards the end of the novel, when Jaya goes to Myanmar to search for Dinu, who has opened a photo studio there. The limited scope of the discursive reach of the regime is nicely illustrated in the scene where Daw Thin Thin Aye goes to meet the government censor who has read a story written by her. The officer tells her that she does not know how to write Burmese. He complains that he has spent a lot of time correcting the manuscript, which is now full of red pencil marks. After pronouncing that it is not his job to teach people how to write, he tells Daw Thin Thin Aye to take her paper and leave. In the bus, the perplexed writer takes a look at the manuscript: "His vocabulary, she realized, was that of a child; he was barely literate. He had run his pencil over everything he hadn't understood – puns, allusions, archaisms" (*The Glass Palace* 536). The implication here is, of course, that in addition to occupying a very narrow discursive-ideological space, the representatives of the government discourse are not interested in finding out about things that are beyond them: they clearly presume that the way they see things is the only correct way. There is nothing else to understand: everything else is banality.

In a manner reminiscent of the silent group in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, the people at the meetings Dinu arranges in his studio communicate outside the discursive world of the regime and therefore the spies sent to the meetings cannot understand what is going on. In both cases, then, subaltern agency exists, and can only exist, in an ethical dimension outside the discursive reality of the hegemonic group. But there are obvious situational

differences between these groups. Whereas the silent group in the earlier novel is trying to escape the ideology of western modernity and its imperialistic-scientific discourse, the people gathering at the photo studio are trying to avoid a brutal military regime which has turned everything into politics. As a consequence of this superficial view of reality, the regime cannot react to things beyond political conspiracies and organizational matters. These, on the other hand, it sees everywhere, which has led to a preposterously extensive system of control.

Consequently, the ideology of western modernity with its inherent scientific and colonialist discourses seems to be a far more complex construction to resist or overcome than the oppressive politics of the totalitarian regime in Myanmar, although modernity does not have ostensible control over people in the manner of the regime. The discourses of modernity shape subjects and identities without them noticing it, as was the case with Arjun. This ideological system actually destroys Arjun who cannot escape its grip and forces Mangala's group to act in silence and secrecy. Despite its show of military power and extreme control over both public and personal sectors, the regime does not have the ideological and epistemological depth and power of the British colonialism. With its superficial political notion of reality it cannot have the kind of ideological machinery that enabled the British colonial system to take hold of all meaning and produce subjects who were heavily dependent upon it (cf. Arjun in the novel).

Consequently, the people at Dinu's studio are not forced to withdraw into complete silence, but they are able to remain in the realm of discourse, albeit a different discourse from that of the regime. Dinu uses the language of photography and of the image as a representative system into which the spies sent by the regime have no access:

> Today for example, I was talking about Edward Weston's theory of pre-visualisation … that you must see the truth of your subject in your mind … after that the camera is incidental, unimportant … If you know the truth of what you see, the rest is mere execution. Nothing can come

between you and your imagined desire … no camera, no lens …' He shrugged, smiling. 'To that list I could have added: No band of criminals like this regime … But I did not have to tell them that in so many words … They understood what I was saying … they knew … you saw how they laughed and clapped … Here in the Glass Palace photography too is a secret language.' (*The Glass Palace* 509-10)

The concept of "imagined desire" as an example of the ethical approach towards the alterity of the other shall be examined in the article on *The Shadow Lines*. In this instant, Dinu's ethical call for personal truths of the mind, achieved through imaginary constructions and not filtered through the censorship system and narrow political epistemology of the regime must be of importance for the citizens of Myanmar. For people living inside closed borders with practically no access to foreign media or any other outside influences, the desire to know the otherness beyond the border is presented as a burning issue.

Unlike totalitarian military regimes, novels are not closed systems, but exist in a relationship with other texts, be they fictional or non-fictional. So far, I have paid little attention to Ghosh's use of intertexts, although these are hinted at in many of his novels. An obvious intertext for *The Glass Palace* would be *At Large in Burma*, the non-fiction piece by Ghosh himself, which comprises one of the three texts in *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma* (1998). This text relates the three times the narrator (a Ghosh-persona) has met Aung San Suu Kyi. As intertexts by other writers go, *The Shadow Lines* forms an obvious connection with the novella, *The Shadow-Line* (1917), by Joseph Conrad. The relationship between these two shall be looked at in the article on the novel in section V.2. In the following section, I shall introduce Ghosh's sixth novel, *The Hungry Tide* (2004), through its central theme of human alienation from nature. I shall do this in a relationship with its intertexts.

II.6. *The Hungry Tide*

The Hungry Tide (2004), features a triangular relationship between the Americanized cetologist Piya, the professional translator Kanai and the illiterate fisherman Fokir. The setting is the Sundarbans, a labyrinthine area of mangrove islands on the Bay of Bengal. Also referred to as the tide country, it forms the delta of the Irrawaddy river. The mixing of river water with sea water and the ecological niches this creates provide Ghosh with elaborate metaphors for inter-cultural connections, replacing the metaphors of weaving or the World Wide Web and railroads as the symbol of connections and the dissolving of binaries. Nature and animals (notably dolphins and tigers) are presented as the others of human beings, and their way of being and communicating is compared to those of humans, who are largely presented as inhibited by linguistic totalities that tie them to the self without 'real' access to other humans or to nature and animals.

Kanai and Piya arrive in the area where Fokir lives for different reasons. Piya comes there to search for river dolphins which have previously received little attention within the science of cetology. Kanai comes to collect a parcel his late uncle, Nirmal, has left him. The parcel appears to contain a diary, excerpts from which are sprinkled through the novel. Piya asks Fokir to accompany her as a guide in the canals of the area, and Kanai goes along to act as a translator between the two.

All in all, this sixth novel by Ghosh contains most of the motifs, themes and narrative strategies to be found in his earlier writings. At the level of narrative strategy, the overall construction is close to the previous novel, *The Glass Palace*. The text is straightforward realist narration, albeit with much shorter chapters than in the previous, more historically oriented novel. The narrative also contains several overtly scientific passages, going through the history and methods of cetology or explaining the structure and functioning of the equipment needed. This feature is to be found in every novel by Ghosh and has, in addition to offering necessary information, the function of placing the factual knowledge production strategy of sciences

against the imaginary components of the narrative and creating connections between the two. The novel also contains oral tales referring to mystic features, exemplified by the story of Bon Bibi, the protecting Goddess of the tide country. And there is even the mixture of science and myth, exemplified by the lesson Nirmal plans for the children of the tide country, explaining the formation of the sub-continent through an amalgamation of geology and religion. *The Hungry Tide* also uses the construction of multiple views that may be antagonistic but are nonetheless given equal status in the narrative. This strategy was used especially in *The Glass Palace* and is in this later novel adopted particularly in connection with Kanai's late uncle, Nirmal, who is described by at least three characters. Concerning the use of languages other than English, where Ghosh previously used non-English words to fill in gaps in the English vocabulary, we now find longer phrases or sayings immediately followed by a translation into English.

At the thematic level, Ghosh returns to his fascination with what he refers to as "patterns of work." In his view, "even the most mundane forms of labour can embody an entire metaphysic" (Ghosh 2002, x). This is most readily observable in the characters of Piya and Kanai, but comes through in other characters as well as one of the components of their identity. As Ghosh has acknowledged, in his earlier works this thematic is most prominent in *The Circle of Reason* and *The Glass Palace*. In the following scene, Kanai compares his desire to understand worldviews constructed by foreign languages with his desire for Piya, who is standing nearby examining the river through her binoculars:

> 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 the recasting of the usual order of things. It was pure desire that had quickened his mind then and he could feel the thrill of it even now – except that now that desire was incarnated in the woman who was standing before him, in the bow, a language made flesh. (*The Hungry Tide* 269)

Kanai's "pattern of work", his metaphysics, is strongly tied with language and discursive realities to begin with. In his view, everything is constructed by language, one just has to try and unravel the logics of the different worldviews of the targets of interpretation, be they other languages or other people. But the problem seems to be that he cannot fully satisfy his desire for the other human being through language. This neatly paves the way for the ethical 'experiences' transcending language that are staged in the novel and examined in detail in the article later (V.6.).

To continue with themes familiar from Ghosh's earlier novels, *The Hungry Tide* also includes a scene in which there is an attacking mob, although in this novel the mob attacks a tiger instead of people of a different religion or nationality (*The Hungry Tide* 290). There is also the scene with the shrine on the island of Garjontola representing the hybrid religion of the tide country (246), which recalls the equally hybrid shrine and religion the narrator of *In an Antique Land* finds in Mangalore on the west coast of India. Also the interest in etymology professed in this previous novel is present here. And there is the presence of a socialist enterprise in the Sundarban area, first conceived by Sir Daniel Hamilton in the 19th century and recreated in the 1970s on one of the islands by a group of refugees. There have been references to quasi-socialist phenomena in Ghosh's novels previously, most notably in *The Circle of Reason*, in which a group of people attempt to live without the use of money.

In *The Hungry Tide*, this typical ideal utopia sketched by Ghosh in all of his novels in different ways is present in the form of the recurring socialist movement in the tide country. The first occurrence was conceived by the rich Scotsman, Hamilton, who himself was a capitalist from head to toe. He buys land in the

area from the British officials and welcomes anyone willing to work on it. Nirmal describes the idea of the enterprise to the young Kanai:

> They could not bring all their petty little divisions and differences. Here there would be no Brahmins or Untouchables, no Bengalis and no Oriyas. Everyone would have to live and work together. […] What he wanted was to build a new society, a new kind of country. It would be a country run by co-operatives, he said. Here people wouldn't exploit each other and everyone would have a share in the land. (*The Hungry Tide* 51-52)

In this society the value of money would be based on actual work, not on value abstracted (or alienated, to use the term of Marx) from actual results of work. The project got a good start, with the blessings of eminent nationalist figures like Gandhi and Thakur, but after Hamilton's death it gradually withered away. The second attempt in this direction took place in the 1970s, when a group of people, originally refugees from what was now Bangladesh, moved to one of the islands. These people had been promised refuge in India, but instead they had been placed in prison-like camps somewhere in central India. They escaped and found their way to the tide country after what could be described as a long refugee march inside India. The first attempt can, with a slight stretch of imagination, be seen as modelled on the way in which Western states have been known to impose their concept of democracy on the so called third world countries. After the introduction of the idea, people have been left on their own after which the structure has collapsed. But the second attempt described in the novel has not been conceived by an outsider, but is the genuine outcome of the desires of the people themselves, an instance of subaltern agency, as it were. Sadly, these people have chosen as their area an island which the government has assigned as a nature reserve. The events lead to the massacre of the inhabitants of the island, which emphasizes the theme of the relationship between humans and nature. It seems that these

people are ranked below trees and animals in the government's hierarchy.

Ghosh continues his characteristic dismantling of totalities and categories, this time using the imagery of nature to emphasize the heterogeneous and constantly changing character of human societies on the one hand and the eternally unchangeable cycles of history on the other. The Sundarbans area is seen as an intermediate border zone between land and sea, where river water mixes with sea water producing peculiar life environments. The environment also leads to animal behaviour not found elsewhere and consequently not predictable through previous findings of science. The relationship between man and nature is also altered. Where nature is usually moulded, utilized and exploited by humans, in the Sundarbans there is very little to mould and the accomplishments of people are every now and then washed away by huge tidal waves or tsunamis. Animals too are hostile to man, especially the tigers, which are strongly thematized in the narrative. But animals are also described as 'working' together with people, as in the case of dolphins helping fishermen to round up fish for mutual benefit (*The Hungry Tide* 168-169), or represented as equally migrant or equally massacred by wars as human beings (*The Hungry Tide* 305-307).

In addition to varying themes introduced in the previous novels and adapting them to the new scenario, this latest narrative also continues the development of themes that have been central through all the novels by Ghosh. This time, the quest for connections in the narrative covers the relationship of human beings to nature and animals. Another strong theme linked with that of nature and animals is the examination of the linguistic and epistemological alienation of humans from their circumstances and from one another. The capability of language to represent emotions and the encounter with the other is increasingly in doubt in recent work by Ghosh. These functions of language are in *The Hungry Tide* partly replaced by bodily gestures, like facial expressions and touching, as well as by a kind of transcendental mode of contact that exists beyond discourse. *Duino Elegies* by Rainer Maria Rilke are brought in as an intertextual backup for the thematics of human alienation from nature and animals, who

are seen as having a deeper connection with the world proper. Consequently, the tension between a dimension transcending language and an emphasis on textuality and difference is even more urgent than in the previous writings of Ghosh.

Whereas the article on this novel (V.6.) concentrates on the breaking of the linguistic ontologies of Piya and Kanai and the ethical transcending of human language, which is seen as a deceptive framework alienating us from one another and the world proper, the following section examines how the use of intertexts backs up the central theme of the novel.

II.6.1. Human alienation from nature: intertextual links

The Hungry Tide contains numerous references to the *Duino Elegies* (1923) by Rainer Maria Rilke. The citations from this collection of poems (*The Hungry Tide* 8, 165, 182, 206, 216, 225, 275, 278, 287, 360) are usually placed in the excerpts from Nirmal's diary, which Kanai is reading. The thematic similarities between *The Hungry Tide* and *Duino Elegies* are quite striking. Rilke writes about the alienation of human beings from nature and animals. As with Ghosh, one dividing factor seems to be language: in Rilke's view, humans are not at home in their "translated" world. However, Rilke's idea of nature as something unreachable by humans does not come through in the short excerpts that are located in Nirmal's diary.

Nirmal is an eccentric character. He is a former radical Marxist who ended up as a teacher in the school on one of the islands, Lusibari. He is reminiscent of another eccentric teacher, Balaram, in *The Circle of Reason*. Balaram was obsessed with Pasteur and phrenology, Nirmal with Rilke and radical Marxism. Nirmal tends to interpret Rilke's writings of transformation and nature as pertaining to socio-political ideals, and is very eager to become part of the socialist project beginning in the area, which he sees as an instance of revolutionary 'transformation.' His wife, Nilima, who runs a hospital and is, in contrast to Nirmal, a very pragmatic character, sees her husband as being obsessed by politics and revolution. For her, this is the ultimate reason for Nirmal's interest in the socialist group. But in Kanai's opinion,

Nirmal is possessed more by words than by politics. In his view, it was important for Nirmal to see himself as a historical materialist, which for him "meant that everything which existed was interconnected: the trees, the sky, the weather, people, poetry, science, nature. He hunted down facts in the way a magpie collects shiny things. Yet when he strung them all together, somehow they did become stories – of a kind" (*The Hungry Tide* 282). Nirmal, then, represents another example of a character very much alienated from the world by language: he lives in a world translated through stories and fails to interpret correctly the practical reality surrounding him. In a similar manner to another uncle, Tridib in *The Shadow Lines*, with whom Nirmal also shares certain characteristics, he is destroyed by the violent actions of the real world.

The following excerpts from *The Eighth Elegy* of Rilke's *Duino Elegies* contain most of the key concepts of Ghosh's novel:

> All eyes, the creatures of the World look out
> into the open. But our human eyes,
> as if turned right around and glaring in,
> encircle them; prohibiting their passing.
> What lies outside, their faces plainly show us.
> Yet we compel even our youngest; force
> each child always to stare behind, at what's
> already manifest, and not to see
> that openness which lies so deep within
> the gaze of animals. (1-10)

> We never have, not for a single day,
> pure *space* before us – all its flowers
> opening endlessly: there is ever World.
> We never find that nowhere, free from
> negatives, unsupervised and pure; the place
> which we might breathe and know unendingly,
> and never crave. (15-21)

> If they possessed our kind of consciousness
> those steady animals, whose own direction

always counters ours, would wrench us around
to follow where they lead. To animals
their being is infinite, unknowable;
and they look out from it, not at themselves. (40-45)

And we, we stay spectators; turned towards
all things and still transcending none. (74-75)

Rilke's message seems to be almost identical to that of the novel. Humans are conceived as prisoners of the totalities of self-generated ontologies that prevent the transcending of the world of objects, while for animals the world is infinite. When animals perceive the world they can actually see outside themselves, whereas people only find themselves in everything they see. For the poems, as for the novel, the thematics of vision and seeing tend to take the place of language: the excerpts above do not once mention language. The novel thematizes language strongly, but offers seeing, or vision, as an alternative way of perceiving the world. The reference to Piya and Fokir as animals in the intentness of their awareness of each other emphasizes the infinite and non-linguistic nature of a love relationship: animals do not have language and they are conceived as capable of seeing beyond themselves to the other in a manner not possible for humans who are imprisoned within their linguistic totalities.

Rilke's observing subject is opposed to the world and its objects to begin with, but there is nonetheless a sense of perpetual contact between everything that exists underlining the poems. What the poems aim at is the giving away of one's personality in front of other forms, be they objects of nature or other humans. The personality of the observer can dissolve and he/she can transform into other objects, in a sense become the other object or person, much in the way in which Kanai becomes Fokir in seeing though his consciousness (see the article in section V.6.). In her study of Rilke, Priscilla Washburn Shaw detects a quest for "the pure relation," corresponding to a fusion of the same and the other: "There is an almost imperceptible shift away from the relationship of self-discipline to realization of the object, away from the seeming conflict between the existence of both self and

non-self. These distinctions have become fused or obliterated" (Washburn Shaw 1964, 77). In the narration of Ghosh, the subject is constructed precisely through connections with others who, in the manner of the self in Rilke's poems, encapsulate both other people, and, in the case of *The Hungry Tide*, nature and animals. And for Ghosh, like Rilke, the ideal utopia would be a space where the lines of division between the self and things outside have dissolved.

In addition to Rilke's poems, it may not be too far-reaching to search for connections between *The Hungry Tide* and American transcendentalism. Ghosh has acknowledged his admiration of Herman Melville, who can be seen as one of the offsprings of this Emersonian quest for transcending nature (Ghosh in Sandall 2004). Of Melville's novels Ghosh mentions especially *Moby-Dick* (1851), which has obvious thematic links with *The Hungry Tide*. The search for the whale, which signifies the unreachable and unknowable nature in general, is narrated in several discourses in a manner reminiscent of the narrative technique of Ghosh that creates room for multiple ways of interpreting the world. The two searches for the whale and the dolphins symbolize the search for the transcending of nature. As Ruland and Bradbury describe *Moby-Dick*,

> the book itself constantly multiplies its own language, as it conducts its own narrative and linguistic search for the meaning of the "whale." We hear the language of dusty scholarship, of scientific cetology, of Christian and classical myth and romantic celebration, of voyaging and adventure, as the prose seeks a sufficient commensurability. (Ruland & Bradbury 1991, 161)

Of the discursive modes mentioned above the narration of *The Hungry Tide* has woven into it the languages of scholarship (in the form of etymology), cetology, myth (the story of Bon Bibi), adventure and even what could be characterized as romantic celebration of the beauty of nature. For Ghosh the multiple discourses have to do with the linguistic constructedness of the world. Each "pattern of work" and way of life creates its own

construction flavoured by the personal character of the interpreter. Melville's point is very similar, although he does not contemplate the functions and character of language to the extent that Ghosh does: in Melville's view there is no human way to any ultimate truth, which means that there can only be different interpretations, as becomes evident in *Moby-Dick* in the chapter "The Doubloon," in which every member of the crew interprets the coin symbolizing the circle of the world differently.

The characterization of nature as ultimately hostile is also to be found in both novels, although perhaps for different reasons. In contrast to the ideas of earlier transcendentalists like Emerson, Melville does not see nature as benevolent, but as "a deceitful hieroglyph" in which people see their own image. People plunge into this image they cannot actually reach, and drown in it in the manner of Narcissus. This is very close to the effect linguistic totalities have in Ghosh's writing: they block the outside world so that people only see a reflection of themselves when attempting to look outside. People are seen as linguistically alienated from nature, which partly explains why it is seen as hostile. In addition to this, Ghosh also seems to thematise the hostility of nature and its animals in *The Hungry Tide* partly as a counter-force to the hostility people often show towards nature and animals, cutting down rainforests or killing animals for money. But of course there are other differences. Where Melville's novel can be aptly described as "Romantic Faustian tragedy of man confronting nature and divine power" (Ruland & Bradbury 160), Ghosh's narrative has more to do with confronting the barriers that linguistic ontologies pose between people on the one hand and between people and nature on the other. The transcending of language does not reveal any divine meaning in the Emersonian sense, but makes possible connections in a common dimension where the border between the self and the other (the other is conceived in the novel both as another human being and as nature including animals) has vanished. Melville constructs "a resonant material world which would yield its transcendent significance only to the free play of suggestive analogy" (Ruland & Bradbury 124). The material world of Ghosh's narratives is always meticulously described,

but in *The Hungry Tide* the transcendent dimension is perhaps more thematised by concentrating on the functions of the mediator of analogies, language, than the analogies themselves. But both novels have as a basic theme the search for something beyond the self, something that is conceived as a mystery.

II.7. Other writing by Amitav Ghosh

In 2008, Ghosh's latest novel, *Sea of Poppies*, was published. As it forms the first part of a trilogy, the whole of which is yet to be written, the novel is not analysed in this dissertation. Nonetheless, it merits a short description. The novel comes across as an epic saga, and is the first in an Ibis-trilogy Ghosh has been planning. The novel is set in northern India and the Bay of Bengal in the 1830s, just before the First Opium War. Typically of Ghosh, the novel has a large array of characters including Deeti, the upper caste wife of an opium addict; Kalua, the low caste ox-cart driver with a strong physique; Neel Rattan, the Bengali aristocrat and Ah Fatt, a half-Parsi and half-Chinese opium addict. The destinies of these characters are intertwined on board the. The Ibis sails over the notorious 'black waters' from Calcutta to Mauritius. The metaphor of journey, or travel, which is a popular one in Ghosh's writings, is used to great effect in the narration to examine the typical issues which concern Ghosh beginning with subaltern destinies leading to colonial injustices – going through the large and small ironies of history.

Ironies of history, be they large or small, are also found throughout the non-fiction of Ghosh. It is rather rare for a novelist to create as large a body of essays as Ghosh has. Whatever his reason for such an extensive engagement in journalism and cultural-political commentary, it serves to reach a wider public than he would have as a writer of fiction. The essays typically form a more ostensibly analytical and politically informed background for the more imaginary contents of the novels, giving voice to Ghosh's academically and journalistically oriented interests. Although they are written in a different discourse, these cultural-political commentaries are typically compiled into the form of stories, searching for a high level of

engagement in the reader. The non-fictional writings by Ghosh are customarily treated only in passing in academic criticism on his works. Such is the case also in this dissertation. In the following, I shall very briefly look at the themes covered by Ghosh's non-fiction publications.

These themes have been listed as follows by John Hawley (2005, 18-19), whose monograph is a good source for an ample overview of Ghosh's non-fiction. Where there are obvious thematical parallels with the novels, I have added the novel/s in question to the list:

- The nuclearisation of India
- The political crisis that has been evolving in Burma and Cambodia (*The Glass Palace*)
- The maintenance of cultural heritage (*The Circle of Reason*, *In an Antique Land*)
- Pre-European trade between India and Africa (*The Circle of Reason*, *In an Antique Land*)
- Fundamentalism (*In an Antique Land*)
- Anthropology & economics in local communities (all the novels)
- The diaspora (*The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines*, *The Glass Palace*)

These themes are spread over the three texts in *Dancing in Cambodia, At Large in Burma* (1998), *Countdown* (1999), the collection of essays, *The Imam and the Indian: Prose Pieces* (2002) and *Incendiary Circumstances* (2006), which was published after Hawley's monograph and adds the theme of international terrorism to the above list. In the preface to *Incendiary Circumstances*, Ghosh refers to terrorism and violent repression and echoes his statement in an earlier essay on the violence that followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984, *The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi* from 1995:

> The deadly logic of terrorism is precisely to invite repression: it is thus that it brings into being the social gulf on which its existence is predicated. To write carelessly can all too easily add to the problem by appearing to endorse either terrorism or violent repression. In such incendiary

circumstances words can cost lives, and it is only
appropriate that those who deal in them should pay
scrupulous attention to what they say. (2006: ix)

Ghosh further evokes the statement by Mahatma Gandhi that
there is no such thing as a means to an end – means *are* ends. I
shall come back to Ghosh's technique of representing violence in
sub-section III.3. For present purposes it suffices to say that in
Ghosh's view, 'incendiary circumstances' of terror and violence
are no longer a feature of 'half-formed nations' (2006: x) (meaning
basically third-world, or postcolonial, societies), but have after
the strikes of 9/11 become typical anywhere in the world. And it
is here that it should be remembered that not all possible means
should be permissible to reach the desired end. As for Ghosh as a
writer, he certainly tries to take into account the influence words
have in the incendiary circumstances of the contemporary world:
it has become one of the trademarks of his writing, both in fiction
and in non-fiction, not to narrate matters into spectacles by being
too polemical and provocative.

In his non-fiction, Ghosh in general uses similar strategies
to those used in his fiction: he conjures up unforeseen
connections through juxtaposing and interweaving lives of
'small', or, alternatively, 'real-life', people against the canvas of
large historical developments. Through this technique, such
historical persons as, for instance, Pol Pot and King Sisowath
become represented as having similar backgrounds (*Dancing in
Cambodia*). Ghosh's engagement with the human condition,
backed up by its larger global preconditions comes through as a
style which manages to hold together a global, ecumenical
perspective while focusing on highly individual, often contested
or marginalized histories, such as those of King Sisowath and Pol
Pot, or that of Aung San Suu Kyi, and so forth.

Ghosh's skills as both story-teller and sensitive interpreter
of historical and political developments is revealed in the way his
non-fiction narratives effectively counterpoise vignettes of
human drama that occur in distinctive locales against epic
backdrops that adumbrate global issues of capitalized 'History',
without taking away the significance from either. His non-fiction

(notably *The Imam and the Indian*) brings to the fore his deep engagement in the political and cultural entanglements typical of the contemporary postcolonial and globalized world.

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III. Contexts and Themes

The first two sub-sections here are contextualizing in nature. The first sub-section introduces the theoretical and methodological bases for ethical study of literature, before looking at the ways in which Ghosh's novels are open to an ethical approach. Sub-section III.2. contextualizes Ghosh's writing in the general intellectual and political history and climate of the Subcontinent. The purpose of the latter half of the section is to continue the examination of themes unfolding through the novels of Amitav Ghosh. Where section II was structured according to each of the six novels covered by this dissertation, sub-sections III.3. and III.4. are compiled thematically. The passage on the representation of violence (III.3.) centres on *The Shadow Lines*, while the section on narration and silence (III.4.) refers to several novels simultaneously.

Sub-section III.1.1. offers a short introduction to the varied field of ethical study of literature by way of looking at its theoretical and philosophical starting points. In sub-section III.1.2., the theory of the meta-ethical, as developed by Emmanuel Levinas, is brought into contact with novels by Ghosh, anticipating the theoretical basis of the six core articles of this dissertation. My purpose is to show how I have adapted Levinas's thinking to the analysis of fiction, and to demonstrate how literature lends itself to ethically informed analysis. This section is loosely based on a previous article (Huttunen 2009).

Section III.2. explores the cultural and political background of Ghosh's writing by examining the ways in which ideologies of modernism and postmodernism have been adopted among the intelligentsia on the Subcontinent. This is done in relationship with the political developments in India after independence. Although secondary to family as a combining unit, nationalism is a prominent theme in Ghosh's novels (notably in *The Shadow Lines* and *The Glass Palace*). This section touches on nationalism as a superimposed Western discourse in Indian circumstances, but does not linger on this vast topic.

Violence and its representation are central to Ghosh's writing and are somehow featured in all his novels.

Acknowledging this, section III.3. examines Ghosh's depiction of communal violence in the subcontinent and the two-dimensional way in which he represents both the horror of violence and the affirmation of humanity involved in violence through his representation of rioting. The power-related political overtones carried by language are balanced by an ethical awareness in Ghosh's fiction. As a result, violence is not straightforwardly defined by any singular discourse appropriating the phenomenon into its own knowledge production strategies. Its presence is acknowledged and it is defined to the extent it has to be, but the ethical awareness of the combined impossibility and precariousness of an adequate representation of it is also present in the narrative. This subsection is also based on a previous article (Huttunen 2008a).

The relationship between narration and silence, examined in section III.4., continues the introduction of important themes in Ghosh's novels. This section examines the way narratives by Ghosh stand in relationship to issues such as globalization and universality versus particularity, before turning to the ways in which the relationship between narration and silence is treated in his fiction. In Ghosh's writing, the function of silence in relationship to discourse and narration varies from a mere lack of meaning, or banality, into subversive action unfurling beyond discourse in the realm of the ethical. This subsection, again, is based on a previous article (Huttunen 2003b).

III.1. Theoretical and methodological starting points

This section aims to quickly chart the diverse terrain of the contemporary ethical study of literature beginning from its theoretical and methodological starting points. The section begins with an overall introduction of ethical studies of literature, while trying to situate the present study within this field. The latter part of the section moves more specifically to the theme of ethics as it comes through in Ghosh's writing. The purpose here is to briefly examine four of Ghosh's novels with the aim of showing how he represents the relationship between ethics and language. In general, this section has an introductory and contextualizing

function. It approaches the main subject of this dissertation and the six articles: the ethics of representing the other and the ethics of narrative representation in general. It also introduces aspects of Levinasian ethics, which spreads over the article section (IV) as the combining theoretical principle.

In *Literature, Power and the Recovery of Philosophical Ethics*, Coady and Miller maintain that

> One of the striking features of contemporary literary theory, and indeed cultural studies more generally, is what might be termed its socio-politicisation of the ethical. Literary texts, traditionally viewed as repositories of moral and aesthetic insight or challenge, tend now to be seen as predominantly ideological constructions, or sites of power struggles between social powers of various kinds (Coady & Miller 201).

This is indeed characteristic of what is often referred to as the 'ethical turn' in literary studies. Contemporary ethical criticism is closely linked with discussions of otherness at the mercy of discursive power. It examines, among other things, questions of how to represent otherness in a text, how to respond to the other and how to bring the concept of otherness to bear on the experience of reading and writing. Much of ethical theory, then, concentrates on interpersonal relationships, emphasizing the need for solidarity across ontological and epistemological divides, while retaining the ultimate alterity of the other. As should be evident by now, this dissertation concentrates on the representation of otherness and the creation of relationships in texts by Amitav Ghosh. And the concept of otherness here engulfs other people (both single and as groups), social classes, other discourses, other narrative epistemologies and discursive formations. Ethics is here conceived as Levinasian meta-ethics — it is not to be confused with compiling rules of conduct, or with the contemplation on the quality of life. Further, ethics is decidedly not the same as morality, a term which in this dissertation, when used at all, refers to the rules set by the surrounding society.

In her pioneering attempt at the application of a clearly defined ethical approach to the representation of social difference, Shameem Black (2010) examines the problem of how to imagine another people without violating the object of scrutiny. This problem is central also to this study. Black presents the problem of conceptualizing experiences that are well beyond one's social location as constituting "a central crisis of representation that haunts the academic study of literature" as well as resonating with "a wider concern with the ethics of encounter in a violently divided world" (2). Like Amitav Ghosh in his novels, Black in her book concentrates on "moments when subjects seek to represent forms of social difference that have been associated with oppression, marginality, or ideologies of inferiority" (3).

These kinds of representations were considered problematic especially within the postcolonialist, feminist and ethnic-minority versions of the late twentieth century literary criticism. They were viewed as hegemonic practises creating new forms of representational violence even when aiming to redeem and activate their object of representation. In this brand of literary criticism, novelistic attempts at writing across the borders of social difference shadowed by oppression were deemed as "complex fantasies that reveal much more about the subject than about the object of imagination" (Black 2011, 3). The desire to know the other is in this kind of criticism seen as a futile romantic longing without political significance, leading to forms of self-deceit in its disguise of seeking the truth and 'real'. Ghosh's novels have received their fare share of this line of criticism (see eg. Wisvanathan 1996).

In Black's view, this once relevant critical line has by now solidified into a critical meta-narrative, a set of widespread critical givens that should be replaced. In her view, ethics as a form of responsibility to one's object of inquiry—a responsibility opposed to hegemonic domination and representational violence—offers a feasible "interpretative lens" for the examination of social difference. She further characterizes ethics "as an open field of possible emancipatory alternatives whose contours are continually being imagined" (3). Ghosh's works fit

nicely into her delineation of "border-crossing fiction," which is defined by its representation of the dissonance between subject and object of representation on the one hand and the drive to transcend this difference on the other. Due to this latter aspiration, border-crossing fiction in Black's view "embraces the challenge of representation with an intensity that surpasses the general concern with alterity at large" (4). She sets up three criteria for the ethical representation of social difference within her model. First, the novels have to show a recognition of the self and discourses as socially shaped. Further, they must acknowledge that the act of imagining the other demands the active reimagining one's own social location. And finally, ethical border-crossing fiction entails that the self and style renounce the aspects of privilege inherent in them and embrace a vulnerability in front of the other.

Consequently, the significant contribution of her book to ethical literary criticism lies perhaps not so much in methodological innovativeness, as in the fact that she limits the scope of her study to a certain brand of border-crossing fiction defined on account of its approach to the representation of social difference. Furthermore, her chosen writers all work within postcolonial, feminist, and ethnic-minority traditions. Amitav Ghosh's work belongs to this brand of writing on account of the socio-cultural circumstances from which it springs, and also through its attempts to secure the features of the other and to transcend the borders of social difference while acknowledging their existence. Accordingly, Black examines *The Glass Palace* and *The Hungry Tide* as parts of her argument (2010, 167-183 & 183-199, respectively). Her interpretation of the latter moves along the same line as mine in III.1.2. & the article (IV.6.) As became evident in the beginning of section II.5., in the context of *The Glass Palace* she concentrates on Ghosh's method of representing others who would not in reality be speaking English, seeing this earlier novel as the starting point for the more radical driving of language to its limit apparent in *The Hungy Tide*. I touch on Ghosh's treatment of language in my article on the novel (IV.5.).

In her review of Black's book, Chambers claims that she "makes too little effort to define her terms or trace their histories"

(Chambers 2010). She acknowledges the validity of Black's approach to border crossing, but finds it regrettable that for instance national border crossing is barely mentioned, although many of the writers have a migrant status. Chude-Sokei (2010) observes that Black's attempt to include a variety of representational strategies represented by the chosen writers within a notion of ethics defined as a "planetary" results in structural weaknesses. He claims that the particular political differences and the refusal to be contained by ideological categories of the writers/novels examined become silenced under this overarching planetary model. In general, these writers become too forcefully appropriated into Black's new scholarly metanarrative for the cultural study of border crossing. However, although suspicious of the book's overarching theoretical model, both Chambers and Chude-Sokei applaude Black's treatment of individual novels.

Black's goal is to examine how her chosen novels attempt to deal with the unresolvable political and philosophical problems involved in the representation of the other. In an ethical manner, these novels acknowledge the unsolvable nature of these problems. Nonetheless, they manifest an ethical responsibility towards solving them—a responsibility different writers realize in different manner. Instead of the influential meta-narratives in postcolonial, feminist, and ethnic-minority theories that have presented representations of alterity as forms of discursive domination, Black goes on to delineate an approach based on "crowded selves" and "crowded styles" indicating "images of subjectivity and literary form that work agains familiar forms of invasive imagination in their encounters of difference" (14).

Although Black, whose book was published as recently as 2010, presents her model as new, it shares many philosophical and methodological aspects with the varied versions of ethical criticism that were developed in the late 1990s. To anticipate the kind of criticism levelled at Black on account of her failure "to define her terms or trace their histories" (Chambers 2010), I shall now turn to the various ways in which the use of 'the ethical interpretative lens' has been conceived within what is now commonly called the ethical turn in the study of literature. This

turn became gradually discernible during the 1990s, had its heyday around the turn of the Millennium and is still with us as a pervasive undercurrent informing various approaches to the study of literature.

III.1.1. Ethical study of literature – a sketch towards a discipline

The current field of ethical study of literature brings together many varying strands. The first and most prolonged of these is the legacy conveyed by the critical traditions that have emphasized the moral thematics and basic value commitments of literary texts and their implied authors. Of the more recent contributions to studies on literary ethics, David Parker's *Ethics, Theory and the Novel* (1994) represents a well-informed upgrade of an Arnoldian-Leavisite idea of literature as a form of ethical reflection. A corresponding tradition in the United States can be found in the presence of moral thought from Puritanism to transcendentalism and on to pragmatism and beyond. Especially the works of transcendentalists such as Emerson or Melville provide particularly fruitful ground for more recent currents in the ethical study of literature, occupied as they are with the search for the unreachable truth beyond different versions apparent in the everyday world. Of the longterm ethical approaches to literature, quite as pervasive as the vein concentrating on the moral thematics and value commitments of texts and their authors has been the branch centering on the rhetoric of genre. The oeuvre of Wayne Booth, reaching through decades and focussing on narrative rhetoric as moral imagination, continues to be a frequent point of reference for negative and symphatetic critique alike.

The gradual turning of some philosophers to literature as the privileged site for moral and ethical discourse during the 1980s represents a development that is more recent and more pertinent to the contemporary state of affairs within ethical literary studies. Richard Rorty, Martha Nussbaum and Alasdair MacIntyre are probably the most obvious representatives of this line. In what is usually considered her major work, *Love's*

Knowledge. Essays on Philosophy and Literature (1990) Nussbaum argues that the rich contextualization of moral reflection found in novels (notably in those of Henry James, but in others, too) presents an indispensable supplement to the study of moral philosophy (125-219). She also notes that ethically aware criticism, or "the organizing questions of moral philosophy" (169), have been absent from the field of literary studies for several decades, pushed aside by the 'linguistic turn' with its structuralist and poststructuralist emphasis on language and discursivity. Nussbaum voices a call for a kind of Aristotelian close relationship between literature and philosophy.[7]

Rorty has characterized philosophy as a form of writing (1982, 90-109). More recently, he has outlined works of fiction as model embodiments of social value (1989, 141-188). In the context of arguing for Proust's ethical superiority over philosophers like Nietszche or Heidegger, Rorty explains that "novels are a safer medium than theory for expressing one's recognition of the relativity and contingency of authority figures:"

> For novels are usually about people – things which are, unlike general ideas and final vocabularies, quite evidently time-bound, embedded in a web of contingencies. Since the characters in novels age and die – since they obviously share the finitude of the books in which they occur – we are not tempted to think that by adopting an attitude toward them we have adopted an attitude toward every *possible* sort of person. By contrast, books which are about ideas, even when written by historicists like Hegel and Nietzsche, look like descriptions of eternal relations between eternal objects. (1989, 107-108)

For Rorty, particular practices in particular circumstances are the important thing in ethics, instead of universal principles. This view of ethical action is apparent in the practices of novelists:

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[7] A similar call for the importance of novels for moral philosophy and the significance of Aristotelian tradition has been put forward by MacIntyre in connection with Jane Austen's novels (1981).

> The novelist's substitute for the appearance-reality distinction is a display of diversity of viewpoints, a plurality of descriptions of the same event. What the novelist finds especially comic is the attempt to privilege one of these descriptions [...]. What he finds most heroic is not the ability sternly to reject all descriptions save one, but rather the ability to move back and forth between them (1991, 74)

This is highly significant for the purposes of this study, as the narrative strategies of Ghosh include a heightened awareness of the existence of multiple versions of same events (see section IV.1 on *The Circle of Reason*). In short, fictive narration "presents us with individuality and diversity alike without any attempt to reduce either to the terms of a singular scheme of totality." (Gibson 1999, 8). This point is central to my interpretation of Ghosh's novels: in his writing, novels turn into expressions of the ethics of pluralism by intertwining the particular characteristics of individual subjects with the characteristics of the surrounding society, thereby creating heterogeneous wholes.

All in all, the contribution of the likes of Nussbaum, MacIntyre and Rorty lies not so much in any originality of method, as in their turning back to a moral and social value-oriented approach to literature. From the point of view of literary theory, their approach seems dated in its pre-structuralist form. The turn to literature may make the philosophers feel that they are gaining new ground. But this not so for most literary critics and theorists. It is only when the above views on literature and ethics are intertwined with post-structuralist views on discourse, narration and language in general that a more substantial change in ethically aware study of literature takes place. The starting points for this coming together of humanism and post-structuralism (or, more accurately, of ethics and deconstruction) in the 1990s is largely due to certain influential shifts in the later thinking of the key figures of post-structuralist literary theory, Michel Foucault and, more importantly, Jacques Derrida. Through this incorporation of ethics into the study of discursive

constructions and questions of power inherent in them the approach adopted in this dissertation also begins to take form more clearly. The rise of the ethics of deconstruction is, by co-incidence, marked by the 'fall' of the reputation of one of the leading deconstructionists, Paul de Man, with the posthumous publication of his *Wartime Journalism* in 1987. Letters in the publication included passages indicating Nazi-collaborationist activity. The publication of the letters resulted in a heated controversy over the moral and ethical emptiness and evasiveness of deconstruction. The Derridean idea of 'nothing outside the text' began to be considered ethically void and problematic. Perhaps symptomatically, Derrida himself became increasingly engaged in social, political and ethical issues during the 1990s.

However, there were two pre-existing ethical currents within the deconstructionist camp even before the unfortunate de Man controversy. One of these was put forward chiefly by J. Hillis Miller in his *The Ethics of Reading* in 1987 as a defence of the rigorous unreliability in critical reading as itself an ethics. According to Miller, there is an ethical moment in deconstructive reading. In practice this means that the reader necessarily fails to read the text correctly (the necessity of the failure is what constitutes the rigorousness of the unreliability), because he/she cannot see into the hidden workings of the language. So the text retains its unreachable alterity, its otherness, and the reader is left with a 'false' interpretation for which he/she is responsible. For Miller, however, ethics is still conceived as a branch of philosophy, rather than a pre-philosophical standpoint as it is in Levinas.

The other ethical undercurrent within deconstruction was formed by the close dialogue between Derrida and Levinas that lasted for decades. In practice, it seems that it was largely Derrida who called the attention of literary scholars to Levinas's work, notably through his critique of Levinas's first major work, *Totality and Infinity* (1961), in his essay "Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas". The essay is mainly known from the collection *Writing and Difference* from the year 1978, but it was originally written and published shortly

after the publication of *Totality and Infinity*. This critique by Derrida arguably had an effect on the way Levinas further complicated and developed his thinking into the form it takes in *Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence* (1974), as an argument for ethics as first philosophy – formulating the priority of ethical obligation for the other to ontology and being itself. Levinas reciprocally published criticism on Derrida's work, albeit in a much more veiled guise. According to some commentators, the ambivalence between praise and critique in the writings of the two on one another betrays the fact that they were ultimately working on similar themes and concerns (see e.g. Davis 1996, 69).

As Lawrence Buell anticipated in 1999 (9), Levinas has become the foremost theorist of the post-poststructuralist literary-ethical research. The road to the new millennium of Levinas's thinking was paved by such theorists as Simon Critchley (1992), who ingenuously brings together the theories of Derrida and Levinas to arrive at a conglomeration of ethics and politics; Adam Newton (1995), who draws the literary study of ethics closer to Levinasian thinking, while still arguing for the distinctiveness of the ethical and the political and rather combining Levinas with Bakhtin to develop a kind of dialogical conception of ethics; and Andrew Gibson (1999), who, l i k e Critchley, defends an ethical theory renewed by the insights of deconstruction. Through his extensive use of both modernist and postmodernist novels, Gibson also posits Levinas in dialogue with theories and theorists that contradict him. He interrogates the blind spots of Levinas's thinking, such as the latter's lack of treatment of gender and sexual difference, his alleged Eurocentrism, and his position in relationship to a kind of ethics of marginality, exemplified by Gibson through queer studies.

Whatever the combination of internal and external influences, the shift within deconstruction towards the contemplation of the ethical responsibility for the other became quite evident during the 1990s. The simultaneous increase in the attention given to the concepts of subjectivity and agency, intensified by the change of emphasis in the later work of Michel Foucault, is especially important in the context of Amitav Ghosh (see e.g. the fourth article on *The Calcutta Chromosome*). While

writing *History of Sexuality*, Foucault shifted from his previous emphasis on the power-knowledge issues and the social construction of subjects by discursively functioning institutions to the care of the self realized as an ethical endeavour. He came to realise ethics as a semiautonomous area that was "not related to any social -- or at least to any legal—institutional system," (1997, 255) and to conceive of imagined power-relations as open to instability and reversal. His attention moved from structures of domination to practices of self-actualization. From the point of view of ethics, Foucault can be seen as shifting from the examination of the Christian tradition of self-renunciation and submission to external law (the discursive constructedness) to the Aristotelian tradition where people practised personal ethical virtue so that it became a permanent habit. This radical change of emphasis (the idea of the self taking itself as a work to be accomplished) also anticipates, and most probably has had influence on, the attention later given to the critical writing on ethics as the rival of politics in the examination of social engagement.

Foucault further started to criticize his own earlier view of the notion of 'truth' as a mere discursive tool utilized by the epistemic will to power. The strain of recent theory that has sprung from this recalibration is targeted at the avoidance of the reductionisms and moral perils of the cognitive scepticism of poststructuralism, while simultaneously avoiding the dangers of mimetic realism. The beginnings of the coming together of political/discursive and ethical/humanist strands, which is quite evident in Ghosh's narratives as well as in the theory of e.g. Radhakrishnan (see the next sub-section & the first of the articles, on *The Circle of Reason*), are visible here. In the words of Satya Mohanty, especially in the case of postcolonial writing, or writing of authors coming from oppressed peoples, there is the need to "explore the possibility of a theoretical understanding of social and cultural identity in terms of objective social location" (1997, 216). But the actual basis for those who examine the problematic of whether truthful or reliable representation can be produced discursively is Derridean. The general idea behind much of postcolonial and other 'minority' scholarship has been that truth

and authenticity, even some kind of historical factity, are lying somewhere behind, or amidst, hegemonic discourses that are opaque and elliptical. The use of, for instance, strategic essentialism *à la* Spivak (see the first article in this dissertation) in narrative representations by minority, or postcolonial, writers has been seen as an ethico-political way of resisting, or opening up, these discourses that tend to eclipse the other and the subaltern.

One significant trend in current ethical study of literature that is not adopted in this dissertation is the rejuvenation of reader response ethics through the treatment of the reader-text relationship as the equivalent of that of the self to the other. Instead of regarding this relationship as one of appropriation or reinvention as Barthes did, the ethical response theory stresses the conscienceful listening and opening-up to the otherness of the text as the basis for readers' relationship with texts, thereby not treating this relationship as the assertion of power. Contemporary literary works are seen as making an ethically based call for solidarity to the reader through their resistance of standard generic expectations, thereby demanding that the reader hear subaltern voices and faces without, however, fully grasping or cognitively processing them. See e.g. Sara Ahmed (2000) for an ethically informed feminist reader response approach.

The text-reader relationship is also evident in the three-fold writer-text-reader relationship as delineated by Derek Attridge. In an effort combining the recuperation of authorial agency in the production of texts on the one hand and reader response ethics on the other, Attridge (2004a & 2004b) describes the literary text as the product of an act of creation inspired by otherness. The role of the writer is here emphasized as an additional force beside, even alternative to, the social constructedness of texts. In Attridge's view, literary texts emanate from the experience in which the writer, who is located in culture's familiar modes of understanding, encounters something strange (strange in that it does not yet exist within the cognitive framework that culture provides for thinking and experiencing). Through the encounter with this strangeness, the writer is required to resist the mind's tendency to reduce new things by understanding them by way of

the familiar. Accordingly, the act of writing involves treating language in a way that lets otherness to influence the individual's mental world and, eventually, the cultural field it embodies. In a sense, then, the literary work is inspired by otherness. Attridge describes writing as consisting of both passivity and action. On the one hand, an encounter with otherness that replaces settled forms of thinking requires passivity, a surrender of intellectual control to the other; on the other hand, through its destabilization of the field of the familiar, this encounter with the other inspires the writer to remould familiar patterns of thought. And the reader goes through a similar process when encountering the otherness of the text.

In this vein, Amitav Ghosh the writer can be seen as destabilizing the familiar knowledge-production strategies of such discourses as modernism, postmodernism (plus the concomitant, but socio-culturally distinct colonialisms and postcolonialisms,) and the Indian version of secular nationalism; sciences like historiography, ethnography and medicine; and the various narrative strategies springing from these discourses. He does this by producing texts that cause an ethical defamiliarization of established ways of conceiving of various aspects of the world. However, regardless of the fact that fiction is always written by someone, this dissertation concentrates on the texts, not the writer. In other words, whatever the nature of the otherness that inspired Ghosh to remould familiar patterns of thought, it is not in focus here, but the outcome of this process (i.e. fiction written by him) is.

According to Attridge, then, the act of reading can be active and passive at the same time just like writing is. If the reader succeeds in opening him/herself to that which cannot be expected and therefore known in advance, reading becomes not only a willed action, but also something that happens to the reader's consciousness. Given that any relationship to alterity inevitably does away with settled forms of thought, a form of reading that responds to the otherness of the text will have an effect on the familiar. The reader's loss of control over the other will inspire him or her creatively to alter the field of the familiar in an attempt to accommodate the other. This way, the reader

becomes responsible for the other. This idea of the literary text's relationship with otherness, the writer and the reader informs both Attridge's discussion of Coetzee's novels (2004a) and his more poetry-centered work on literature as a kind of ethical performance (2004b).

At this point, a detour examining my own position as both a reader and a writer is perhaps in order. In the case of this dissertation, I am both the reader of Ghosh novels and the writer of the presently unfolding text. As I am also a researcher, the otherness of Ghosh's texts is not revealed to me directly. The theoretical ideas I have chosen to adopt here filter the novels to me in a certain way. In a sense, this text is designed to block out both Amitav Ghosh and myself, revealing just the the novels and the theoretical ideas through which they are shown. Although this independent existence is ultimately a fallacy, it nonethess represents a methodological decision that limits the scope and argumentation of this dissertation to a reasonable scale and focus. I am here clearly responsible for Ghosh's novels, and I would even say I have opened myself up to their otherness to the extent the parameters of dissertation writing make possible. This, I think, is evident in the present text's lack of a neat and consistent theoretical framework. Instead of such a totalizing and distorting device, I have attempted to let the novels define how they should be approached. Therefore, I approach them through a selection of theoretical and methodological ideas, instead of attempting to construct a comprehensive theoretical model, or adopting an already existing one. If I were concerned with several different novels written by a number of writers, such a model would clearly be a feasible way of focusing the research, but as I am concentrating on the thematically consistent oeuvre of one writer, this 'open' way of going about it seems more appropriate. Instead of a theoretical model, this dissertation then has as its basis the guidelines of the ethical encountering and representation of otherness. And I am presently going through the manifold outcomes of the adoption of these guidelines during the 'ethical turn'.

To return from the methodological self-reflections above to the debates of current literary-ethical criticism, another important

feature within the field that is of significance in the context of Ghosh's novels and this dissertation in general, is the interest in narrative devices and strategies. This entails discerning incipient or already evident ethical aspirations in the application and intertwining of various genres, representative strategies, or discourse modes in individual works of literature, or in the larger output of individual authors. Throughout the present study, it is my contention that Ghosh's novels transform the discourses of Western modernity (whether scientific or novelistic) by producing ethically informed narrative constructions that have a subversive relationship to the discursive knowledge production strategies that originally produced them. This view of literary texts as media for ethical reflection enabled by their generic and formal idiosyncrasies has developed through the generic studies of Wayne Booth, the genre-related scholarship of Martha Nussbaum, and the combination of Levinasian ethics and poststructuralist discursivity in the work of e.g. Adam Newton (1995) and Geoffrey Harpham (1992).

Yet another important issue running through the field is the controversy on the relationship between the personal/ethics and politics/morality. This polarity as well as the need to transcend it already comes to the fore in the first article of this dissertation and I examine this topic further in relation to Ghosh's writing in the latter sub-section of the concluding remarks. This relationship, characterized as one of "semiantagonistic interdependence" by Buell (14), remains open and heated. The most satisfying solution, from the point of view of this study, comes from Simon Critchley in his excellent *Ethics of Deconstruction* (1992), to which I shall return in the next sub-section, as well as towards the end of the present study (section V.2.). This problematic of ethics vs. politics permeates the field of ethics-literature studies: It is evident in Booth's attempts to argue for multiple reader responses without becoming guilty of critical relativism (1982), Nussbaum's view of James' rhetoric as a "dialogue between perception and rule" (1990, 157), Harpham's statement that discourse issues rules without, however, determining situation-specefic obligations (1992, 5), and, most importantly, Levinas's idea of the responsibility for the other as

meaning "not the disclosure of a given and its reception, but the exposure of me to the other, prior to every decision (1998, 141).

This basic endeavour "to adjudicate the relationship between disposition and normativity" (Buell 199, 14) remains the same whether examined from the standpoint of the author, reader, language, or human relationships. The problematic of the relationship between the personal and the socio-political is closely related to the ethical-political discussion. 'Ethics' is an ambivalent word, referring to both private and public domains (this ambivalence comes through in the articles, and is specifically looked at in the final subsection). Ethical acts can only be carried out in specific socio-cultural circumstances: the 'being with' is an integral part of the ethical relationship to the other/s. However, it seems that there are grounds for concern over the possible privatization of human relations that bypasses the social and the political.

The emphasis on the area of interpersonality and interhumanity as the critique of the 1970s textuality and 1980s historicism is probably the most lasting contribution of the ethical turn that actualized in the late 1990s. Regrettably, it seems that this lively period of ethical awareness quite quickly degenerated into a haphazard and unfounded use of the word 'ethics'. In the literary criticism of the 2000s, there appears to be an unfortunate tendency to regard any action or representative strategy that can be deemed subversive as unproblematically ethical. As the use of the word *ethics* has become more fashionable, it has also become more ductile and misleading, if not outright confusing. No specific model, or theoretical framework, for ethical examination of literary works managed to emerge with any force out of the cacophony of general ethical interestedness, and many practitioners of outspokenly "ethical" criticism today fail to connect their mode of examination to antecedent traditions or to alternative brands of contemporary ethical study (Shameem Black's excellent *Literature Across Borders* (2010) is an outstanding exception to this tendency). This might be viewed as not surprising for an emergent discourse (or a bundle of discourses) searching for self-definition. But it does create confusion. Some

writers, like for instance Coetzee and Beckett,[8] have become the target of consistent and innovative ethical scholarship, but within for instance postcolonial studies at large the term is usually just thrown in to add fashionable flavour to the text.

A more optimistic stance on the vicissitudes of ethical literary studies in the new millennium has been put forward by Bárbara Arizti and Silvia Martínez-Falquina in their edition on the ethical turn: they "revel in the polyphonic nature of the turn to ethics. The advantages of the "crossover" among disciplines, interests, discourses and practices, brought about by the phenomenon, amply make up for the putative loss of critical edge" (2007, xiv). Disciplinary crossovers in ethical vein are presented also by Astrid Eril, Herbert Grabes & Ansgar Nünning in their volume on the dissemination of ethical values in literature and media (2008). Recent more 'neutral' voices include Russell Smith, who sees the ethical turn "variously as an attempt to give ethico-political substance to what was perceived as the empty linguistic formalism of deconstruction […], or as a retreat from the conflictual space of the political in search of a consensual realm of the ethical" (2009, 2-3), and David Cunningham, who in line with Smith characterizes the ethical turn as the phenomenological fleshing out of the formalist tenets of deconstruction with Levinasian substance. Cunningham further notes that

> As such, the 'ethical turn' is a 'turn' that has largely taken place, not in fact against, but *within* what are understood to be the 'philosophical' terms of mainstream 'deconstructive' literary criticism itself. In this they have broadly followed developments in the theoretical interests of Anglophone 'deconstruction' more generally: developments which have sought to 'add moral weight' […] to deconstruction's definitive 'preoccupation' with alterity (2009, 25).

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[8] See e.g. Attridge (2004) and Leist & Singer (2010) on ethical approaches to Coetzee, and Smith (2009) on Beckett.

Perhaps the most sombre recapitulation of the outcome of the late 1990s ethical project comes from one its own proponents, Andrew Gibson who, in 2006, after a 'personal turn' towards the French philosopher, Alain Badiou, and with the benefit of hindsight, characterized the ethical turn as follows:

> Its underlying impetus is in fact pragmatic compromise. Badiou is surely right: what was initially a sophisticated and theoretically demanding conception of ethics swiftly became a mixture of a bland ethics of the other and a doctrine of human rights whose essence is a reconstituted and basically sentimental brand of liberal humanism. (2006, 91)

Gibson further claims that there is an underlying religious ontology behind Levinas's thinking:

> What requires our self-abnegation in the encounter with the other? If it is not a principle or an imperative that exists prior to the encounter itself—and it cannot be that, in postmodern ethics—the command can only stem from the presence of the Great Other within the other, from God. (2006, 91-92)

Gibson also announces that Levinasian ethics cannot separate itself of theology without becoming inconsistent.

Levinas does acknowledge that for him philosophy derives from religion (1990, 182). But this does not imply that philosophy is subordinate to religion, or that religion needs philosophy to give it intellectual respectability. Rather, religion and philosophy represent two parallel but distinct spheres which are both part of the same spiritual process of the approach of the transcendental. Whether this religious component in Levinas's thought is considered intrinsic and indispensable or not, my interpretation of his view of God, as well as the significance of the idea of God in his thinking differs from that put forward by Gibson (and Badiou) in that I find it more useful to interpret the notion of God in Levinas as signifying a metaphor for the encounter with the

other. The presence of God in the very core of subjectivity serves to prove that the subject is not its own origin, and that there is something alien and unreachable inside it. This alien is the other. The subject only comes into being when it encounters the alien alterity of the other, be that God or another human being (see the fourth article in this dissertation for more thorough analysis of God in Levinas). In short, Levinas is trying to explicate his idea of the other and its significance for the self through using the metaphor of God. So, our "self-abnegation" that Gibson is referring to in the above quotation is required in the first place by *the other*, which is needed for the self's coming into existence in the first place.

Nonetheless, after reading Badiou, Gibson appears quite vehement towards the theorists of the 1990s ethical turn, his former self included:

> Those, like Simon Critchley—and myself, in the past—who have argued for a Levinasian ethics in the mode of 'atheist transcendence', to adopt Critchley's phrase, have failed to recognize that, without the theological sanction, Levinas's ethics simply falls apart. (2006, 92)

Gibson's turn of mind is not wholly inconsistent, given the fact that he was searching for "blind spots" in Levinas's thinking already in 1999 (17), although he at that time was basically of the opinion that the combination of Levinas and Derrida was just what was needed in the literary theory of that time.

Given my view that Gibson's recent outburst against the theological basis of Levinas's theory is perhaps based on a too literal a reading of the latter's immensely metaphorical and, admittedly, religiously charged language, I myself tend to agree with the Gibson of 1999. As will become evident in the articles, I see Ghosh's writing as the coming together of poststructuralist (or Derridean/deconstructive) tenets to dismantle pre-existing discursive models (e.g. of modernism and colonialism) and humanist ethics promoting the use of imagination to transcend discourse as such in a pre-ontological and pre-linguistic plane of relationships. I am also of the view that ethical and political are

intertwined in Ghosh's writing into a properly ethico-political discourse (see V.2.). On the level of genre, I view Ghosh's generic mixtures as ethically aware in that they break and re-construct pre-existing generic formations, thereby changing their political implications. The self-other relationship is also narrated ethically as a reciprocal relationship, in which neither of the two is reduced into a passive target of scrutiny, but both appear as active agents in the relationship with a voice of their own. This serves to avoid appropriation and to create agency for the discourses and subjectivities that are being narrated into existence.

Above I have tried to chart the fractured map of ethically informed literary criticism and locate my study within it as best I can. However, because of the general methodological and theoretical confusion within ethical studies of literature, no clear-cut theoretical framework can be discerned in this dissertation. And even if there did exist relatively standardized models for ethical study of literature, I feel that the very basis for an ethical relationship between a text and its examiner negates the possibility of the use of a ready-made framework in the examination of specific literary works. As I have already indicated, I would rather let Ghosh's novels ´speak´ for themselves and participate in the process of interpreting them than distort them by applying a certain theoretical model into which they would become appropriated. Filtering the texts through a certain framework with its idiosyncratic knowledge production strategies would diminish their alterity, i.e. their otherness, by eclipsing aspects of them and making them part of the familiar.

At the risk of repeating myself, I once again state that, in order to avoid too obvious discursive appropriation, I build my arguments on certain (mainly Levinasian and deconstructionist) philosophical ideas and starting points, not so much on comprehensive theories or pre-existing theoretical models. This may be deemed eclectic, even opportunistic, but to my mind it is a way of attempting to ascertain the alterity and independence of the object of study to the extent this is possible. What is more, this reflects the general *modus operandi* within the ethical turn: the

critics choose varying theoretical and methodological threads out of a myriad of philosophical and theoretical influences to form their own approach to the chosen objects of study. I try to let the texts bring forth the thematic concerns inherent in them and choose my tools accordingly. And in doing so, I try to avoid forcing them into a preconceived framework. This, I hope, will prevent "what was initially a sophisticated and theoretically demanding conception of ethics" turning into "a mixture of a bland ethics of the other and a doctrine of human rights whose essence is a reconstituted and basically sentimental brand of liberal humanism" (Gibson 2006, 91).

In the following, I shall introduce some of the key concepts in Levinas's thinking in connection with Ghosh's novels and their central themes, in an attempt to create a kind of ethically informed athmosphere for the later sub-chapters on representation of violence and the treatment of narration and silence. The main thrust of my argument here revolves around the relationship of ethics and language, the resources that language and narration have for bringing forth the ethical in interhuman relationships. Towards the end of the section I shall tentatively bring ethics into connection with deconstruction.

III.1.2. Ethics, language and the writing of Amitav Ghosh

To point out an issue I shall be returning to repeatedly in the course of this dissertation, there is an increasing emphasis on the inadequacy of language to represent the movements of the mind and the encounter with the other in the writing of Ghosh. A tension between post-structuralist emphasis on textuality and difference on the one hand and a humanism transcending discourse on the other has been found in his fiction. In one of the first thorough articles on Ghosh's work, Robert Dixon characterizes his writing as exhibiting a "fluid and at times confusing deployment of the lexicons of both liberal humanism and post-structuralism, though without allowing his writing to be affiliated with either" (1996, 16) and as flickering between "suggesting a metaphysics of presence and a Derridean trace" (1996, 17). In Mondal's view, Ghosh is "seeking a syncretism that

is an anti-humanist, postmodern recognition of difference and is also *at the same time* a humanist secular ideal" (2007, 30, orig. emphasis). My aim here is to imply that this supposed tension is a product of the simultaneous application of approaches very close to Levinasian ethics and deconstruction. This view will be strengthened through the article section and the concluding remarks. At this point, my approach follows the general outlines detailed by Adam Newton in his *Narrative Ethics*:

> Ethical answerability here is not a flattened prescription for action; it is not a moral recipe book. Nor is deconstruction an indifference to answerability; it is at its best a scrupulous hesitation, an extreme care occasioned by the treachery of words and the danger of easy answers (1995, 37).

According to Levinas, communication has two dimensions, which he refers to as Saying and the Said. The Said represents the surface level where we use language to communicate themes, ideas and observations to one another via discourse. Saying is the ethical dimension where the genuine encounter with the other ideally takes place. Saying is pre-discursive, and although it leaves a trace in the Said, it has its own significance that cannot be represented within the Said: "Saying states and thematizes the Said, but signifies it to the other, a neighbor, with a signification that has to be distinguished from that born by words in the Said" (Levinas 1998, 46). Saying, then, cannot be grasped within the Said, which is the dimension of linguistic 'knowing' and ontology. In the words of Simon Critchley, Saying represents "the non-thematizable ethical residue of language that escapes comprehension, interrupts philosophy, and is the very enactment of the ethical movement from the Same to the other" (Critchley 1999, 7).

Levinas tries to find ways of using language that would transcend the totalizing effects of representation and preserve the self and the other as independent and self-sufficient, but still in a genuine relationship with each other. Throughout this dissertation, I suggest that this kind of relationship between the self and the other is very close to Ghosh's goal as a writer of

fiction. Where the outcome of Levinas's experiment within the parameters of philosophic argumentation is, to say the least, perplexing and self-contradictory, Ghosh has more success within the multiple narrative modes of his fictive representations. In fiction, the contrasting views on language and the mystical experiences which transcend discourse can be approached more easily.

Levinas, then, seems to propound the view that the ethical is destroyed by attempting to present it in language and that the proper understanding of, or contact with, the other occurs beyond language. Although Ghosh uses language in several narrative modes to open up ways of representation that would ascribe independence, voice and agency to the other, whether conceived as a person or another discourse, he seems to share the same assumption concerning the ultimate possibilities of language. But, although the ethical cannot rigorously speaking be reached through language, the novel with its polyphonic character seems to be a good device for 'showing' or 'staging' the ethical without explicitly defining it, and thus inviting the imaginative capacity of the reader to compensate for the incapabilities of language (on this point, I am in general agreement with Rorty, Nussbaum and MacIntyre). In the following, I would like to examine three aspects of *The Hungry Tide*. These are formed by the questions of what is said, how it is said and how what is said draws on outside information. First, there is the level of the inside of the narrative, as it were. This level examines the way in which the characters act within the story frame of the novel. Then there is the level of the narration itself, pertaining to the narrative strategy, i.e. the modes and discourses used to narrate the story. Thirdly, I would like to sketch a level outside the narrative, examining the elements left outside the novel but hinted at through the use of intertexts, for instance.

Most of my interpretation of the novel in the article-section (IV.6.) belongs to the first level. There I examine the manner in which the characters in it conceive of language, nature and each other. I will also look at the ways in which these manners change. The most striking attempts at descriptions of transcendent ethical

experience are those with Kanai on the island of Garjontola. In these scenes, to be examined later in the article, language is really stretched to its limits to give the impression of its transparency or its vanishing, or its forming into a kind of vision. Language cannot properly speaking describe its own transcending, its own beyond. But we, as readers, can imaginatively understand the purpose of the language in this instance and try to think, or rather feel or sense, such an occurrence ourselves. This would in practice mean the use of transcendental imagination as characterized by Cornell and precise imagination as delineated by Radhakrishnan (see the introduction).

The second level has to do with the choice of what is narrated, and through what kind of linguistic strategies the chosen targets of narration are represented. As noted in the introduction to the novel above, the setting is the Sundarbans, a marginal area by any standards, and also an intermediate zone between land and sea, or fresh water and salt water, indicative of diversity and connections within and between areas conventionally conceived as separate totalities. The list of characters is diverse linguistically, socially, as well as in terms of class and ideology. If ethics is about forming connections with various kinds of others while restoring voice and agency to the same others (be they humans, worldviews or discursive representations of the world belonging to these worldviews), then this kind of setting bringing to the fore a marginal area seldom treated in fiction, and a cast of characters covering a wide area of the Indian society and even beyond, has to be considered ethically aware. Also the careful exposure of the many differing viewpoints in many differing discourses, like those of natural science, etymology, religion, myth and diary notes, not to mention the finely tuned differences in the prosodies of the characters, are exemplary in their attempt to secure voice and independence to a multitude of 'others' without appropriating them through 'knowing' them in one discourse.

Information outside the actual novel is constituted by the intertextual references, or hints, to other texts. In *The Hungry Tide*, the obvious example would be the already discussed (II.6.1.) poetry of Rilke (*Duino Elegies*). What is interesting about the

excerpts from Rilke in the narrative is that they do not represent the passages from the poems that would most obviously or apparently support the themes of the novel. They are very short and appear to be there just to give more poetic grandeur to Nirmal's already 'winged' diary style. It is only when one becomes better acquainted with Rilke's works that their real significance in relation to the novel becomes evident. Consequently, Rilke's works are, in a sense, hinted at in the narrative, but not discursively defined by tying them into the narrative too strongly or thematising them too obviously. Once again, this has to be considered an ethical way of constructing a narrative: although it wants to form a connection with the poems, the narrative is careful not to appropriate Rilke's work into its discourse too strongly.

The novel as a whole can be seen as a way of describing the ethical relationship with the other in a way that is not possible within the discourse of philosophy. Nussbaum (1990) proposes the idea that novels can tell us things about moral or ethical views that cannot be discussed in philosophy. She also states that a novel's message of how to live morally is dependent on the narrative form of that novel (the relationship between the content and the form of a narrative is, of course, not a new idea, especially after the studies of Hayden White). Consequently, in addition to containing material that supports or refutes certain philosophical theories, the novel can be seen as representing the philosophical viewpoint of its author (or, if we want to avoid the pitfalls of authorial intention, we can always talk of the philosophical message of the narrative as a whole). As indicated, the message of this novel seems to be that the good way to live is on the one hand to try to keep an open mind regarding the stimuli from the outside and on the other to refrain from too easy or rash acts of defining the outside. The infinity and ultimate unattainability of otherness is emphasized through the use of multiple discourses for its description. The understanding and tolerence of the other requires the transcending of the personal totalities that are largely seen as linguistically constructed. Although this can be stated in the discourse of philosophy, the 'showing' of it, for instance in the manner of Kanai's encounter

with Fokir and his experience alone on the island, is beyond the parameters of philosophical language and argumentation. The above mentioned scenes are examined in the article in section IV.6.

As I have already established, in the fourth novel by Ghosh, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, silence, or the extra-discursive, is given a prominent role. The extra-discursive represents an instance of subaltern agency in the novel. People who come from the lowest strata of society are secretly using Ross, who represents Western science and rationality. This elusive group leaves only inconspicuous signs of its existence. One of the characters in the novel describes Mangala as "her who has so long eluded me: Silence herself. I see signs of her presence everywhere I go, in images, words, glances, but only signs, nothing more…" (*The Calcutta Chromosome* 122). Nowhere is the group defined straightforwardly, and the characters in the novel are only able to find elusive textual traces of it, despite their frantic search. This is consistent with Levinas's idea of silence as "the inverse of language: the interlocutor has given a sign, but has declined every interpretation" (Levinas 1969, 91). Language and speech would consist in the other coming to the aid of the sign given by him/her, enabling the formation of an interpretation, but this is what Mangala's group refuses to do for fear of becoming 'known' and appropriated through this interpretation.

Ghosh seems to imply that we can only know through language. Consequently, in knowing the world, scientifically or otherwise, we simultaneously change it by projecting onto it ideological meanings carried by language. In the novel, knowledge, which is conceived as discursive, is strongly linked with the concepts of agency and voice. The project of the group, targeted at the moment of crossing to an alternative mode of being, proceeds through moments of mutual discovery. The borderline between the discoverers and those who are discovered is extremely porous. In the narrative, no person discovers the other person without that other person simultaneously discovering him/her. This guarantees voice and agency to every character and no-one becomes reduced to the position of the passive object of knowledge, to be appropriated to the discourse

of the observer. This is phrased by Murugan as follows in novel, "You see, for them the only way to escape the tyranny of knowledge is to turn it on itself. But for that to work they have to create a single perfect moment of discovery when the person who discovers is also that which is discovered" (*The Calcutta Chromosome* 303). This is ethical: the other is not reduced to a passive object by discursive representation, but retains its subjectivity and agency.

I would say that achieving immortality in the novel is equal to escaping the grip of the totality of the discursive ontology of the discreet intentional subject, and ethically approaching the infinity of the other. In other words, getting outside oneself ethically, not at the level of a separate, discursively functioning consciousness. This dismantling of the solitary self is precisely what ethics as the examination of interpersonal relationships aspires to achieve. The effecting of personal transference in the novel shares some aspects with the Levinasian concept of substitution. As Alphonso Lingis observes in his commentary on Levinas,

> substitution is the ethical itself; responsibility is putting oneself in the place of another. Through becoming interchangeable with anyone, I take on the weight and consistency of one that bears the burden of being, of alien being and of the world. I become substantial and subject, subjected to the world and to the others. And because in this putting myself in the place of another I am imperiously summoned, singled out, through it I accede to singularity. (Lingis 1998, xxix)

The moving of personality traits, or "matching symptomologies" (*The Calcutta Chromosome* 107) of people, between different minds and bodies (different selves) is a science-fiction utopia. It is reminiscent of something that cannot, strictly speaking, happen in real life: the ethical substitution of the self for others. Through this substitution, the questions of voice and agency, as well as the notion of discreet subjectivities, would be deprived of meaning. Furthermore, through the transmission of socially learned

personality traits, the distinction between the self and the other would vanish and the contemporary subject appropriating the other and the world through 'knowing' them would cease to exist. In Levinas's model, subjectivity would come to mean the subjection of the self to the other, all the way to the substitution for this other. For Ghosh, the transferring of personality traits does not go quite that far, but stops at the dispersal of intentional subjectivity through the establishment of connections and over-lappings between multiple subjectivities. In a sense, Ghosh does not reverse the power-relationship between self and the other as the Levinasian model seems to do in its move from appropriation to substitution, but he makes the whole unequal relationship impossible by dismantling independent subjectivities, which are its component parts (see the article in section IV.4. for a more thorough discussion on this point).

As Lingis observes, for Levinasian ethics, "the other is not experienced as an empty pure place and means for the world to exhibit another perspective, but as a contestation of my appropriation of the world, as a disturbance in the play of the world, a break in its cohesion" (Lingis 1998, xxix). In the novel, Mangala's group surely represents a contestation of the appropriation of the world by Western discourses, most notably the historical and scientific ones. The Levinasian substitution seems to be quite close to the view on universal/particular implied in the novel. Like the chromosome, this substitution provides access to the universal while maintaining the particular, or singular. But the terms 'universal' and 'particular' can no longer be seen as opposites, or as a binary construction, because they have been redefined. 'Universal' now refers to the multitude of selves, or personality traits, which exist in the same dimension for one another. Singularity is formed through the fact that these selves can be summoned, or called, as single entities (compare to the discussion on universal particularism in section III.4.).

While the above discussion of the novel largely belongs to the realm of what could be characterized as the meta-ethical and tends to concentrate on the thematic contents of the narrative, the narration itself is also ethically aware. If ethics is about the establishment of interpersonal connections across discourses on a

mutual basis, then *The Calcutta Chromosome* has to be considered as a narration that proceeds according to an ethical logic. It forms connections by representing characters from vastly different areas of society, instead of concentrating on just a few. Furthermore, as established in the section II.4.1., these representatives of different social classes are described in their own environment, instead of placing them in alien, or somehow generalized, circumstances. The narrative also creates interpersonal connections with an awareness of the problems of voice, agency and appropriation. No-one is reduced to being a mere target of knowledge and discursive definition, or appropriation; all are granted voice and agency. Everyone gets to speak and does this in his/her own idiosyncratic English, variants of which in the novel have been illuminatingly examined by Khair (2001, 315). By this means, the narrative dismantles religious, social, ideological and linguistic differences and borders constructed by the use of these discourses in a political vein, as tools of definition utilized to construct power-relationships. Silence, then, represents the kind of unattainable experience that transcends the level of language, or knowing. This would be the experience of the ultimate truth that has not been changed through knowing, in other words by the meanings carried by language. This would also be an ethical experience. The ultimate truth in the novel belongs to the realm of the ethical, transcending the divisions created by various linguistic totalities.

A similar response to the problematics of silence and knowing can be found in *The Circle of Reason*. The scene in which the protagonist, Alu, speaks to a crowd of people in a "turmoil of languages" features an instance of communication which transcends the claim to knowledge by a specific language:

> It was like a question, though he was not asking anything, bearing down on you from every side. And in that whole huge crowd nobody stirred or spoke. You could see that silently they were answering him, matching him with something of their own. […] Tongues unraveled and woven together – nonsense, you say, tongues unraveled are nothing but nonsense

> – but there again you have a mystery, for everyone
> understood him, perfectly […] They understood him,
> for his voice was only the question; the answers were
> their own. (*The Circle of Reason* 279)

This mixture of languages does not introduce to the listeners any particular ideology or claim to power in the way a specific language would. It does not 'know', it does not provide a definitive answer. It signifies only the ethical approach towards each 'other' in the group in the form of a question, to which everyone can have their own response. Therefore, it speaks to everyone, regardless of class or language, without treating them as a homogeneous group. As Phulboni says in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, although this is the world of silence, it is animate, it has a spirit and voice. Consequently, the crowd is capable of answering Alu through silence.

In *In an Antique Land*, the problematics of knowing the other is approached from the point of view of ethnography. In the novel, the Egyptian villagers, who would normally constitute the target of a traditional ethnographic study, are transformed from passive objects of traditional ethnographic representation and knowledge into active agents/characters with a historical trajectory of their own, while the ethnographer/narrator turns into an object of inquiry. This does not signify a mere change of roles, but creates a two dimensional relationship, which comes through for instance in the following scene with the narrator and one of the villagers, Nabeel:

> 'It must make you think of all the people you left
> at home,' he said to me, 'when you put that kettle on
> the stove with just enough water for yourself.'
>
> There was a brief pause and then Isma'il said
> quickly: 'Why should it? He has us and so many other
> friends to come here and have tea with him; he has no
> reason to be lonely.'
>
> 'It's not the same thing,' said Nabeel. 'Think how
> you would feel.'

> […] It was the first time anyone in Lataifa or
> Nashawy had attempted an enterprise similar to mine
> – to enter my imagination and look at my situation as
> it might appear to me. (*In an Antique Land* 152)

Radhakrishnan, who, like Ghosh, is engaged in a project of
dismantling the hegemonic position of a Western-originated
discourse (the discourse of postmodernism, in his case),
maintains that for genuine transcultural readings to become
possible, other realities will have to be "recognized not merely as
other histories but as *other knowledges.*" (2000, 58; orig. emphasis)
To transcend the incommensurability in worldviews, the
participants would have to imagine their own "discursive-
epistemic space[s] as a form of openness to one another's
persuasion" (2000, 61). As can be seen in the above quotation
from the novel, the narrator's encounters with the villagers
constitute this kind of openness through a two-directional act of
knowing, a moment of contact between two active participants
similar to the idea of the simultaneous discovery in *The Calcutta
Chromosome*. One cannot simply observe the world by either
trying to know it, or by trying to know oneself by looking at it:
the world, or the other, looks back at one at the same time.
Consequently, the other is not merely an inert object to be
appropriated to the ethnographer's own discourse by 'knowing'
it, or to be used for purposes of self-definition: it is active and
looks back at the observer.

The connections Ghosh creates in his novels are primarily
those eclipsed by the universalized knowledge-production
strategies of Western ideologies and sciences (especially history
and social sciences). Even if the present-day cross-cultural
communication in the narrative proves to be nearly impossible
without these universals, *In an Antique Land* does succeed in
piercing through them and revealing other epistemologies by
dissolving and transforming the traditional methods of
knowledge production in history and ethnography. Ghosh's
strategy of representation in the novel is almost identical to the
program of "modernist" ethnography delineated by the

ethnographer George E. Marcus and shortly introduced in the introduction:

> Far from ignoring "objective conditions" such as processes of coercion, the play of interests, and class formation, the focus of modernist ethnography on the experiential and access to it through language in context is direct engagement with and exploration of such conditions – without, however, the usual obeisances to the given social scientific frameworks for their discussion. […] But while modernist ethnography operates fully cognizant of the history of the political and economic circumstances in which identities have been formed, it is not built explicitly around the trope of power, but rather of ethics, that is, the complex moral relationship of the observer to the observed, of the relevance of the observed's situation to the situation of the observer's own society, and ultimately the exploration of the critical purpose of contemporary ethnographic analysis. (1998, 75)

It would seem that the significance of ethically tinged representation based on the relationships and connections between people as both observers and those observed lies in "the possibility of changing the terms in which we think objectively and conventionally about power," to use the words of Marcus (1998, 75).

But despite references to an ethical dimension exceeding the abilities of the traditional intentional subject or existing beyond language and discourse, novels are, obviously, very much narration and language. Even though Ghosh has constructed his novels in a manner that tries to preserve the alterity and independence of the other insofar as this is possible, he remains inside language. Especially in *In an Antique Land* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*, the choice of what to narrate and how is strongly reminiscent of Derridean deconstruction, which is aimed at opening a certain text up to the blind spots or ellipses within it.

In the latter novel, the dominant interpretation to be deconstructed is that of the history of Malaria research and the breakthrough in it achieved by Ronald Ross. In line with deconstruction, the novel repeats this dominant version through a detailed commentary in the form of Murugan's accounts of the official version of this intertwined colonial and medical history and simultaneously opens it up with the narrative of the silent group manoeuvring the whole thing. *In an Antique Land* deconstructs the representational strategies of the sciences of ethnography and historiography with fictive literary narration to produce a narrative that opens up new ways of realizing the contemporary situation of globalization and multiculturalism. Ideally, deconstruction aims at a reading which is neither a commentary nor an interpretation. It is meant to open up a textual space that is 'other' to commentary and interpretation, by this means creating distance to logocentric conceptuality. A deconstructive reading of a text exceeds the totality of the dominant version. Seen in this way, the goal of deconstruction is to locate a point of otherness within logocentric conceptuality and then to deconstruct this conceptuality from that point of otherness (Critchley 1999, 20-31).

The above characterization of deconstruction comes quite close to what Levinas aims at in his self-other relationship: in his model the other remains an undefinable alterity interrupting the totality of the same. Levinas differs from Derrida in that for Levinas the other exists ultimately beyond discourse. Derrida's model, although resistant to the language of logocentrism and traditional philosophy, is decidedly about texts and discourse. *The Calcutta Chromosome* as a whole represents the coming together of ethics and deconstruction: in it the dominant version of the history of malaria research is deconstructed from a point of alterity (Mangala's subaltern group), which resists definition or interpretation by remaining secret and silent outside of discourse. The novel is highly remisniscent of Critchley's delineation of *clôtural* reading. Critchley is here outlining a manner of interpretation which would combine deconstruction and ethics:

> *Clôtural* reading articulates the ethical interruption of ontological closure, thereby disrupting the text's claims to comprehensive unity and self-understanding, a procedure which [...] extends all the way to a reading of Derrida's and Levinas's texts. A *clôtural* reading of a text would consist, first, on a patient and scholarly commentary following the main lines of the text's dominant interpretation, and second, in locating an interruption or alterity within that dominant interpretation where reading discovers insights within a text to which that text is blind. My governing claim is that these insights, interruptions, or alterities are moments of *ethical transcendence*, in which a necessity other than that of ontology announces itself within the reading, an event in which the ethical Saying of a text overrides its ontological Said. (Critchley 1999, 30)

Consequently, instead of producing a tension or vacillation between each other in the novel (or within Critchley's concept of *clôtural* reading), Levinasian ethics and Derridean deconstruction seem to support each other in their goals of disrupting and transcending discursive totalities, be they those of the self or those of logocentric narratives.

As a waypoint, it should by now be clear that Ghosh is engaged in a project which raises our awareness of alternative ways of constructing the world based on ethical connections that dismantle the traditional binary constructions of Western modernity. As I stated in the introduction, the primary purpose of this dissertation as a whole is to examine Ghosh's ethically informed techniques for transcending the borders between various discursive totalities. The articles in section IV break down this larger question by examining the ways in which Ghosh represents the encounter with the other, be that a person, a discourse, a literary genre or an animal. On the other hand, the articles form a whole by approaching the main research question of the dissertation from slightly different angles that are dictated by the thematic emphases of each novel.

Levinas's meta-ethics and poststructuralist deconstruction are both highly abstract theoretical constructions. In this

dissertation, they are placed in the context of Ghosh's narratives, to show how fiction and ethico-political theory can explicate and back up one another and set examples for how we conceive of the world. Although the relationship and possible bias between the personal and socio-political within theories of the ethical is in dispute, all parties agree on the fact that the only space where the personal ethical action is conceivable is the social space of being with other/s. The defining of ethical action demands that it be contextualized in specific socio-cultural and political circumstances. The following section ties Ghosh's output into the intellectual climate of the Subcontinent through examining the coming together of modernist and postmodernist ideas in the cultural and political history of India.

III.2. Modernism, postmodernism and the idea of India

In the West, the concepts of rationality, knowledge and truth that were developed during the Enlightenment period became the building blocks of the metaphysic of modernity. The ideology of modernity is heavily dependent on binary constructions (e.g. science/religion, or rationality/irrationality). The world is largely conceived through separate opposites divided into two antagonistic poles. Various modernist tenets were also inherent in the colonial project. Later, postmodern ideas were developed with the goal of destabilizing such ways of thinking. As a consequence, the postmodernist dissolution of modernist, separate, individual subjectivity, the dismantling of the ideology based on binaries and the highlighting of the textuality and the representational character of different versions of reality were eagerly adopted by many postcolonial intellectuals as useful tools for deconstructing the colonial legacy. But this does not mean that the ideology of Western originated postmodernism was necessarily assimilated as such. In India, as in many other areas, the process of adopting postmodern ideas is more aptly described as a process of translation, in which the local discourses blend with modernist and postmodernist ways of thinking, producing idiosyncratic amalgamations. In the following, I shall offer an overview of how the process of interweaving modernism,

postmodernism and the indigenous discourses of the Bengal area and culture proceeded in India.

One modernist discourse that people in the subcontinent had to assimilate was that of nationalism. Sunil Khilnani (1997) presents the striving for Indian unity mainly through the ideas and influence of two men, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlar Nehru. Their notions of Indian identity and unity were in many respects oppositional. Gandhi refused to separate religion and politics in the secularist manner of the colonial power, and opted for traditional tales and religious legends to find a common basis for Indian identity and unity. He was against Partition as a violation of the common cultural inheritance of the population. His was an idea of a self-produced unity and an identity free of the problems of the Western mode of history and nationalism, a unity produced on the level of everyday life on the basis of the common inheritance of tradition and legend. The Prime Minister, Nehru, on the other hand, operated on the political level. His idea was to create a common history for India that would present its past as leading through a gradual unification of various cultures towards participation in the universal development of mankind. He saw the adoption of the Western philosophy of development as the only way to create unity in India and make it an inherent part of world economics and politics. According to Khilnani, Nehru's idea was that a distinct Indian identity was possible only "within the territorial and institutional frame of a state […]: a model committed to protecting cultural and religious difference rather than imposing a uniform 'Indianness'" (1997, 167). In general, Gandhi can be seen as representing the ethical means for creating connections between people of the Subcontinent, while Nehru clearly operated within the hegemonic discourse of nationalism he wanted to modify to Indian circumstances.

With independence and nationalism, then, the new political entity of India adopted the Western ideology of a common history leading to the unification of a people as a nation. With a population comprising such manifold differences, this history had to be an extremely forced and premeditated invention. On the surface, Partition seemed to be a clear division between the Hindu and Muslim religions. In reality, as we know, there are

people of both religions on either side of the border, not to mention all the other religions that have been brutally divided by it. Furthermore, the secularist nationalist separation of the religious component from all the other components contributing to communal identity was an extremely violent process. It disregarded all the other cultural affiliations that people necessarily possess, such as ties to place of origin, ethnic group, language etc.

In a sense, the political decolonization was not enough to create a stable state and a healthy nation. Independence, the Partition and the federalism and the secularism of the new state were political ideals functioning within the political discourse that only recognized citizens: it had no established way of affecting the development of national, communal and religious identities of actual people. These political measures, together with the charismatic figure of the Prime Minister, Nehru, were enough to bring things to a standstill for some time, but eventually the regional and religious communalism managed to surface with an alarming force. After the periodical communal trouble of the 1950s, the situation gradually worsened. The central government exerted military force in the areas of Goa and Kashmir. Political decisions had to be increasingly circulated through the central administration, which created regional frustration. The apparent lack of power and autonomy also triggered secessionist movements in Assam, Punjab, Nagaland and Kashmir. These encouraged the central authorities to use even more power by dispatching the army into these regions. The increased authoritarianism of the state was now clearly visible and resulted in Indira Gandhi declaring a state of emergency (Mondal 2007, 23-24).

After the end of the state of emergency, Mrs Gandhi's undertakings led to the centre—region problematic becoming increasingly mixed with religious communalism, which had always represented the other side of the Indian national identity (at the same instant India became an independent nation it was also divided on religious and communal grounds). This tension between the state and the various communalisms is depicted by Ghosh in *The Shadow Lines*, for instance in the scene where the

narrator contemplates the fact that riots, which are communal trouble, do not make it to the newspapers, which only report acts of war which have to do with the nation-states and governments. I shall come back to this issue of nationalism and violence in the following section III.3.

To bring things to a standstill, Mrs Gandhi tried to increase her popularity within the Hindu community, which could help her thwart the appeal of the regional secessionists. With the support of Hindu majoritarianism, the centre tightened its grip over the regions, and matters resulted in Mrs Gandhi being assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984. This happened following an attack by the army on a Sikh shrine to arrest the leader of a Punjabi secessionist movement. After this, the religious/communal dimension of Indian national imagination took over with militant and chauvinistic Hindu nationalism in the lead.

These developments had a tremendous impact on the Indian cultural and political self-image. Modern Indian history and identity had to be reconsidered due to the fact that the grand narrative of nationalist freedom-fight against colonial rule had lost its relevance and credibility with the destruction of national ideals. This Nehruvian idea of a secularist and democratic national unity had slowly died with the deepening crisis of the Indian nation. Only empty words now remained of this once functional rhetoric. National unity had dispersed into various regional, linguistic, religious, caste and class identities. Secularism had been wrecked by using religious denominators for political manoeuvrings, which had planted communalism as an inherent part of political logic. Finally, democracy had deteriorated into a smoke screen covering the corruption of a disproportionately large bureaucracy (Mondal 2007, 25).

All this resulted in a serious crisis of representation, both politically and in a more fundamental sense. The Enlightenment-based idea of a secular nation and the adjacent representational structures had collapsed and destroyed India's emergent idea of itself. With the ideology of nationalism went its political manifestation, the concept of a modern sovereign and self-representative state, which had stood for progress, modernity,

liberty and freedom. The state now stood for coercion, repression and oligarchy. This sinister depiction of a not atypical postcolonial state would frequently connect with the period of emergency when the state had assumed its most authoritarian guise. In Indian fiction of the 1980s, it is quite common to encounter the state as a threatening and all-invading presence. In the fiction of Ghosh the state comes through "variously as a menace, a threat, a distant and peremptory presence, or is ironically mocked as a perversion of 'rationality'" (Mondal 2007, 26). In general, the history of twentieth century India is represented as a fight for national freedom over the colonial rule, followed by the fight of multiple religious and regional communities against the repressive nation-state.

In her *Limiting Secularism: The Ethics of Coexistence in Indian Literature and Film* (2008), Priya Kumar provides an extensive treatment of the entanglements between religious co-existence and secularist nationalism in India after Partition. She proposes an ethically conceived alternative to the Nehruvian discourse of liberal secularist tolerance which, as we have seen, has degenerated into coercion and oppression of other religious groups by the Hindu majority. Her idea of "revising the related and entangled notions of tolerance and secularism" through the examination an "ethics of coexistence" is based on an "imaginative response to particular to particular historical moments marked by rising religious violence in the Indian subcontinent" (Kumar 2008, xv). This comes very close to the way in which Ghosh depicts the religious-communal rioting in *The Shadow Lines*, where imagination is highly emphasized as the basis for ethically wrought versions of the national past of India. I shall examine Ghosh's narrative representation of violence in the next section.

The need to criticise and revise the discourses of colonialism, Indian nationalism and Indian colonial and national identity is apparent in all of Ghosh's writing. He is also opposed to the authoritarian and coercive actions of the state. But at the same time there also seem to be signs of a longing for certain aspects of the Nehruvian utopia of a secularist, democratic national unity within a nation-state that would contain India's

diversity in a syncretic whole. Based on ethically conceived solidarity, this would provide an ideal alternative to religious and ethnic chauvinism as well as political dispersal and religious/ethnic violence that are rampant in contemporary Hindu nationalism. Postmodern ideas offered a useful method for tackling the social and political situation in India in the 1980s and 1990s.

To deconstruct the descriptions of the colonies by various colonial discourses it was necessary to deconstruct the philosophical basis on which they stood. Similarly, the various modernist genres and scientific discourses need to be dismantled or changed to suit the purposes of the postcolonial world. Accordingly, Ghosh has been commended for his generic versatility and inventiveness. His experimentation with literary and scientific genres and disciplines are the most apparent testimony to his affiliation with postmodernism. He mixes historiography, ethnography and scientific discourses with various literary genres in his search for authentic representations that are cognizant of both the heterogeneity and the unity of cultural groups. This is most readily evident in *In an Antique Land*, which, as stated in the introductory section (II.3.) is the most postmodern of Ghosh's works in terms of its narrative technique.

Obviously, writers of fiction adopted postmodern ideas to varying extent. It is commonly agreed among critics that the impact of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in 1981 on the narrative strategy of Indian fiction in English was tremendous. Ghosh does not embrace postmodernism as whole-heartedly as Rushdie, but they both use postmodern literary techniques to examine the birth, development and crisis of the Indian nation. The way postmodernism advocates diversity and difference as outcomes of the dispersal of modernist entities and totalities was embraced by writers trying to make sense of the Indian nation, which was about to disintegrate due to religious and communal trouble. The tensions caused by the double axis of centralism and regionalism plus nationalism and religious communalisms, which had caused pressure already during the days of the Raj, had come to the surface again after Nehru's death in 1964. The unrest reached its

peak during the 70s and 80s with the state of emergency (1975-77) and the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984, the influence of which can be detected in the background of *The Shadow Lines*.

Ghosh's attitude towards the past and the possible future of India and nationalism in general provides obvious ground for what Mondal describes as "an acute political and ethical dilemma" that tends to lead to "ambivalent meditation" in his writing (Mondal 2007, 28). This clearly resonates with problems of contemporary India, where the tension between the state and the numerous ethnicities is evident. The state uses its power to keep the nation together at least as a political concept, while the various religious communities are attempting to tear it apart. In *The Shadow Lines,* the concept of freedom in relationship to nation appears differently for different generations: for T'hamma freedom lies with the state and nationality. It is freedom from the colonial rule. But for the cosmopolitan Ila freedom means freedom from both the restrictive and oppressive state and the customs and rituals of the ethnic/religious communities. She abandons both dimensions of the failed Indian nationalism for a certain kind of cosmopolitanism.

What, then, could freedom mean in the future and how should the history of the Indian nation be represented for it to become meaningful for the needs of the present? This is where the political and ethical dilemma Mondal is referring to becomes a burning issue. Criticism of the contemporary concept of nationhood is necessary so that the original goal of freedom for the people promised at independence is not totally forgotten. However, the destabilizing and dismantling of the current nationalist structures in representation might easily lead to even greater disintegration and the total dispersal of the nation. The huge national whole of India should be protected, while the current discourse and ideology of the only thing keeping this whole together, the state, should be deconstructed and rebuilt in a manner that makes possible the peaceful co-existence of the various heterogeneous elements it contains. The politics of difference and instability and the ethics of unifying connections are pitted against each other, just as they are in the fiction of Ghosh.

Mondal claims that Ghosh is ideologically attached to the syncretic nationalism of Nehru (Mondal 2007, 29). It is true that Ghosh's writing tends to promote syncretism and humanism, which as Enlightenment-originated ideas on the surface seem to create a certain tension with his postmodernist preoccupations. For Ghosh, the common humanity and the accompanying similarity of human experience across different spaces and times has been divided and fractured by the ideology of modernity and its various avatars like Western geographical and ideological expansion, modernist knowledge production strategies (mainly of sciences) and nationalism. And it is concerning nationalism where I would disagree with Mondal. Although the Nehruvian model of nationalism would perhaps be regarded by Ghosh as a lesser evil than the current situation, I would say that Ghosh conceives nationalism in general as an undesirable Western formation. Nationalism is based on binary divisions and necessarily demands the invention of a certain kind of 'false' history on which to stand. Where the idea of nation is concerned, Ghosh seems to be closer to Mahatma Gandhi than Nehru: Gandhi opposed the Partition, the Western form of nationalism, and the discourse of history that came with it. The idea of constructing a feasible future out of a selected past did not appeal to him. Gandhi wanted to count on pre-existing local identities and traditions to create a larger Indian whole. For this purpose, he developed the concept of *Swadeshi*,

> a patriotism based on a respect for the everyday material world inhabited by most on the subcontinent. His adoption of cloth as a symbol of interconnection exemplified this esteem of the everyday. By spinning and weaving their own cloth, through literal self-production, Indians would regain the economic control and cultural respect that colonialism had usurped and battered. (Khilnani 1997, 165)

Gandhi's idea of nation as a self-producing community was clearly incommensurable with the traditional Western territorially conceived political nation-state.

Like Gandhi, Ghosh is opposed to the political discourse, as well as the haphazard division of land and human communities required to form a nation. It is noteworthy that, in *The Circle of Reason*, he uses precisely cloth and weaving as the metaphors for creating the world and its history. The protagonist of the novel, Alu, is reminiscent of the imprisoned Gandhi, who fasted and took vows of silence while sitting at his spinning wheel for a week at a stretch. He considered the spinning wheel in his cell to be the only connector capable of making all Indians using it feel that they are the children of the same land (Wolpert 2001, 115). In Ghosh's novel, Alu is equally silent, until he gains a unifying voice through the activity of weaving and creates connections between the individuals in the diverse crowd. Ghosh further connects weaving with writing, i.e. the production of discursive representations. Both weaving and writing, then, are thematised as self-productive activity which disrupts the discourse and history of Western modernity. And this activity is in the novel linked with ancient trade and the routes used to convey self-produced commodities to distant places. Unlike Gandhi, Ghosh extends the connections implied by cloth trade and weaving far beyond the Indian predicament to other times and places. In a sense, Ghosh by-passes nationalism as though it were a mere whim of modernity while reaching beyond its sphere both geographically and temporally. However, like Gandhi for whom spinning could regain the economic control and cultural respect of a people usurped by colonialism, Ghosh weaves cultures into a texture of connections between people to produce a heterogeneous whole, like a many-coloured cloth.

Although Ghosh adopts syncretism and humanism in his project of seeking ways of representing connections between cultures, and although he probably would agree with the view of nationalism in India as a colonial/postcolonial failure, I would connect his humanist tendency and his concept of nationalism more with Gandhi than with Nehru. Further, there seem to be signs of a separation between the state and society within nationalism in Ghosh's writing. Ghosh, who usually appears quite positive about the possibilities of various discursive mergers, is surprisingly adamant in his delineation of

nationalism: in his view, the nationalist political and 'official' discourse is incommensurable with human affairs and constitutes a gap between the words and the world. The state, unfortunately the only connecting force in the Indian nation, comes through as a faceless and violent machinery totally detached from the actual lives of the people, whom it only recognizes and addresses as 'citizens'. This is reminiscent of their separation by Rabindranath Tagore, who characterized nation as a state of being which people assumed when being organized as a mechanical unit. In Tagore's view, this kind of attitude destroys personal humanity. Further, the state, which represents the mechanical political machinery, uses science for perpetrating violence and oppressing people.

Consequently, Ghosh's endorsement of syncretism and humanism that alleviate cultural differences through enabling the establishment of connections, as well as his antipathy towards nationalism and its dividing epistemology, seem to have their distinguished predecessors in Mathatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore. Nehru, who was also greatly influenced by these two, did not, however, share their antipathy towards traditional Western political nationalism. I shall not chart the possible reasons for the failure of his national model here. Suffice it to say that it was a failure that cast a long shadow that still hangs over the social and cultural intelligentsia in India. Through Tagore, among others, Ghosh also became implicated in the tradition of the Bengal Renaissance, which is the best known of the vernacular 'renaissances' that emerged in India around the mid-nineteenth century. This movement represented the attempt of the colonised India to come to terms with the ideology of modernism and to produce a specifically Indian modernity out of the encounter between the 'indigenous' cultures and this Western model.

The modernism that came into existence through the Bengali Renaissance was by no means a straightforward replica of the Western version. Modernist concepts had to be interrogated in relation to the existing social and cultural traditions and to India's position as a colonised area. For instance, the abstract and universal nature of humanism in Western

modernity was not palatable as such. This form of humanism had its basis in the Enlightenment political discourse on 'rights'. These rights became actualised in the French and American revolutions and they followed the logic of the essential and universal humanity as the defining characteristic of all human beings. They were shared by everyone irrespective of time and place. It is no surprise that the reception of this discourse based on universal rights was not unproblematic in a colony where these rights were denied. Further, the generally optimistic spirit of the European humanism was in India mixed with insecurity, even pessimism. It became symptomatic of the frustrating battle for cultural equality with the Western nations—a goal never to be reached according to the criteria of the same nations, despite obvious merits (e.g. Tagore's Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913).

Consequently, in India universal humanism was intertwined with local particularism which would then colour every discourse forming within the parameters of Indian modernity (this was the case for instance with the Bengali Renaissance). As we have seen, Indian nationalism would be one obvious example. The idea of individualism, of singular individual identities, is another case in point: it was continuously under pressure by the various religious, linguistic and other collective identities that represented considerable power. The idea of distinct subjectivities was therefore not easily assimilated into the discourses of the Subcontinent. I have already looked at Ghosh's way of constructing subjects with both modernist and postmodernist features in sub-section II.3.1., and shall briefly return to this issue from the point of view of ethics in the article on *The Calcutta Chromosome* (IV.4.).

On a more positive note, much could be assimilated from Western modernity and used for specifically Indian purposes. The introduction of print culture paved the way for new literary genres like the novel, the short story and biography. With them also came new concepts of identity and subjectivity. The 'neutral' (as opposed to sacred) time of the empty, linear causal logic of modernist historiography seemed to be just waiting for emplotment in the interests of creating a history that would answer the need for cultural parity with Western nations.

Rationalism stemming from the Enlightenment-based positivism and empiricism came to India in the form of scientific rationality advocated by the colonial state. It was therefore taken as a sign of power. Science became the equivalent of reason and progress.

The ambivalent form in which these discourses were assimilated by the Bengali Renaissance reflects the position of colonial subjugation. For instance, while scientific positivism and empiricism were welcomed enthusiastically, their secular nature was discarded. There were quests for analogies and equivalents in ancient (mainly Hindu) religious texts and philosophies. In a slightly contradictory vein, the same religious and philosophical traditions were also used in attempts to humanise science (Balaram in *The Circle of Reason* is one tragicomic fictional representative of both these tendencies). Either way, rationalism appears as mediated by religion. The science versus religion problematic is central throughout *The Circle of Reason*, and I examine the blending of these two poles in the article on the novel (sub-section IV.1.).

In an interview, Ghosh has spoken of the influence that Tagore and the writer and film maker, Satyajit Ray, have had on his writing and on his way of conceptualizing the world (Silva and Tickell 1997, 172). Most idiosyncrasies of Indian modernity can be traced back to Tagore. Consequently, all of the above mentioned features of the Indian modernity are represented in Ghosh's writing. Tagore's attitude towards nationalism has already been touched on. His relationship with Western modernity in general was complex and changed during his life. In its project of constructing an Indian modernity, the Bengali Renaissance was no longer interested in the rural folk culture, which these representatives of upper and middle classes had previously shared with the peasants. This neglect of the culture produced by the subaltern people of India was later a cause for great regret for Tagore. This is also a point where Ghosh diverges from the Bengali tradition: he has always been interested in popular culture and oral folk stories, the representation of which in English forms a significant dimension of his writing. But Tagore's knowledge of the fact that the formation of people into colonial subjects has caused and required forms of self-alienation

both on individual and larger cultural levels is something Ghosh endorses quite eagerly. The most touching depiction of this predicament comes probably in *The Glass Palace*, in the character of Arjun (see sub-section II.5.1. and the article in IV.5.). Mondal represents Tagore as "the figure that looms over Ghosh's troubled and ambivalent relationship to modernity and humanism" (Mondal 2007, 36). This is quite evident in the shared negative attitude of the two towards the modernist discourses of nationalism, science, colonialism and their alienative effects.

The writer and film-maker Satyajit Ray is featured by Mondal as representing a more straightforward and positive attitude towards modernity, especially the discourse of humanism based on the Enlightenment. Ray's films and stories almost invariably either address children or depict the world through them. This "register of innocence" (Mondal 2007, 36) has points of convergence with several of Ghosh's main protagonists, notably Alu in *The Circle of Reason* and the narrators in *The Shadow Lines* and *In an Antique Land*. There is an aura of, if not innocence, at least openness about these characters. This 'liberality' at the face of the world backs up Ghosh's promotion of unprejudiced attitude towards everything new and especially towards other people and the world they inhabit. This works well as an epistemological principle for Ghosh, whose work is directed towards the humanist creation of ethically formed connections between differing cultures and often antagonistic discourses. It seems that for Ray, too, open-mindedness worked as a metaphor for humanism. It comes through as a part of his project of confirming the human, which basically stood for the invigorating of the humanist appeal within the tradition of the Bengali Renaissance. As far as the narrative techniques and themes in fiction writing are concerned, Ray's delineation of multi-dimensional individuated characters and his way of writing highly intricate plots and themes into deceptively simple narrative structures are also apparent in Ghosh's writing.

The tensions created by the clash and merging of Western ideologies with those of the Subcontinent resulted in a discursive whirlwind, which reached its peak in the 1980s with the introduction of postmodernist ideas (see II.3.1.). This seems to

have resulted in the appearance of ethical tenets in Ghosh's narratives. The clash between ideologies has clearly resulted in a heightened awareness of the relativity of all discursive constructions. Ghosh's ability to move in-between discourses, to mould them, as well as to interweave and undo them, can be seen as resulting in a kind of frustration with language and discourse: although narration carries with it powerful political overtones and has the power to mould the world (even to make things corporeal, as Zindi's narration does in *The Circle of Reason*), it does do not seem to offer access to any ultimate and unchanging truth concerning human existence or the encounter with the other human being. The power of language seems to lie in its ability to change its object of description and create realities. The ethical awareness of the distorting nature of narration begins to show more clearly in *The Shadow Lines*, where, as shall be shown below as well as in the article IV.2., the narration seems to be urgently aware of its own powers and the need to wield those powers cautiously.

Consequently, while continuing to discuss the difficult relationship of nationalism and communalism in the Subcontinent in a closer relationship to Ghosh's narration, the following sub-section also reacts to Ghosh's endeavour to transcend the 'aesthetic of indifference' mentioned in the introduction. The representation of violence, which, as has been noted, is a recurrent theme in Ghosh in the form of the attacking mob, offers excellent ground for examining Ghosh's narrative strategy of refusing to turn violence into an overtly dramatized aesthetic spectacle. This strategy of not defining matters too obviously from any one angle is characteristic of Ghosh and is one of the defining features of his writing. As the presence of collective violence is most readily available in *The Shadow Lines*, I shall once again turn to this novel as the main focus of my examination.

III.3. National and communal struggle
– representation of violence

Although each of his novels contains some measure of mob action, *The Shadow Lines* represents the most thorough examination of collective violence in Ghosh's oeuvre. The novel narrates rioting in post-partition India and Pakistan in close relationship with nationalism and communalism. In another context, Ghosh has expressed his concern about the descriptions of violence in general:

> When I now read descriptions of troubled parts of the world, in which violence appears primordial and inevitable, a fate to which masses of people are largely resigned, I find myself asking, Is that all there was to it? Or is it possible that the authors of these descriptions failed to find a form—or a style or a voice or a plot—that could accommodate both violence *and* the civilized willed response to it? (Ghosh 2002, 62)

I shall next look at how violence and unrest are represented in Ghosh's own descriptions of violence.

When the narrator of *The Shadow Lines* is studying in Delhi, he browses through old newspapers to find something on the riots he remembers from the Calcutta of the early sixties. He learns that the riots of his memory were the off-spring of riots that followed the theft of a relic (the hair of the Prophet Muhammad) from a mosque near Srinagar in the Kashmir area of India in the late 1963. The relic had been very popular among all the communities in Kashmir and over the centuries it had become a symbol of the unique and distinctive culture of Kashmir that transcended the now politicised and nationalised denominator of religion. After the theft, riots erupted both in India and Pakistan, but this time the targets of the rioters were not people of different religion and community, but property identified with the government and the police. The government officials were surprised: the theft of the relic had brought together the communities of Kashmir as never before. After two weeks of

rioting in India and both wings of Pakistan, the relic was allegedly 'recovered' by the Indian intelligence authorities.

Regrettably, as the city of Srinagar bursts with joy, a demonstration against the theft of the relic in the town of Khulna in the east wing of Pakistan turns violent. As events accumulate, people of different religions are once again restored as the target of the rioters, and Hindus begin to pour into India over the border. The riots then gradually spread to Calcutta, where, as an inverted 'mirror image' of what happens in Pakistan, Muslims are attacked by Hindus. The common feeling among the Kashmiri communities epitomized through the ancient relic provides an example of the kind of connection that leaves aside nationalist discourse with its religious and other divisions. Both governments are eager to stop the riots, which they regard as subversive action against the hegemonic discourse of nationalism. Eventually, however, the riots develop from a communities vs. nations type of disorder into a nationalities vs. communalisms kind of struggle, in which the citizens of the Hindu nation attack Muslims within its borders and vice versa. The beginning of these riots is in line with Gaurav Desai's observation that "any residual syncretism evident today is to Ghosh a privileged site of political resistance itself—and particularly of political resistance to the repressive state" (Desai 2004, 128). But as the unrest spreads syncretism against the state is gradually pushed aside as the communal status of violence is restored.

In the case of India and Pakistan, the national border is also a communally constructed border. But while the border is quite valid at the level of official national discourse and clearly separates two nation-states, the communal border actually divides the original Indian Self, which was formed by the plenitude of religious communities, the two largest of which are Hindus and Muslims. Consequently, the divide between the Hindu and the Muslim is clear cut only in the nationalist discourse; in practical reality there are people of both communities on both sides of the border. The national and communal identities mix with one another. In this sense, on the other side of the border is not an other, but rather the divided

communal Self.[9] Hence the title of the novel, *The Shadow Lines*, which constitutes a comment on the shadowy nature of the lines and borders separating the intertwined communal and national identities of people.

This two-sided nature of the border is symbolized in the novel among other things by the mirror, which shows not only oneself, but functions also as a window to other selves on the other side of the border constituted by Partition. When writing about the fear of riots he felt as a child in Calcutta, the narrator concludes: "It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the sub-continent from the rest of the world—not language, not food, not music—it is the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one's image in the mirror" (*The Shadow Lines* 204). The narrator also describes the border between India and Pakistan as a "looking-glass border", referring to the mirrored riots on both sides of the border: "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" (*The Shadow Lines* 233). Ironically, then, the line that was supposed to create two free nations with free citizens, actually bound people together more strongly than ever. Of course, the idea of a mirror functions both on the communal and the national spheres: if the riots are mirror images of each other at the communal level, so are the official announcements at the national level: "As for the two governments, they traded a series of curiously symmetrical accusations" (*The Shadow Lines* 230), first criticizing each other for letting the riots happen, then congratulating each other for quelling them.

All in all, the novel depicts riots at three levels. There are riots between different religious communities within one nation-state, there are simultaneous, mirrored, riots between religious communities in two states and there are riots between different communities (one or more) and the government. Robi, one of the

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[9] See Anshuman Mondal (2003) for more extensive clarification of the national/communal problematics in relation to the novel.

narrator's cousins, describes his experiences from the time he was acting as a government official:

> I'd have to go out and make speeches to my policemen, saying: You have to be firm, you have to do your duty. You have to kill whole villages if necessary—we have nothing against the people, it's the terrorists we want to get, but we have to be willing to pay a price for our unity and freedom. And when I went back home, I would find an anonymous note waiting for me, saying: We're going to get you, nothing personal, we have to kill you for our freedom. It would be like reading my own speech transcribed on a mirror. (*The Shadow Lines* 246-247)

Ironically, both the terrorists and the government troops are acting to secure their freedom, which, as a construction of nationalist ideology, is an illusion. As Robi says: "the whole thing is a mirage. How can anyone divide a memory? If freedom were possible, surely Tridib's death would have set me free" (*The Shadow Lines* 247).

In his article on *The Shadow Lines*, Jon Mee ties up nicely the three-fold nature of riots on the subcontinent:

> The riots represent one of those blurrings that haunt the novel as they reveal that the imagining of the nation and the state may not be the same thing. Even in their antagonism towards each other, the rioters may be bound together in ways that the state cannot acknowledge. […] The riots are as much a subversion of difference, the difference between India and Pakistan, as they are the product of difference, the difference between Hindu and Muslim, and even the latter asserts a relationship with the image in the mirror. (Mee 2003, 104-105)

The blurring Mee refers to is at a general level due to the narrative's tendency of dismantling various discursive totalities (here nationalism and communalism) on the one hand and

attempting to offer multiple views/versions on the events making these dismantlings evident on the other.

In Ghosh's fiction, then, the two-dimensional nature of human connections becomes apparent on many occasions. For instance, the double nature (national and communal) of the divide between India and Pakistan is symbolized through the two-fold function of the mirror. When applied to the divide, or border, it both acknowledges the difference (or national identity) instigated through nationalist discourse (the mirror that blocks out the other and only shows oneself) and recognizes the communal bonds that reach across this official divide (the window through which you can see other selves of the divided Indian whole). As a result of the combined mirror-window effect, the relationship between the two nation-states is presented as a multi- and interhistorical issue in the communal and personal sense and not just as an issue based in the difference inherent in the discourse of nationalism (see the article on the novel in section IV.2. for more thorough examination of the mirror-window dyad).

But as the riots caused by the theft of the relic in the novel show us, people in the subcontinent are never safe from violence. Whether people opt for the inter-communal unity vs. the nation-states, or affiliate themselves with the nationalist imagery, which has divided the Indian communal self according to religious majorities, the double-condition of the subcontinent seems to lead to crowd disorder in the novel. Hence the need to create one's own affiliations, one's own imaginary identifications, to avoid appropriation by the discourses of others and to stay away from violence. Mee examines the novel as an example of a cultural translation that would by-pass the universals of nationalist or scientific discourse and occur directly between cultural differences. As Mee explains, quite often "universal values are privileged as a third term through which all differences must pass if they are to relate to one another" (2003, 91). Mee sees the strategy of the imaginative invention of one's own stories promoted by Tridib as an example of the kind of translation, or connection, that leaves these universals aside. It in a sense reaches across cultures instead of taking a detour into a universal

(such as the discourse of nationalism) beyond them. This is very close to how Radhakrishnan views the novel and its treatment of nationalist discourse, which

> insists that all other a priori imaginary relations and identifications (be they gender or sexuality based or class, religion, ethnicity, or community specific) be mediated and alienated into knowledge by the symbolic authority of nationalism that […] exercises total command precisely because it cannot be *had* by any one group yet can perform its representative-pedagogical function with seeming neutrality. (2000, 62, orig. emphasis)

The narrative itself backs up this kind of interpretation quite strongly by depicting riots on both sides of the border as a reminder of an "independent relationship" that manifests the "indivisable sanity that binds people to each other independently of their governments." This relationship "is the natural enemy of government, for it is in the logic of states that to exist at all they must claim the monopoly of all relationships between people." (*The Shadow Lines* 230)

To sum up, then, nation-states and communities do not exist on the same plane: a division that creates two nation-states and is quite successful in nationalist discourse, results in violent incisions at communal level. On the other hand, calls for communal divisions are unacceptable within the discourse of a nation-sate. But both nations and communities are in the end inventions. And all these inventions, whether personal or 'official' are equal in the epistemological sense; they are equally imaginary. But, as Radhakrishnan states in his study of the novel, although these inventions are epistemologically equal versions, they may be "all too 'real' in their political effects, hence the need to have 'one's own' version." (2003, 28) Accordingly, the novel offers the possibility of a kind of utopian transcendence of the communal (and at the same time the national) division in the form of the strategy of the imaginative invention of one's own stories promoted by the narrator's uncle, Tridib.

If we now re-examine the passage in *The Shadow Lines* where the narrator endeavors to find a way of writing about riots but ends up in a "struggle with silence," we can see that this silence is not only produced by the borders of national discourse:

> Every word I write about these events of 1964 is the product of a struggle with silence. It is a struggle I am destined to lose—have already lost—for even after all these years, I do not know where within me, in which corner of my world, this silence lies. All I know of it is what it is not. It is not, for example, the silence of an imperfect memory. Nor is it a silence enforced by a ruthless state–nothing like that, no barbed wire, no check-points to tell me where its boundaries lie. I know nothing of this silence except that it lies outside the reach of my intelligence, beyond words—that is why this silence must win, must inevitably defeat me, because it is not a presence at all; it is simply a gap, a hole, an emptiness in which there are no words. (*The Shadow Lines* 218)

In the strictest sense, then, in the novel the experience of a riot is "beyond words" and consequently also outside the reach of knowing. The experience of riots in the narrative is ethically depicted. Riots enact memories and sensations, but these are very difficult to turn into language because this would create meaning and knowledge, which again would not be able to convey these memories and sensations due to their partial and distorting character. It seems that any representation of a riot is necessarily banal, losing itself in the gap between the world and the words. Consequently, on another occasion the narrator reflects that the fear caused by riots "has a texture you can neither forget nor describe" (*The Shadow Lines* 204) and this double impediment affects the narrative representation of riots in the novel to a high degree. This texture that cannot be put into words or forgotten corresponds to the ethical Saying as delineated by Levinas and explicated in the section III.1.2.

Amitav Ghosh has expressed his concern about the literary representation of collective violence in an essay originally published in *The New Yorker* in 1995 (*The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi*). There, for the first time he writes about his experiences of the rioting that followed Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984. He quotes the Bosnian writer Dzevad Karahasan's essay *Literature and War*, where Karahasan establishes "a connection between modern literary aestheticism and the contemporary world's indifference to violence" (Ghosh 2002, 60). In Karahasan's view, "the decision to perceive literally everything as an aesthetic phenomenon—completely sidestepping questions about goodness and truth—is an artistic decision. That decision started in the realm of art, and went on to become characteristic of the contemporary world" (Karahasan in Ghosh 2002, 60).

Ghosh explains that for his next novel (*The Shadow Lines*), and for descriptions of violence in general, he needed to find a strategy of representation that would not reduce experiences and representations of riots, or violence in general, to mere spectacle. He had difficulties in finding a way of writing about the riots directly without "recreating them as a panorama of violence," as an aesthetic phenomenon in the sense Karahasan means. For instance, Robi's description of the riot that led to Tridib's death (*The Shadow Lines* 244-246) is narrated by him in the form of a recurring dream, a nightmare that ends before Tridib is actually killed. The description is dramatized and creates the effect of a film with rapid cuts. It seems that here Ghosh the writer does allow for a dramatized, spectacle-like description of violence. But, significantly, Robi's version of the incident is represented as a frightening dream; it follows the form and content of a stereotypical nightmare and does not claim to be a realistic account of the event. On the contrary, attention is drawn to the fact that the dream assumes 'artistic liberties' compared to how Robi actually remembers the events. Below is the beginning of the dream:

> Sometimes it's a crowd, sometimes just a couple of men. […] The odd thing is, that no matter how many men there are—a couple, or dozens—the street always seems

> empty. It was full of people when we went through it
> […] but all the shops are shut now, barricaded, and so
> are the windows in the houses. […] Then the men begin
> to move towards us—they're not running, they're
> gliding, like skaters in a race. They fan out and begin to
> close in on us. It's all silent, I can't hear a single thing, no
> sound at all. (*The Shadow Lines* 243-244)

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

The death of Tridib is described towards the end of the novel, and this is done in a totally different manner. When the narrator meets May, one of the eye-witnesses to Tridib's death in the 1964 riots, he says that he has never asked her about the events surrounding Tridib's death because he did not know how to do it: "I told her the truth: that I hadn't known how to ask, that I simply hadn't possessed the words; that I had not had the courage to breach her silence without the solid bridgehead of words." (*The Shadow Lines* 250) When the death of Tridib in the hands of the mob is finally described, it is reported by May without any dramatizing detail, without unnecessary adjectives, bluntly and in as short sentences as possible. Below is the end of the description. May has come out of the car and is running towards the old man and the rickshaw:

> I began to run towards the rickshaw. I heard Tridib
> shouting my name. But I kept running. I heard him
> running after me. He caught up with me and pushed
> me, from behind. I stumbled and fell. I thought he'd stop
> to take me back to the car. But he ran on towards the
> rickshaw. The mob had surrounded the rickshaw. They
> had pulled the old man off it. I could hear him
> screaming. Tridib ran into the mob, and fell upon their
> backs. He was trying to push his way through to the old
> man, I think. Then the mob dragged him in. He

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

That was that; that's all there is to tell.

We cleared away the dinner plates then, I remember.

(*The Shadow Lines* 250-251)

The short sentences in this quotation may have the effect of building up the atmosphere, but certainly they make for a very undramatical representation of violence, especially towards the end, where the deaths of the three men are stated matter of factly, before moving on to describe quotidian household tasks. Significantly, May does not see the actual acts of decapitation and throat cutting, in which the violence reaches its peak. The mob envelopes Tridib and the old man, blocking the view. Any description of violence is necessarily dramatic to a certain extent, but at least the above passage avoids aestheticizing the event or turning it into a spectacle. The incident is merely reported, there is no superfluous description and there is no explanation that would seek to give meaning to what happened.

The novel is more concentrated on narrating the inner experiences and consequences of riots than describing the actual acts of violence. And when finally the actual violence is described it is done in a manner that avoids any superfluous narration and by this means avoids superfluous dramatizing and meaning construction. The narrator of the novel seems to be quite as careful in his descriptions of violence as is Ghosh in the essay examined above. In the representation of riots the world of experience and the language of meaning do not coincide: there is a gap, and the narrator tries to avoid banality both by desisting from the use of discourse that would be inappropriate for the description of riots, and by not remaining silent about them. In his essay on the 1984 riots Ghosh explains that he felt responsible

for what he would write, what the effect of his words would be in a context where the political situation leaves "so little room for the writer":

> To write carelessly, in such a way as to appear to endorse terrorism or repression, can add easily to the problem: and in such incendiary circumstances, words cost lives, and it is only appropriate that those who deal in words should pay scrupulous attention to what they say. It is only appropriate that they should find themselves inhibited. (Ghosh 2002, 61)

This kind of awareness of the possibly drastic effects careless words might have has surely influenced the way in which Ghosh the writer represents violence. Ghosh further explains that to be able to write about violence he had to resolve the dilemma between his roles as a writer and a citizen. He maintains that, as a writer, his subject was obviously the violence, and as a writer he was worried about the fact that the contemporary conventions of representation in novels, news reports and films often just give us the bloody details and "present violence as an apocalyptic spectacle, while the resistance to it can easily figure as mere sentimentality, or, worse, pathetic or absurd." But as a citizen and a human being, Ghosh's experience of the riots was "not the horror and violence but the affirmation of humanity: in each case, I witnessed the risks that perfectly ordinary people are willing to take for one another." (Ghosh 2002, 61)

The description of Tridib's death in the novel seems to seek an equilibrium between the two 'faces' of a riot taken up by Ghosh in his essay: it depicts both the violence of the event and the "affirmation of humanity" that comes through in the form of Tridib's action as he faces the mob. By surrendering himself to the mob, Tridib sacrifices himself on May's behalf. When he pushes May down and plunges into the crowd trying to rescue the old man and Khalil, he must know what is going to happen to him. The act of Tridib is characterized as a sacrifice and mystery by May, once again highlighting the evasive nature of collective violence as the object of representation in the novel: matters

pertaining to it cannot be understood or voiced properly: "He gave himself up; it was a sacrifice. I know I can't understand it, I know I mustn't try, for any real sacrifice is a mystery" (*The Shadow Lines* 252).

The novel attempts to address the issue of violence by not defining it too obviously: the riots are there in the background all the time: they have had an effect on everyone. But the narrative appears extremely guarded about straightforward descriptions of violence. It does not try to define violence or give it meaning beyond the absolute minimum, because this would create the danger of allying it with the political discourse and giving riots a political meaning as either terrorism or action against repression. In the hands of Ghosh, fiction seems to be a useful discursive meta-mode for blending and framing various discourses and topics without defining them to the extent that they no longer seem to exist in their own right or independently. Ghosh has always managed to be surprisingly up-to-date and aware of things going on in cultural and political debates without explicitly thematizing them. This way of writing manages to engulf the urgent aspects of contemporary societies without becoming affiliated with any branch of science or politics; indeed without subordinating these debates to too much defining discourse. The various aspects of the world are not so much transformed into objects of the 'knowing' words of language; they are rather shown but left undefined so that everyone can form his/her own imaginary identifications with them. The power-related political overtones carried by language are here balanced by an ethical awareness, whereby communal violence is not straightforwardly defined into some discourse (be that public or personal, national or communal) appropriating the phenomenon into its own knowledge production strategies. Its presence is acknowledged and it is defined to the extent it has to be, but the awareness of the impossibility of an adequate representation of it is also present in the narrative. And when a description of violence cannot be avoided, care is taken to feature both the violence and the "civilized willed response to it," to contrast the horror of violence with the ethical affirmation of humanity. In *The Shadow Lines*, this affirmation is present in

Tridib's sacrifice, which is characterized as mystery. This, then, is an example of ethically aware narration, in which the political potential for definition and meaning formation of discourse/language is balanced by juxtaposing, or connecting, it with this ethical sacrifice, or giving away one's self, in front of the other. The ethical dimension that comes through in the character of Tridib shall be examined in more detail in the article in IV.2.

In the following, my aim is to outline how Ghosh situates his writing in relation to the process of globalization and the power-relationships that steer it, and how he represents the encounter between different classes, cultures and ideologies. Language carries with it power-related overtones, and when certain narratives gain hegemonic positions, other areas of reality tend to be left in silence. Therefore, I shall examine Ghosh's relationship to various 'grand' narratives by looking at the relationship between narration and silence in his novels. As we have seen, narration in general stands for the political and discursive, and silence for the ethical and non-discursive in Ghosh's narration.

III.4. Narration and Silence

Emanating from discussions of the new global world order over the past two decades has been the call for a new 'multicultural' literary paradigm. Apparently the term *world literature* was first coined by Goethe. As Wail S. Hassan (2000) notes in his article on literature in the age of globalization, when sketching the idea of world literature, Goethe was envisioning the future rather than describing a contemporary state of affairs. For him, world literature was a literature which would describe some kind of universal human experience through cross-cultural understanding, which he thought could be achieved by reading the leading writers of other (Western) nations. There was to be an open dialogue between nations, through which their literatures would eventually reach a synthesis. As Hassan notes, there have been suggestions that Goethe's idea of world literature was triggered by the increasing trade and communication that had followed the industrial revolution.

In the case of Amitav Ghosh, the idea of universalism, or universal human experience, is most evident in his call for connections across cultures. Already in *The Circle of Reason*, he adopts weaving, a symbol also used by Mahatma Gandhi for the creation of connections (see section III.1.), for referring to the universal nature of the experience constructed of particular strands: "And so weaving, too, is hope; a living belief that having once *made the world one and blessed it with its diversity* it must do so again. Weaving is hope because it has no country, no continent" (*The Circle of Reason* 58; emphasis added). Weaving, or experience or narration, has no specific country or continent. In this sense, it is a universal feature of mankind. In the introduction, I have already referred to the importance of establishing connections (weaving), and the meaning attributed to place that come through in the above citation. But this passage, and Ghosh's narration as a whole, also seem to negate the separate existence of universalism and particularism through a narrative process. The simultaneous emphasis on the diversity and the universality of humankind that emerges from Ghosh's narration is close to what Patrick Colm Hogan has named "particularist universalism" (2000, xvii), which can be characterized as simultaneous universalism and cultural particularism.

Hogan distinguishes between absolutism and universalism. While absolutism represents the idea that one culturally specific set of beliefs or practices applies to everyone, universalism "involves a self-conscious effort to understand precisely what is common across different cultures" (2000, xvi). Hogan seems to construct universalism as a point of view, rather than a dimension that becomes visible through the examination of various sites and their connections, as Marcus suggests (1998, 83).[10] Universalism, as defined by Hogan, seems to be adoptable at will, a method for examining heterogeneous groups of people.

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[10] Although Marcus in this context does not speak of universalism, but of the "global," and although the word "global" bears Western- and capital-related overtones of which universalism as a term is relatively free (excluding the discussions on Eurocentric 'universalism,' which actually is absolutism), for the purposes of this text, local and global or particular and universal can be used interchangeably.

According to him, in the universalist view, "no practices are ethnically particular," but all are "ethnically neutral" (2000, 313). He also states that through universalism people can discern "the common humanity" and the "shareable value of distinct instantiations" (2000, xviii) of it. He sees cultural particularism not as the opposite of universalism, but as its consequence. Hogan's universalism moves in the opposite direction from that of Marcus; in Hogan's view, respect for different cultures is to be gained through universalism, whereas Marcus promotes the view that universal features become visible through the examination of multiple particular sites and their connections.

It would seem that the model of Marcus is closer to Ghosh's narration than that of Hogan. Ghosh does not set out to search for universal features, but to construct multiple historical trajectories and connections among them. For him, the clothing (to apply an example used by Hogan) of his characters is certainly socio-culturally specific, and he usually describes the garments of his characters, as well as their circumstances of living (e.g. the descriptions of the apartments of the characters in *The Calcutta Chromosome* examined in section II.4.1.). But the fact that there are so many differing kinds of clothing, of which none are presented as being more significant or neutral than the others, lessens the definitive power of clothing in relation to the characters' ethnicity or origin. To the characters in Ghosh's novels, ethnic or racial differences, although acknowledged, are of surprisingly little consequence. Ghosh's way of narrating multiple histories and the creation of connections where they usually have not been discerned circumvents the traditional postcolonial discourse contemplating racial and ethnic differences. This has been noticed by Ranjita Basu in her article on Ghosh's novels: "It is curious to note that no false note is struck in Ghosh`s delineation of Egyptian or Arabic characters and this is because their emotions and passions are related to their universal humanity rather than to their racial identity". She describes this universal dimension as "a broader, more human context that transcends the boundaries between Indian and foreign" (1994, 152-53). In *The Circle of Reason*, for instance, we only learn towards the end of the novel that Zindi is Egyptian. As Basu points out, "this knowledge does

not help to define her in any way, for Ghosh has already defined her in a broader, more human context that transcends the boundaries between Indian and foreign" (1994, 153).

For Ghosh, then, to create connections between various socio-cultural and historical discourses is a deeply humane action that also indirectly constitutes the universal dimension of his narration. What is universal is revealed through ethical connections between various particularities (see the ethically framed discussion on substitution and universalism versus particularism in section III.1.2.). Since there is no straightforward access to these universals, one cannot just adopt a universalist approach; one has, rather, to narrate, often painstakingly, the intertwined histories and socio-cultural circumstances of various groups, to avoid the appropriation of discourses, and to secure for these groups their own agency and voice. The common humane features of mankind are gained through particularism.

As can be seen from the above discussion, the idea of universal experience has expanded considerably from the Western-based concept propounded by Goethe. Similarly, the status of nations has changed dramatically since Goethe's times, and trade and communication have multiplied in quantity and speed. Arif Dirlik succinctly lists the typical features of the contemporary situation:

> global motions of peoples (and, therefore, cultures), the weakening of boundaries (among societies, as well as among social categories), the replication in societies internally of inequalities and discrepancies once associated with colonial differences, simultaneous homogenization and fragmentation within and across societies, the interpenetration of the global and the local (which shows culturally in simultaneous cosmopolitanism and localism of which the most cogent version may be 'multiculturalism'), and the disorganization of a world conceived in terms of 'three worlds' or nation-states. (1997, 93)

If literature is produced under such circumstances, I think it is fair to say that we now live in the era of global multicultural

world literatures. But the question is, are we reaching a cultural synthesis through the merging of literatures, or are we witnessing a dispersal and fracturing of cultures. And what does this 'multiculturalism' mean? Postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha (1994) see multiculturalism as a positive concept and celebrate the border areas of cultural existence as a fertile ground for creating new narrative strategies to account for the new kinds of fragmented 'hybrid' experiences. Marxist theorists warn us against such abstract concepts and claim that multiculturalism is just a new name for marginalization and racism, this time dictated by the late-capitalist mode of production, which depends on globalization, not on colonial expansion. In their opinion, postcolonialism eventually serves to strengthen the ideology it claims to subvert. For this line of argument, see e.g. Edward San Juan:

> What strikes me as fatal is the repudiation of foundations and objective validity that undermines any move to produce new forms of creative power and resistance against global inequalities and oppression. Hybridised, heterogeneous and discrepant lifestyles, local knowledges, cyborgs, borderland scripts - such slogans tend to obfuscate the power of the transnational ideology and practise of consumerism and its dehumanizing effects. Postcolonial discourse generated in "First World" academies turns out to be one more product of flexible, post-Fordist capitalism, not its antithesis. (1998, 8)

San Juan further characterizes globalization as "a recently retooled program of universal commodification, imperialism for the twenty-first century." (1998, 198). Dirlik, in turn, criticizes postcolonial theory for its abstract concepts and accuses it of rendering "into problems of subjectivity and epistemology concrete and material problems of the everyday world" (1997, 76). He sees multiculturalism as a trick performed by global capitalism to include within its sphere areas that might otherwise turn against it.

The globalization discussion seems to indicate that there are elements of both homogenization (especially the political and economic levels) as well as diversity and tension (especially the cultural level) present in this new 'global village'.[11] As Doris Bachmann-Medick has noted in her study on intercultural communication, it seems that although we may have a relatively free trade zone in our post-national world, this has not resulted in "free cultural trade" of the kind Goethe thought could be achieved through the trans-national concept of world literature (Bachmann-Medick 1996). The directions, or narrative strategies, of this new world literature are varied. There is the alternative of aiming at a peaceful fusion of all difference into some kind of homogenic multicultural experience (Western postcolonialism). Then there is the option of building discursive barriers to resist this multiculturalization that acts as a smoke-screen for economic exploitation directed from the West (´the Empire writes back' type of thinking). Most works naturally end up as something that has elements of both these extremities in them.

During the 1990s, the Marxist branch of postcolonial theory (Aijaz Ahmad, E. San Juan, Dirlik, etc.) gained a prominent position beside the variant based on poststructuralism, which was the leading paradigm during the 1980s and part of the 1990s. The methods of Marxist theory are more practical and historically informed than those of the often abstract poststructuralist-based postcolonialism. With its emphasis on the movements of capital and work force, and with its insistence on the importance of the historical perspective, Marxist theory is also relevant and methodologically suitable for the examination of the globalization process. On the other hand, traditional postcolonial theory, with its basis on language and discursively constructed realities, is a useful tool for examining questions of power. As I am dealing with literature here, it is quite reasonable to take as a starting point language, and more specifically narration. In reference to the problem of synthesis versus diversification, it can be said that we have one world but several narrative realities that

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[11] For a good general overview of the globalization discussion, see e.g. King (1991).

inhabit it. These narrations are constructed through language, which carries with it cultural, political and power-related overtones. So, in the end, this seems to be a question of agency and power, of whose voice is heard and whose voice and ideology get to map the world. Those who are conquered, in a military or ideological sense or otherwise, are thrown into silence.

In his writing, Ghosh uses stories to indicate diversity in the social and cultural backgrounds of his characters. By using stories, he also tries to deal with the problem of appropriation. By giving away his narratorial responsibilities, in a way, he tries to give authentic voice to various kinds of people coming from different social classes and cultures. Through their stories, Ghosh tries to avoid appropriation on several levels. One of these is narratorial appropriation. The narrator in Ghosh's novels is often from the middle or upper-middle class of Indian society, belonging to the privileged group that has had Westernized education and is fluent in English (like Ghosh himself). Describing the lower classes from this position in a language they often do not know at all can be seen as an act of appropriation that makes them part of the privileged discourse, both linguistically and ideologically. Ghosh tries to give these people agency and their own point of view by locating them as the narrators of their own stories, instead of relating their lives from a privileged point of view. Consequently, Ghosh's attempt at avoiding narratorial appropriation is tantamount to the avoiding of appropriation over class differences.

In his study of Indian English fiction, Tabish Khair (2001) makes a distinction between the privileged and Westernized "babu" class and the "coolie" classes that are lower in the social hierarchy. He has also examined Ghosh's use of language in relation to appropriation (Khair 2001, 314-17). He points out that Ghosh does not "stage" the coolie and his/her use of English, or any other language. In other words, Ghosh does not use anything like the Rushdian chutney or Sanskritized English of Raja Rao to represent the language of the coolie, be it Bengali or some form of English. Everything is translated into English grapholect, with an indication in the text of the kind of variety in question.

Vernacular words and Indianisms are used only to explain something or to "fill a gap in the English grapholect" (2001, 316). As Khair points out, this is a good way of representing the subaltern without "appropriating a sense of authenticity" (2001, 316). Khair's reference here is to *The Calcutta Chromosome* only, but this feature seems to be present in Ghosh's other novels too.

If the stories help to maintain and create diversity, Ghosh's representation of his characters can be seen as creating common ground, or as moving towards a kind of transcendent unity in his narration. As I have attempted to show, Ghosh circumvents the traditional postcolonial discourse contemplating racial and ethnic differences by narrating his characters on the level of a kind of universal humanity, or experience. As will be seen later, the relationship between diversity and wholeness, or particularity and universality, in Ghosh's writing is quite complicated. Suffice it to say here, that in these days of discursively constructed realities, and of discourse as power, the delineation of this kind of transcendent ethical universal experience connecting people may appear to be out of place. But this is exactly how Ghosh seems to want it. He does not remain tied up only with the constructionist discursive epistemology, because this would mean conforming to the hegemonic Western way of narrating, or constructing, the world.

The stories narrated, or focalized, through individual characters in Ghosh's novels, although not superfluous to the narrative as a whole, often appear as distinct from the main stream of narration, and their contents represent the world of the character through which they are focalized. As indicated, the stories also have to do with agency. In *The Circle of Reason*, narration creates the world, makes it real, even corporeal. This implies that by changing the narrative, the narrator changes the world. To use one of Ghosh's favourite expressions, already encountered in the introduction to *The Glass Palace*, a change in a narrative is like the potter's thumb on the malleable clay whirling on the wheel. *The Circle of Reason*, then, concentrates on the importance of narration and the power of language to signify and to create alternative realities. The reference to clay also marks the material, corporeal and substantial nature of these narratively

constructed realities (*The Circle of Reason* 212-213). Silence, apart from the fact that it is a feature of Alu's character, does not play a significant role in the novel. There is, however, one scene where narration and silence are presented as parts of the same communicative process (this is a scene I shall be returning to several times). Uncharacteristically, Alu has begun to talk. He sits at the loom, weaves ferociously and speaks in a strange mixture of languages. The usually talkative group of people gathers around him to listen in silence (*The Circle of Reason* 279). Amazingly, people in this multi-lingual crowd seem to answer him through their individual silences. The scene is typical of the magic-realist spirit of the novel, but it also has relevance to Ghosh's theme of diversity in one - this is an example of all the languages in one.[12] This kind of mixture would also do away with the problems of agency and appropriation. It raises a question that has relevance to Ghosh's later writing: what is the nature of silence - is it the opposite of speech and narration, or does it have communicative potential? I will come back to this question later.

While it is not significantly thematised in *In an Antique Land*, in Ghosh's fourth novel, *The Calcutta Chromosome*, silence is given a prominent role. The theme of diversity in one is present once again, this time for instance in the form of the heterogeneous congregation dedicated to the goddess of Silence. The crowd has gathered to follow the transition of the mysterious Laakhan to a new body: "It seemed like a strangely motley assortment of people: men in patched lungis, a handful of brightly painted women in cheap nylon saris, a few young students, several prim-looking middle-class women - people you would never expect to see together" (*The Calcutta Chromosome* 164-165). In other words, the worshippers of Silence come from vastly different social backgrounds. As was seen in the introductory section on the novel (II.4.1.), Ghosh narrates the social spectrum from various viewpoints in several discourses. As a result of the parallel narration of several temporal and

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[12] See the article in section V.1. for a more thorough examination of this scene in the novel.

spatial dimensions, the structure of the novel is very fragmented. Nevertheless, the characters in the novel are "not fractured into their separate and local identities but knitted together along with their differences into a, shall we say, great-narrative that pits their agency against their representation in and by colonial and imperial great-narratives" (Khair 2001, 328). The fragmentary structure, often connected with the Western postmodern novelistic genre, functions here as a useful tool for the simultaneous narration of several realities and voices.

On a political level, Ghosh's message here seems to be that the hegemonic position of the Western narrative of rationality and science is so strong that it cannot be overcome through subaltern narration or voice. This has been commented on in the context of the self-alienation of Arjun in *The Glass Palace* (II.5.1.). In Ghosh's delineation, Western discourse has, over the centuries, partitioned the world both geographically and culturally, and now reigns over this fragmented whole through the ideology of modernism and global capital. This is thematised most clearly in *In an Antique Land* and shall be discussed in the article in section IV.3. In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, silence is not seen as mere banality and lack of meaning as it is in *The Shadow Lines*; on the contrary, in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, silence represents considerable subversive power. Western narration of the world has no way of containing and understanding reality in the manner of the subaltern people in the novel, because its language, its way of knowing, changes the world into a process of rational causal relationships. Murugan, who has conducted extensive research on Ross's career and has found Mangala's secret group in the process, explains the idea of this counter-science in the novel as follows:

> Wouldn't you say that the first principle of a functioning counter-science would have to be secrecy? The way I see it, it wouldn't just have to be secretive about *what* it did (it couldn't hope to beat the scientists at that game anyway); it would also have to be secretive *in* what it did. It would in principle have to refuse all direct communication, because to communicate, to put ideas into language, would be to

establish a claim to know - which is the first thing that a counter-science would dispute. (*The Calcutta Chromosome* 101)

This group cannot voice their aspirations; if they did, they would immediately be appropriated by Western scientific discourse. Furthermore, these worshippers of the female Goddess of Silence are illiterate and know little or no English. They act outside the reality formed by the English narrative, but still manage to manipulate that reality.

As was seen above in the context of representing communal violence (III.3.), in *The Shadow Lines* silence is described as something which has been left out by the hegemonic narration and which therefore has not been given meaning. It is a gap, a whole and an emptiness (*The Shadow Lines* 218). In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, it is precisely this lack of meaning, the fact that the hegemonic discourse has left this area of the world out of its process of meaning production, dismissing it as irrational, that empowers silence. Silence is here considered a kind of feminine counterforce to Western male-centered science and rationalism. As long as the group works in silence, Western scientific discourse has no access to it; it cannot, in fact, even be aware of its existence.

On an epistemological level, Ghosh implies that we can only know through language. Consequently, in knowing the world, scientifically or otherwise, we simultaneously change it by projecting onto it ideological meanings conveyed by words. Silence represents the kind of unattainable experience that transcends the level of language, or knowing. This would be the experience of the ultimate truth that has not been changed through knowing, in other words by the meanings carried by language. In the words of Murugan, this would mean "the ultimate transcendence of nature" (*The Calcutta Chromosome* 106).

In his writing, Ghosh seems to operate on two levels. First, he acknowledges that the world is a narrative and discursive social construction where alternative narrative realities and ideologies clash and unite. This is evident in his foregrounding of oral stories and is also clearly evident in *The Shadow Lines*, which

examines the multiple narrative realities and the construction of personal and national identities out of these realities. In this novel, the narrator seems to privilege language over images; reality only comes into existence through the narrative ordering of images. In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, where silence and the transcending of language have a more prominent role, Phulboni is less certain of this order:

> I have never known, whether life lies in words or images, in speech or sight. Does a story come to be in the words that I conjure out of my mind, or does it live already, somewhere, enshrined in mud and clay - in an image, that is, in the crafted mimicry of life? (*The Calcutta Chromosome* 226)

But there is an alternative to the discursive, in a sense poststructuralist, epistemology, which Ghosh increasingly finds untenable: he acknowledges to the world a reality beyond human knowledge, or narration. This is the world of silence: a unified, but not homogeneous world, free of the power politics distributed by language. It is a space that transcends temporal and spatial distances, as well as differences of social position, without making them vanish. It also brings us back to Ghosh's theme of diversity in one: it is in this world that Alu, in the scene in *The Circle of Reason* referred to earlier, is speaking in his "turmoil of languages." This mixture of languages does not put forward any particular ideology or claim to power in the way a specific language would. In other words, it does not 'know', it does not provide a definitive answer. It is only a question, to which everyone can have their own response. Therefore, it speaks to everyone, regardless of class or language, without treating them as a homogeneous group. As Phulboni says in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, although this is the world of silence, it is animate, it exists and it has a spirit. Consequently, the crowd is capable of communicating with Alu through silence.

This world is also similar to the one for which the narrator in *The Shadow Lines* is longing when 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. (*The Shadow Lines* 29)

In *In An Antique Land* this world of diversity in one is represented by the unpartitioned past before the Western hegemony, in which different religions and cultures lived together in peace. And, finally, it is to this kind of world that Murugan, Tara and the numerous other voices are taking Antar in the closing lines of *The Calcutta Chromosome*: "There were voices everywhere now, in his room, in his head, in his ears, it was as though a crowd of people was in the room with him. They were saying: 'We're with you; you're not alone; we'll help you across'" (*The Calcutta Chromosome* 306).

Although Ghosh does not thematize this transcendent reality too strongly, it is nevertheless present in the background of all of his novels and represents a kind of ethical universal experience which is beyond language. In *The Calcutta Chromosome* and *The Circle of Reason*, it is hinted at on an epistemological or transcendent level, whereas in the other two novels examined here it is represented in the form of a reconstructed past. The sketching of this kind of 'alternative' reality, or reconstruction of the past, may be seen as overtly idealistic or romantic, but to my mind it is a subversive act in itself, offering us a refuge from the oppressive power struggles of everyday life into an ethically constructed world that "has been made one and blessed with diversity" (*The Circle of Reason* 58).

It seems that this idea of a heterogeneous whole is Ghosh's answer to the questions I posed at the beginning of this sub-section about the possible direction of the new world literatures and about multiculturalism. Literatures should not aim at "homogenizing heterogeneity", a world embracing hybridity that does away with context-specific differences, nor should they engage in a radical and pointed emphasizing of difference that does not recognize the whole. Ghosh's work resonates with both

postcolonial and Marxists modifications of 'multiculturalism'. *In An Antique Land*, for instance, shows current multiculturalism in Egypt in a very practical and historically informed guise as the interpenetration of the local and the global, resulting in simultaneous cosmopolitanism and localism, as defined by Dirlik. But there is also the discursively constructed multicultural 'hybrid', for instance in the form of the anonymous narrator of *The Shadow Lines*. His identity is written at the border-lines of cultures, and his narration adopts a curious strategy of mingling the imaginary and the actual to account for his fragmented experiences.

Gauri Viswanathan has examined *In An Antique Land* with reference to the concept of religious syncretism. She states:

> Ghosh's syncretism denies the historical reality of religious difference. That is why no matter how moving Ghosh's book might be, and no matter how appealing his humanist call for dissolving barriers between nations, peoples, and communities on the grounds that world civilizations were syncretic long before the divisions introduced by the territorial boundaries of nation-states, the work cannot get beyond nostalgia to offer ways of dealing with what is, after all, an intractable political problem. (Wiswanathan 1996)

I have to disagree, because as a whole the book does offer a feasible way of representing cultural-political problems: it gives voice to various scientific approaches as well as to different cultures, classes and religions without obliterating their differences. If a certain nostalgia for the past emanates from the book, that has to be allowed for a writer of fiction. I shall return to the political viability of Ghosh's writing in closer detail in section VI.2. Suffice it to say here, that even though Ghosh can be accused of attempting to produce some kind of nostalgic universal human experience or forced syncretism, he never dispenses with diversity and particularity in his writings. He aims at a unity, but he arrives at it through the representation of diversity, without doing away with the conflicts it enacts.

In her study, Bachmann-Medick evokes Lévi-Strauss and his plea for "a controlled cultural ethnocentrism" which "stresses the need of cultures for self-assertion and defends it against the shapeless multiculturalism" (Bachmann-Medick 1996). Ghosh tries to avoid shapeless multiculturalism by narrating the whole through the distinctive voices of several cultural groups and social classes. He recognizes the whole, but retains its diversity. This also comprises Ghosh's remedy for the contemporary fragmentation and disorganization of the world. In the manner of Mahatma Gandhi, he seeks for 'wholes' that transcend the partitions and differences created and maintained by the changing forms of Western ideology and capitalism. As has been shown, these 'wholes' may appear in the form of narrative reconstructions of the past, or they may appear as 'silent' transcendent realities that exist outside linguistically constructed knowledge, or a discursively realized world.

These 'wholes' disrupt the Western discourses of colonization or globalization far more than some now almost conventionalized forms of postcolonial "writing back". This is because, as was shown in the context of *The Circle of Reason*, in delineating his characters, Ghosh leaves without emphasis such partitioning concepts as nationality, ethnicity and race. He lets these features, and the conflicts they create, come up in the background, for instance in the stories that his characters tell, but he does not use them as representative or definitive qualities of his characters. As Ranjita Basu notes, the "emotions and passions" of Ghosh's characters are related more to "their universal humanity" than to their racial or ethnic identity (Basu 1994, 152-153). This kind of representation of racial and ethnic difference escapes the grip of the Western discourse, which largely defines people on the basis of their nationality, race, ethnicity or religion. Consequently, although the typical postcolonial subvertion of power-relationships that are connected with racial difference, for instance, does raise the position of marginalized peoples, it still happens in the discursive framework constructed by the West. But the characters in Ghosh's novels pay scant attention to ethnic or racial differences. Ghosh transcends the Western (and postcolonial) discourse of 'otherness' and difference by

delineating his characters in a universal, human, context that transcends the boundaries between nationalities and religions.

To sum up, then, it would seem that at the level of narrative strategy Ghosh has found fresh ways of representing the global multicultural societies and experiences. His refusal to foreground nationality, ethnicity and race (even class) as the principal definitive features of fictional characters, and his search for a way to represent different social groups that ensures their authentic voice and agency seem to be particularly good methods for the new world literatures to reduce the clash between cultures and, conversely, to avoid homogenization in their representation of multiculturalism. Furthermore, his project of narrating silences produced by nationalistic discourse, or the discourse of Western historiography, has acute cultural and political relevance in the context of many areas of the world that have so far been presented only as parts of 'grander' narratives. And, at an epistemological level, he is trying to find a way of escaping the realm of the hegemonic Western mode of being and narrating the world. It seems that one of the possible ways he has found to circumvent this powerful and deeply rooted 'way of knowing' is to turn to silence as a means of achieving realities that exist outside the hegemonic narration and epistemology.

Silence has traditionally been considered as the absence, or failure, of agency in literary criticism. But when the difference between being silent and being silenced was foregrounded, silence began to be presented as a site of resistance. It was considered discursive and agential; it had communicative potential. The voluntary silence, the "will to unsay" (Duncan 2001, 28-30), became prominent as a subversive act, a token of resistance towards hegemonic discourses. In a literary text, the unspoken was seen as having "the potential for decoding that which is hidden by and from the dominant discourse" (Huttunen et al 2008, xv). Conceived as a textual site that has the potential to create alternative meanings, this performatively functioning silence needed a reading strategy of its own. (Huttunen et al 2008, xv). But, as should be evident from the above discussion of silence in the narration of Ghosh, this view of silence as

discursive does not entirely exhaust the significance that silence has in the narratives under examination here.

For Ghosh, silence ultimately has an ethical function, which basically posits silence beyond, or outside, discourse. Silence in Ghosh's narration comes through as ethical rather than discursive. For instance, the silent group in *The Calcutta Chromosome* functions beyond discursive knowledge. If its silence were discursive, it would already have been defined by the discursive methods of meaning production. The group is not straightforwardly defined in the novel, which in a way remains on the shadowy line between defining and remaining silent about it. The fact that it is symbolized by a clay figurine also highlights the non-discursive character of the group, which is represented through an image instead of language. Of course, the outside of language cannot be reached by using language, but it can be approached, or staged and hinted at, to the extent this is possible. In the hands of Ghosh, the novel has a meta-discursive function, as it blends the discursive methods of sciences and literary genres. The idea of a non-discursive narration, although a contradiction in terms, maybe possible to attain by readers through the use of the 'precise imagination' put forward by Radhakrishnan in his study of *The Shadow Lines*.

IV. The Articles

The following articles revolve around the simultaneous presence of modernist and postmodernist discourses in Ghosh's fiction, while concentrating on specific themes raised in the six novels. The articles are arranged in the order in which the novels were published, and so they also offer a sense of how Ghosh's writing techniques have changed through time. The deconstruction and subsequent reassembly of discourses in unexpected forms is Ghosh's strategic methodology. The resulting narratives, I shall argue, are ethically informed: they break discursive totalities and refuse to allow the other to be subordinated by the self.

The first article, on *The Circle of Reason* (IV.1.), examines how the dismantling of the modernist epistemology based on binary constructions enables the construction of ethical connections. In this article, I argue that the novel represents the coming together of ethics and politics in its deconstruction and reassembly of the poles of modernist binaries. I also argue for the use of Spivakian 'strategic essentialism' as a viable ethico-political alternative for the construction of subaltern subjectivities.

The second article is on *The Shadow Lines* (IV.2.). It concentrates on the importance of imagination and narration in the construction of personal versions of events. It examines the way narration weaves together hegemonic 'given' versions of events with imaginative personal narrative constructions. I argue that Ghosh's suspicion about the capacity of language to ultimately represent emotions or the other comes through in this novel for the first time. I further argue that relationships based on love and desire, which are central themes in the narrative, are ethically constructed in the novel.

The next article, written on *In an Antique Land* (IV.3.), looks at the manner in which Ghosh delineates the encounter between different cultures and ideologies while examining his way of juxtaposing and amalgamating established discourses. I present the novel as a representative of the simultaneous provincialization of European history and re-moulding of traditional ethnography, following the ideas of Dipesh

Chakrabarty and George Marcus, respectively. I argue that there is in the novel an awareness of other people's realities not only as other histories but also as other knowledges, towards which we have to remain open so that genuine transcultural reading may become possible. This openness to other knowledges also comprises an ethically noteworthy narrative principle.

The fourth article (IV.4.) takes as its object of investigation *The Calcutta Chromosome*. It examines the ethical outcome of the merger of universal humanism and postmodernist textuality through the themes of silence and knowledge. I argue that, in the novel, silence represents the ethical dimension beyond discourse and language, while knowledge is indicative of discursive totalities. I aim to show that the narration in this novel proceeds though the principles of both deconstruction and ethics. I also argue that the narrative uses image/vision as a tool of representation for the ethical, while language, discourse and knowledge point towards the closed and eclipsing totalities of Western discourses, and of the traditional self.

The fifth article on *The Glass Palace* (IV.5.) sheds light on Ghosh's method of setting different ideologies against each other both on the content level and as regards the discourses used to narrate this content. The novel proceeds through discussions, which, I argue, form an ethical way of representing interhuman relationships. I further argue that here, as in the previous novel, image and vision are chosen as metaphors for the ethically informed representation, this time in the form of photographs and photography.

The last article (IV.6.) covers *The Hungry Tide* and seeks to clarify Ghosh's views on language as the communicative medium for the encounter with the other human being, and with animals and nature. I argue that there is a heightened awareness of the inability of language to represent the encounter with the other in the novel. Again, I argue that a form of vision is used to signify ethical understanding in the narrative. All in all, I further argue, the novel depicts animals as being more in tune with themselves and the world than humans, who are inhibited by a deceiving bag of tricks: language as a communicative apparatus.

V. Concluding Remarks

The above articles approach Ghosh's novels simultaneously from the viewpoints of humanism and poststructralism, or ethical humanism and political postmodernism. Poststructuralist tenets are applied to the deconstruction of discursive totalities, and humanist ethics is laid as the ground on which new, ethically constructed, relationships are built. Beyond claimig that the novels form ethico-political wholes, the articles do not, however, comment on the political implications of the merging of the two in any significant detail. It is my contention, however, that the coming together of ethics and politics in Ghosh's writing has interesting effects on how human societies could be constructed and on what principles they might function. It is precisely on this point that a certain kind of dubiety, or uncertainty, concerning the political implications of Ghosh's narratives seems to surface when the criticism on his works is examined as a whole. The final subsection of this dissertation provides an explanation for this uncertainty by explicating how the narrative strategies of Ghosh function in relationship to politics. There I shall examine his writing with a view to the passage, or move, from ethics to politics in Levinasian ethics.

In order to situate this study within the field of criticism on Ghosh, the first part of the following final section provides a short general overview of the critical reception of Ghosh's novels. I shall not comment on the schools of thought that have surfaced on the Subcontinent, especially around the *The Shadow Lines*. The purpose is rather to chart the main lines of argument in international criticism on his works in order to evaluate the potential impact and relevance of my findings in the articles.

V.1. Critical overview

The criticism written on Ghosh clearly establishes him as one of the most prominent in his generation of Indian writers in English (see e.g. John Thieme's excellent writings on Ghosh). Although Ghosh's writing does not define them in any obvious ways, it nonetheless deals with many of the urgent political and

theoretical issues of the contemporary academic world. Ghosh himself does not acknowledge an affiliation to postcolonial theory, or at least to its poststructuralist variant propounded by such theorists as Homi Bhabha. Nevertheless, he examines issues that form the area of interest of postcolonial theorists and critics. It is evident that he explores the colonial and postcolonial themes and eras, but not from the viewpoint of the various sub-branches of postcolonial theory.

On the other hand, Ghosh does consider Indian writing in English to be an apt characterization of his work:

> I think of myself as an Indian writer in the first instance. By this I mean that my work has its roots in the experience of the people of the Indian sub-continent, at home and abroad. I think I would be uncomfortable with any categorization of my work that did not acknowledge this. In this sense 'Indian writing in English' seems to me to be a perfectly acceptable categorization of my work. (Ghosh in Dougal 2001)

Possibly due to his endeavours in the university world, it was precisely within academic circles that his work was first acknowledged as a prominent voice in the Indian writing in English. As Mondal observes (2007, 164), the publication of *The Shadow Lines* coincided with academic interest in the interrogation of nationalism and national identity, which were fast developing into a major concern within postcolonial criticism. *In an Antique Land* finally made apparent Ghosh's intellectual preoccupations, which, incidentally, largely overlapped with those of this new generation of critics. Ghosh came across as a writer "whose innovative textual experiments offered new insights and openings into the cluster of conceptual and theoretical concepts that had been developed to describe, analyse and interpret the complex of colonial and postcolonial relations" (Mondal 2007, 164).

The first really important and influential piece of criticism on Ghosh's writing was probably by Dixon in 1996. I have referred to this article in many of my own articles. Another

important and more substantial endeavour came from Tabish Khair in the form of a chapter on *The Calcutta Chromosome* in his published PhD in 2001. The two very different monographs on Ghosh by Mondal (2007) and John C. Hawley (2005) were an important addition to a body of edited volumes that has been growing especially in the Indian subcontinent. There have been unpublished dissertations, parts of which have found their way to various journals. Some of the most notable journal publications in this line come from Claire Chambers, specifically on *The Circle of Reason* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*. In general, criticism on Ghosh within Western academia has concentrated on *In an Antique Land* and *The Calcutta Chromosome*, whereas the criticism stemming from the Indian subcontinent has found its main target in *The Shadow Lines* and its preoccupations with nationalism.

Decidedly ethical criticism on Ghosh's novels worth mentioning here has been provided among others by Black (2010) on *The Glass Palace* and *The Hungry Tide* and Kumar (2008) on *The Shadow Lines* and *In an Antique Land*. Kumar juxtaposes *In an Antique Land* with Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* praising both for their successful imaginings of a more "inclusive and hospitable world", and congratulating Ghosh for his transnational cosmopolitanism that calls into question "the post-Partition binaries of "Indian" and "Pakistani"" (xxiv). She draws attention to Rushdie's version of cosmopolitanism and its tendency to dissolve differences altogether in its desire for a borderless world. Paradoxically, Rushdie in Kumar's view also manifests an inability to move beyond the idea of modernist nation-state. In this vein, Ghosh in her view "offers a more complex account of the intermeshing of religions and cultures, one that is not limited by, and indeed exceeds the bounds of, the nation-state" (2008, xxiv). Kumar further maintains that Rushdie fails to do away with fundamentalist and regressive lexicons in his representations of religion, while Ghosh appears unable to self-reflectively question the secular universalist position of his narrator. *The Shadow Lines* is examined by Kumar in juxtaposition with *Looking through Glass* by Mukul Kesavan, highlighting the radically defamiliarized version of Partition created by the two novels.

I have already referred to Black and her excellent analysis of Ghosh's novels (see section II.5. and the beginning of section III.1.). Black discerns in Ghosh's fiction "inceasingly radical textual sacrifices" (2010, 16) that appear necessary for imaginative border crossing. This foregrounds the ethical problem of representing linguistic difference. It is necessary to find a solution to the problem of ethically narrating the translingual, multilingual and (certainly in the case of Ghosh) even extra- or antilingual experiences in the English language. In Black's view, Ghosh's treatment of English in *The Glass Palace* makes the language "renounce elements of its own aesthetic privilege" (17) in an attempt to accommodate different forms of expression.[13] Renouncing obvious markers of linguistic variation, such as dialect and style (still carefully crafted and pointed out in *The Calcutta Chromosome*) this novel "flattens the sonic dimension of English to create a tone that different readers are meant to hear differently" (17). I agree with Black on this point, and I am also on the same lines with her on *The Hungry Tide*, as can be inferred from my article on it. I therefore share Black's contention that "the radicalism of this approach deepens in *The Hungry Tide*, which produces expansive crowded selves and styles to embrace the significant linguistic otherness of hyperverbal translation and nonhuman communication" (17). Black concludes her treatment of Ghosh as follows:

> As Ghosh's writing asks how fiction in English might accommodate the multiplicity of multilingual and antilingual experience, it copes with the borders between

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[13] Black (2010, 167) connects Ghosh's preoccupation with new practises of textuality with a larger trend of experimenting with the relationship between linguistic form and social difference she discerns within the twenty-five-year span she examines in her book (1980-2005). She mentions novels such as *The Bone People* (1983) by Keri Hulme, *Kafka's Curse* (1997) by Achmat Dangor and *Londonstani* (2006) by Gautam Malkani as texts occupied with the various ways of depicting socially explicit usages of the English language. Especially Hulme comes close to Ghosh in her delineation of silence and visual arts as forms of representation. Of course, the 'chutneyed' English of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), and the 'sanskritized' English of Raja Rao from earlier decades also come to mind here.

languages by divesting English of exclusive aesthetic privilege. The flattened language of *The Glass Palace* eschews the hierarchies of dialect, favouring instead the visual techniques of modernist photography, and the crowded selves of *The Hungry Tide* forge a compromise between the utopianism of the unspoken and the fallible speech of translation. These aesthetic renunciations, paradoxically, expand the capacity of English to represent non-English worlds of experience. They testify to possible strategies for lives lived across the borders of language. (2010, 199)

The Hungry Tide, which among Ghosh's novels has received the largest amount of substantial ethical criticism, has been approached from this angle also by Terri Tomsky, whose interpretation of the characters of Kanai and Piya as well as their relationship is strikingly close to mine (see the article in IV.6.). But Tomsky also examines the way the characters of Nirmal and Nilima in the novel can be ethically approached through Edward Said's concept of "anxious witnessing" (Said 2000, xxi), originally conceived as denoting the relationship of the writer to his/her community. Anxious witnessing is in Tomsky's view inseparable from ethical inquiry as it brings the creative vision of the displaced (or exiled) writer together with the ethical obligation of the intellectual (58). Consequently, Tomsky foregrounds anxious witnessing as "a useful hermeneutic for understanding the model for ethical action advanced by Ghosh" (Tomsky 2009, 54). She further maintains that Ghosh, like Said, "recognizes that ethical intervention is only effective when accompanied by the economic agency of the transnational bourgeoisie." In her view, anxious witnessing "collapses into modes of melancholia and incapacity without financial mobilization" (54), thereby emphasizing the importance of this cosmopolitan component. However, Tomsky is observant enough to recognize that Ghosh's ethics also comes through as "a meditation on the transformative power of close human relationships", which I highlight in my article and which Tomsky characterizes as having an effect on the political actions (cf. Nilima) and philosophical interests (cf. Nirmal) of the

characters. Tomsky also brings the concept of the affect *à la* Sara Ahmed (2000) to bear on her interpretation of the novel.

As I have endeavoured to establish, the writing of Ghosh is affiliated both with postmodernism and liberal humanism. In general, the criticism written on his works tends to adopt one of the following four stances in relation to this ambivalence: the avoidance of both postmodernism and humanism (eg. Dixon 1996), affiliation with both (eg. Mondal 2007), or seeing his writing as primarily humanist (eg. Viswanathan 1996) or postmodernist (eg. Kaul 1995). In addition to his own argument, Mondal offers an apt discussion on the views of the other three scholars mentioned above (Mondal 2007, 169-172). The presence of both postmodern and humanist sentiments in Ghosh's output is quite evident and, as will be shown in the next sub-section, this duplicity does not indicate an escape from both realms by avoiding affiliation with either, as Dixon would have it. On the contrary, it "denotes a strategic *commitment to both*" (Mondal 2007, 171; original emphasis). Ghosh's texts cannot be defined solely as postmodern or humanist without eclipsing a significant amount of important material in them. His texts weave together elements of both ideologies for certain purposes. The articles in this dissertation chart the historical and cultural contexts of this ambivalent approach, while trying to establish the goals of the ensuing ideological texture.

As Mondal (2007, 171) observes, although Ghosh's writings have been explored thoroughly from theoretically and politically informed angles, their political status and viability have largely been left unresolved. Of the four above mentioned critics, Viswanathan, Kaul and Dixon respectively maintain that Ghosh either fails to consider political problems in his forced humanist syncretism (*In an Antique Land*), proposes the use of amorphous imagination that has no consequences on material reality (*The Shadow Lines*), or lets his text flow free of any affiliation, be that humanist or postmodernist. The central thesis proposed by Mondal is that Ghosh has a strategic commitment to both humanism and postmodernism, and that this explains the ambivalent attitude that his texts reveal towards both. My own stance in this respect has been explicated in the articles and will

be returned to in these concluding remarks, but suffice it to mention here that I am closest to Mondal on this issue. But a caveat is in order: with Ghosh, it is only safe to say that his narratives are equally preoccupied with matters pertaining to both liberal humanism and postmodernism, not so much with these two as theoretical disciplines or sets of methodological tools. Ghosh the writer of fiction is not to be confused with Ghosh the academic.

In addition to the concern about the political implications of Ghosh's writing expressed by several critics, the matter of gender in Ghosh's output merits a mention since it has clearly been neglected by critics in the subcontinent and the West alike. This is commented on by Mondal, who briefly discusses the representation of gender in Ghosh's novels (2007, 165-169). In addition to Mondal, texts on Ghosh that specifically take up gender include those by Nagesh Rao on cosmopolitanism, class and gender in *The Shadow Lines*; Suchitra Mathur on third-world women and the politics of science, that includes *The Calcutta Chromosome* as one of three examples on its theme; and Shameem Black (2006) on *The Shadow Lines*. This dissertation does not concentrate on questions of gender in any detail. But it is worth noting that Ghosh's narratives are mindful of gender and that the significance of gender in his output has been on the increase.

As I have attempted to establish, Ghosh's works resonate strongly with the history of the assimilation and/or refutation of Western ideas (be they modernist or postmodernist) in India and especially in the Bengali tradition from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The ambivalence inherent in this tradition between the initially successful creation of cultural/political strategies for facing colonialism and the resulting defeat in the form of the failure of the construction of a politically functional Indian nationalism comes through in Ghosh's writing. What creates the more positive dimension of his fiction is the outlining of strategies for transcending or avoiding the boundaries set by modernist knowledge production strategies and the political systems based on them.

The representational strategies developed by Ghosh advocate the establishment of connections through ethical

principles, which help to avoid the pitfalls lurking in the mechanisms of an unguarded discursive representation of the other. Ghosh explores the colonial and post-colonial situation through an amalgamation of postmodernism (politics of difference) and humanism (ethics of connections). As I clarified in section III.2., both humanism and postmodernism are an integral part of the ideological history of India. As I shall attempt to show in the following section, in Ghosh's writing this ideological fusion comprises an ethical project not indicative of political failure, or a failure to cope with political discourses. It is, rather, representative of the simultaneous representation of both ethical and political dimensions of human existence.

V.2. From ethics to politics – political viability in the writing of Amitav Ghosh

As I mentioned above, certain critics (especially Viswanathan and Kaul) of Ghosh's writing have dismissed his work on the grounds that it is incapable of taking political responsibility and/or confronting political realities. Presumably, this dismissal is motivated by a certain kind of 'activist' conception of what constitutes political behaviour or responsibility. This conception presupposes that politics automatically involves action and that a discourse is politically significant "to the extent that it can be acted upon" (Mondal 2007, 172). Politics would then require choices that make for a certain course of action. Ghosh's ambivalence, his concentration on both the ethics of connections and the politics of discourse and difference causes a problem in this respect, because he seems to be espousing two political positions, making two choices at once. Mondal connects this ambivalence with Ghosh's dislike of binary models evident, as I have shown in the article in IV.1., right from *The Circle of Reason*. Mondal claims that Ghosh chooses to pick both stances: he chooses not to make a choice based on a binary model. According to the 'standard' view, in politics people cannot follow two allegedly opposing courses of action simultaneously. Ghosh's model remains open-ended when examined from those premises.

Mondal's explanation concerning Ghosh's two-dimensional representational strategy, or as he characterizes it, Ghosh's "politics of ambivalence" (2007, 173), is quite close to the interpretation I proposed in the introductory sub-section on ethics and language in Ghosh (III.1.2.) and later in the articles. In Mondal's view, postcolonial circumstances are best met with such an ambivalent political attitude, because they demand two registers: one that

> acknowledges the metaphysic of modernity, its institutions and its governing ensembles of knowledge such as the state, citizenship, equality, social science and the rule of law etc.; and, on the other hand, another register which exceeds and resists that metaphysic because it does not observe the forms of rationality that inhere in the emancipatory projects of modernity. Indeed, this politics recognises that those projects involve an epistemic violence against other ways of thinking and being in the world – hence the strategic value of alignment with postmodernism – whilst also acknowledging the importance of modernity's universal frameworks in any struggle to establish social justice on a global scale. (2007, 173)

I have referred to this ambivalence on several occasions (e.g. sub-section III.1.2.; the articles in IV.4. & IV.5.), but shall repeat the main purpose behind these two registers again here. It seems that Ghosh is above all attempting to create narrative representations that establish connections across totalities constructed by modernist discourses. He does this by narrating into existence ethical relationships ensuring agency and voice to all while avoiding the appropriation of these voices to any one discourse. This is achieved by juxtaposing representative strategies and deconstructing the hegemonic position of certain versions. The transcending of borders inevitably requires a certain emphasis on difference, as well as an awareness of realities as discursive constructions in the poststructuralist vein. In a sense, Ghosh has to play the postmodernist games of textuality and of 'discourse as power' in order to deconstruct modernist totalities and to be able

to avoid discursive appropriation and abstract homogenizing of heterogeneous groups. But this recognition of difference is effected on the basis of ethically conceived relationships that transcend the discursive totalities created by representations.

As Mondal acknowledges, Ghosh's choice of both these registers proposes a commitment to ethical problems involved in the encounter with the other. And this two-dimensional representation refuses "the subordination of the ethical to the political, the means to the ends, theory to practise, and deliberation to action," all of which are set up by the 'activist' branch of politics in the form of oppositions that bring forth a certain kind of concept of politics (Mondal 2007, 173). Ghosh's political ambivalence opens a way to the ethical negotiation of cultural difference that would be blocked by political activism, which is set on achieving ends at the cost of exploring the means.

The political value of Ghosh's texts has to be seen in the context of deconstructing the hegemonic position of European discourses and trying to excavate other, silenced ways of being and realizing the world that might enable the creation of a more inclusive and globally just future. To hear these silenced voices, we have to open up our own ways of being to those of others and to acknowledge our ethical responsibility to react to the other. The problem is how to do this. This is a question Ghosh neither evades nor provides an exhaustive answer to. In line with Levinasian ethics, the question is more important than the answer, which draws us back to the linguistic totality of the self, preventing the approaching of the other human being or discourse. This explains the open-endedness of Ghosh's narratives: he does not endeavour to act in the sense of doing something decisive. The targets of representation are not 'known,' but there is an attempt to approach them without distorting them by appropriating them fully into one discourse.

Like Ghosh and his narratives, Derrida and deconstruction in general have been criticized for not being able to deal with issues pertaining to politics (e.g. Critchley 1999). Deconstruction has been accused of discursive terrorism that tears apart without providing means for remedy. In his book, *The Ethics of Deconstruction*, Simon Critchley combines the theoretical

approaches of Levinasian ethics and Derridean deconstruction to envision a model for a society that would be based on ethical relationships and be politically valid and operative at the same time. In the following, I shall examine Ghosh's writing in relationship to this theoretical model in order to find out how these novels treat questions of ethical relationships in a political society.

"[A]ccess to a just conception of politics can only be mediated ethically," states Critchley (1999, 219), echoing Levinas. In totalitarian societies, the domination of politics, the idea that everything is political, leads to the reduction of practically all areas of social life. Totalitarianism is politics without anything beyond it—without transcendence, or interruption by the ethical. This comes through in *The Glass Palace* in the passage in which the narrator meets Dinu in the modern closed state of Myanmar. The passage is examined in more detail in the article on the ethics of representation in *The Glass Palace*, but it is invoked here again for further reference. Among other things, this part of the novel features the figure of Aung San Suu Kyi as the representative of the ethical that transcends the level of the all-invading politics:

> 'politics has invaded everything, spared nothing ... religion, art, family ... it has taken over everything ... there is no escape from it … and yet, what could be more trivial, in the end? She understands this ... only she … and this is what makes her much greater than a politician .'
>
> 'But if that's true,' Jaya said hesitantly, 'doesn't it make it much harder for her to succeed – as a politician?'
>
> Dinu laughed. 'But she has already succeeded … don't you see? She has torn the masks from the generals' faces ... She has shown them the limits of what she is willing to do … and these limits have imprisoned them too ... she haunts them unceasingly, every moment ... she has robbed them of words, of discourse.' (*The Glass Palace* 542)

This is an example of the ethical (Suu Kyi) interrupting and transcending the political (the military regime). As Critchley

observes, for Levinas ethics means precisely the disruption of the discourse of totalizing politics (1999, 221).

Politics provides the horizon of Levinasian ethics, in which the idea is to create a form of political life which repeatedly interrupts all totalizing impulses (Critchley 1999, 223). In the following passage from *The Circle of Reason*, which I have already referred to on several occasions, ethical and political are fused into the same communicative act. Alu is speaking in a mixture of languages:

> It was like a question, though he was not asking anything, bearing down on you from every side. And in that whole huge crowd nobody stirred or spoke. You could see that silently they were answering him, matching him with something of their own. [...] Tongues unravelled and woven together—nonsense, you say, tongues unravelled are nothing but nonsense—but there again you have a mystery, for everyone understood him, perfectly […] They understood him, for his voice was only the question; the answers were their own. [...] I saw mysteries, all around me, one growing out of another, and I could find no grasp on them, not the slightest hold [...] and you could feel – if such a thing is possible – the silence beginning to stir. (*The Circle of Reason* 279-280)

Here Alu is voicing his political program of waging war on money, abolishing the use of money from the Souq. This is represented in an amalgamation of ethics and the political: Alu uses language, but this language is not identifiable as any distinct language which would establish a discursive totality through a certain claim to 'know' the world and the other.

Significantly, the crowd is approached by Alu simultaneously as the other and as a group of Thirds (*le tiers*), as conceived in Levinasian ethics (Levinas 1969, 212-213). The appearance of the Third simultaneously with the other has to do with political equality and justice, which belong to the realm of the Said and language: "the third party looks at me in the eyes of the other – language is justice" (Levinas 1969, 213). The

relationship between the self and the singular other is not equal, because the self is subordinated to the other. But through the idea of the Third party, the self simultaneously realizes itself and the other as equal individuals just like all the others, with equal rights in a *political* society. At this level, the self and the other are equal with all the others in a group. The Third party looks at me in the eyes of the other. Consequently, my *ethical responsibility* to the other expands into wider questions of *political justice* for others in a society and for humanity as a whole (Critchley 1999, 226). We then simultaneously have an ethical, unequal relationship with the other and a political, equal relationship with all the others. The self and the other are simultaneously conceived as participants in an ethical relationship and as others in a multitude of people, like everyone else, and with the same rights as everyone else. This, then, is how the ethical and the political exist at the same time.

Levinas elucidates the relationship between the self, the other and others as follows:

> The third party introduces a contradiction in the saying whose signification before the other until then went in one direction. It is of itself the limit of responsibility and the birth of the question: What do I have to do with justice? A question of consciousness. Justice is necessary, that is, comparison, coexistence, contemporaneousness, assembling, order, thematization, the visibility of faces, and thus intentionality and the intellect, the intelligibility of a system, and thence also a copresence on an equal footing as before a court of justice. (Levinas 1998, 157)

This characterizes the move from the ethical to the political, which denotes the move from the Saying back into the realm of the Said. The diachronic ethical proximity (the other comes before me) is changed into the synchronic political contiguity (every other exists at the same time), which "presupposes both thematizing thought and a locus and a cutting up of the continuity of space into discrete terms and the whole – out of justice" (Levinas 1998, 157). Through the idea of the Third party

develops the "birth of representation, logos, consciousness, work, the neutral notion *being*" (Levinas 1998, 158; orig. emhasis). So, the presence of the Third party introduces into the singular relationship of responsibility towards the other the idea of the question of universal justice and a society based on this justice. This requires returning to the realm of the Said and the world of linguistic thematization, consciousness and discursive totalities.

The co-presence of the ethical and the political is referred to as the double structure of community by Critchley (1999, 225). For instance, Alu's communication in the above scene establishes a connection with the people both as individuals (through ethical Saying) and as a group (through the political Said). The silent answer, something of everyone's own, that each person has to Alu's discursive but unintelligible question, establishes both the ethical and the political relationships between individuals. In a sense, Alu's discourse is within the realm of the political: it treats the crowd as a conglomeration of others (or Thirds), who are approached discursively. But each individual in the crowd addresses Alu as the other in an ethical relationship: their answer is within the 'silent' ethical Saying, which is beyond discourse. Simultaneously, the people react to Alu's discourse as a group: the silence begins to stir.

This doubled communication leads to what Critchley calls the justified Said (1999, 228-236). Initially the Said appears as entities that are exposed in their essence under the domination of discursive totalities. This Said is then deconstructed so that we are left with the Saying, the actual ethical residue of the relationship with the other, that has been relieved of all totalizing discursive burden. But then there remains the movement back to the Said, which by now has become the political 'justified Said' that has been "informed and interrupted by the trace of the Saying" (Critchley 1999, 229). In Ghosh's narration, the discourses and epistemologies of modernity (the Said as discursive totalities) are interrupted, or deconstructed and transcended, by the construction of ethical relationships (narrative approach of the ethical Saying). But his narrative strategy does not stop at the mere deconstruction of discourses. The political justified Said, the Said that bears with it traces of the

ethical Saying, unfolds as the outcome of the narrative process. Alu's unintelligible discourse can be realized as an example of the 'justified Said': its totality has been interrupted by the ethical Saying beyond language in the sense that it does not presume any specific way of constructing the world in the manner one distinct language would. However, even though it is a mixture, Alu uses discourse in his address to the group: it is just that this discourse has been affected by the ethical prerogative. His mixture of languages treats everyone as an equal.

In Critchley's model, deconstruction has an ethical function as the interruptor of political linguistic totalities. His argument is that

> Derridean deconstruction has a horizon of responsibility or ethical significance, provided that ethical is understood in the Levinasian sense. Deconstruction […] opens an ethical space of alterity or transcendence. However, the move that deconstruction is unable to make – what I have called its impasse – concerns the passage from undecidability to decision, from responsibility to questioning, from deconstruction to critique, from ethics to politics. (1999, 236)

The way out of this impasse of the political is to follow Levinas's move from the other to the Third. This is analogous to the move from the responsibility towards the other to the questioning of the equality of all the others (both the self and the other as others among all the rest), and of the society and the politics; it is the move from the anarchy of the ethical responsibility, which is not yet justice, to the questioning and criticising of the political order. I have already referred to the simultaneous application of deconstruction and Levinasian ethics in section III.1.2. in the context of *The Calcutta Chromosome*. To return to the novel from the present angle, the hegemonic colonial version of the history of malaria research becomes ethically deconstructed in its narration. There is the ethical responsibility towards the other, meaning Mangala's silent and secret group, which demands that this group be approached without appropriating it into any

discursive frame. The narrative tries to reach this goal by not defining, or 'knowing', the group and by presenting only textual traces of it. The group is characterized by silence and secrecy that transcend the discourse of colonial medical history. But, at the same time that the narrative is involved in the act of deconstructing the hegemonic version as a result of its ethical responsibility towards the eclipsed presence and agency of Mangala's group, it acknowledges three others that are equals in the political sense. These comprise the Western construction (the Said: colonial medical history), Mangala's group (the Saying: subversive, subaltern history) and the narrative itself (the justified Said that has been touched by the Saying: the narrative as a whole).

In other words, deconstruction in itself is not justice in the political sense, it only opens an ethical space in which transcendence can take place. The society in the novel has a double structure. There is the ethical *duty* to acknowledge the presence of Mangala's group to the extent this is possible in an ethically informed narrative as well as to deconstruct the hegemonic version of events. But there is also the political *right* for all three versions (colonial medical history, its deconstruction, and the novel as a whole) to be acknowledged equally in the narrative. Hence the narrative includes the hegemonic version (the Said as discursive totality) and the point of alterity from which it is deconstructed (Mangala's group as the ethical Saying not altogether graspable through language). By interweaving these two, the narrative process (i.e. the novel as a whole) constitutes the move from the Saying to the 'justified Said', the just Said that has been interrupted by the ethical Saying. In Levinasian ethics, justice can only be reached if the other can be simultaneously seen as the Third, representing all the others and their right to exist in equal terms.

It follows that the two-dimensional representative strategy of Ghosh, or his 'politics of ambivalence', as Mondal expresses it, is revealed as a simultaneous ethico-political mode of representation. What has been referred to as the simultaneous embracing of modernist universalism and postmodernist emphasis on difference, or as "at times confusing deployment of

the lexicons of both liberal humanism and post-structuralism"
(Dixon 1996, 16) varying between Derridean trace and universal
humanism, turns out to be a narrative strategy that constructs
human societies as the simultaneous double structure of ethical
and political relationships: the ethical unequal relationship
between the self and the other is at the same time the political just
equal relationship between various others in a society. And the
political is frequently interrupted by the ethical. It is important
that this doubleness is not chronological: the ethical relationship
is always already political, as the Third always looks at me in the
eyes of the other. This ethically aware discourse does not
subordinate ethical to the political, the means to the ends, theory
to practice, or deliberation to action. It manages to narrate these
poles of modernist binary constructions simultaneously, as it
were, without defining them as separate and antagonistic. And
this narrative strategy aspires to globally just universal
representations while meticulously narrating difference in
particular circumstances in time and space.

In conclusion, it does seem that Ghosh is operating on two
levels simultaneously. His works are ethical and political,
postmodernist and modernist, deconstructionist and essentialist,
at the same time. He acknowledges that there are multiple textual
constructions of the world. These versions can always be
deconstructed from a point of otherness that lies inside them. It
seems that Ghosh is attempting to create narrative
representations that establish connections across culturally
constructed totalities through ethical relationships ensuring
agency and voice to all while avoiding the appropriation of this
voice to any one discourse. He does this by juxtaposing multiple
representations and deconstructing the hegemonic position of
certain versions. This transcending of borders inevitably requires
a certain emphasis on difference, as well as an awareness of
realities as discursive constructions. In a sense, Ghosh has to play
the postmodern language games of textuality and of 'discourse as
power' to be able to avoid discursive appropriation and abstract
homogenizing of heterogeneous groups and to be able to secure
the distinctive features of all the varieties in question. But this
recognition of difference is effected on the basis of ethically

conceived relationships that transcend the discursive totalities created by representations.

Consequently, the general feeling of universal humanism in Ghosh's writing is caused by the fact that he does not merely deconstruct hegemonic representations, but does so on the basis of an ethical dimension based on the relationship between the self and the other. This relationship is represented as existing ideally beyond the totalities created by language, knowledge, or narration. In the light of the novels examined in this dissertation, the significance of this ethical dimension seems to have strengthened with the expansion of Ghosh's literary output. Generally speaking, the career of Ghosh as a writer of fiction can be characterized as proceeding from the emphasizing of the reality-constructing power of narration (*The Circle of Reason, The Shadow Lines*) to the exposition of the relationality and reality-obscuring nature of all discursive models (*In an Antique Land*, *The Calcutta Chromosome*) and finally to an outright distrust of language as the builder of ontological totalities like nations, religions, sciences, social classes and subjectivities, and as incapable of transcending these totalities (*The Glass Palace, The Hungry Tide*).

The ethical dimension beyond linguistic totalities is symbolized by silence in some of Ghosh's novels. The alternative mode of being achieved in the realm of silence would result in a unified, but not homogeneous world, which is not defined merely by the power politics distributed by language. This world would transcend temporal and spatial distances, as well as differences of language or social position, without, however, making them vanish. All in all, it would enable the Levinasian utopia of the self and the other existing on their own terms independently, while still in a close relationship with one another. In addition to the awareness of multiple histories, agencies and voices highlighted in the novels by Ghosh, this change in the way we think of the world may constitute a major step towards more authentic multicultural representation.

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